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**INTERTEXTUALITY IN NEIL GAIMAN'S
*AMERICAN GODS***

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*AMERICAN GODS***

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*“These people ought to know who we are and
tell them that we are here”*

**(Winsor McCay - “Little Nemo in
Slumberland” strip, September 9, 1907)**

RESUMO

A presente dissertação consiste em um estudo do romance *Deuses americanos* de Neil Gaiman levando em consideração suas conexões a outros textos bem como inserções de diversos textos provenientes de outros trabalhos na prosa do romance. A proposta de leitura do texto de Gaiman segundo este trabalho utiliza os conceitos de intertextualidade e arquétipos de forma a analisar a relação entre a trama de *Deuses americanos* às várias utilizações de textos cuja escrita “original” não é atribuída ao autor do livro inseridos (ou referenciados) na prosa do romance. Embora o objeto de estudo seja comumente visto como um livro difícil de ser categorizado dentre de um certo gênero, a proposta desta dissertação é demonstrar que o movimento e o fluxo contínuo de discursos (textos) e estilos na prosa do romance remonta a uma visão de um estrangeiro sobre os Estados Unidos e como o país foi criado: ou seja, que ele é não somente um ponto geográfico de confluência de muitos povos, mas também de muitas crenças e culturas que, de um modo ou outro, trouxeram os seus deuses consigo. A análise do uso de intertextos, intratextos e arquétipos no romance está estruturada em três capítulos centrais: o primeiro contextualiza os mitos que aparecem no romance e discute a questão de gênero literário do livro, além do conceito de América no texto de Gaiman. O segundo capítulo examina o uso de mitos por Gaiman em relação a outros trabalhos, tanto os manuscritos antigos de crenças pagãs quanto instâncias mais modernas de mito e alegoria, além de estudar as conexões entre *Deuses americanos* e outros textos escritos por Gaiman de acordo com o conceito de intratextualidade proposto por Affonso de Sant’Anna. Por fim, o terceiro capítulo se concentra no uso pontual de intertextos no romance, organizando-os entre alusões literárias, referências à cultura pop, além de estudar o conflito entre a era digital e o antigo reinado da fé religiosa, sem deixar de investigar o uso de arquétipos e apropriação na prosa do romance. O trabalho, assim, tem como objetivo verificar a alegação de que a qualidade intertextual do romance é essencial tendo em vista sua trama e cenário, bem como a afirmação de que ele redefine o conceito da América do final dos anos 90 como um espaço multicultural, dinâmico e mítico.

Palavras-chave: 1. Literatura inglesa. 2. Neil Gaiman. 3. Deuses americanos. 4. Intertextualidade. 5. Intratextualidade.

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of a study of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* in the light of its connections to other texts as well as the punctual insertions of various texts from other works in the novel's prose. The proposed reading of Gaiman's text employs the concepts of intertextuality and archetypes in order to further analyze the relation of the plot of *American Gods* to the various uses of texts - that were not originally written by the book's author - which are inserted (or alluded to) in the novel's prose. Although the object of study is generally seen as a book that is hard to brand within a certain genre, this thesis' approach to the novel demonstrates that movement and the continuous flow of speeches (texts) and styles in the novel's prose comprises an outsider's view of America and how the country came into existence - that is, that it is the geographical conflux not only of many peoples, but also of many beliefs and cultures, which in some way or other brought their gods with them. This examination of the use of intertexts, intratexts and archetypes in the novel is structured in three main chapters: The first chapter contextualizes the myths that appear in the novel and discusses the issues of genre and the concept of America in Gaiman's text. The second chapter analyzes Gaiman's use of myths in relation to other works - the original manuscripts of ancient beliefs as well as modern instances of myth and allegory - along with the connections between *American Gods* and Gaiman's other works according to Affonso de Sant'Anna's concept of intratextuality. Finally, the third chapter focuses on the punctual uses of intertexts in the novel, breaking them down into literary allusions, references to pop culture and the conflict between the digital era and the age of religious faith, and the use of archetypes and appropriation in the novel's prose. At the end of the work, I aim to assert my belief that the intertextual nature of the novel is essential to its plot and setting, and re-defines the concept of late-90's/early 2000's America as a multicultural, dynamic mythical space.

Keywords: 1. English Literature. 2. Neil Gaiman. 3. American Gods. 4. Intertextuality. 5. Intratextuality.

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INTRODUCTION

I first read *American Gods* at a very weird point in my life: it was right before the classes at university began, when I was 17 years old and still did not know exactly who I was and what I wanted to do for a living. A close friend of mine lent me the book and told me I would enjoy reading it - I was already familiar with the name Neil Gaiman at the time, having read through most of *Sandman*, but I had never read one of his novels. Little did I know then, but the novel I was about to read would not leave my mind so soon. It has now been about ten years since that happened, and here I am, about to focus an entire thesis on that book.

I was still quite a naive reader when I first read *American Gods*. I would simply read through the words and not mind the hints and clues Gaiman placed everywhere in the text regarding the “true nature” of things in the story. In fact, I was quite surprised when I learned that Mr. Wednesday was the “Americanized” Odin - that simple and basic realization only took place when another character referred to him as “Votan”, much farther along the narrative, in a section where I believe most other readers (at least those familiar with mythology or Gaiman's other works) would have probably already guessed who the mysterious character is meant to represent in the story, and the reason behind his calling himself Wednesday. To me, at the time, it simply seemed weird and interesting that someone would refer to himself as a day of the week - not even Mr. Wednesday's playful hint as he referred to the stormy skies the day he met Shadow, that “given the weather, it might as well be Thursday” (GAIMAN, 2001, p. 24), managed to reach me then. That's not to say that the narrative did not resonate with my teenage self: I greatly identified with Shadow's quiet, brooding nature; I remember distinctly the pain it caused me to read that the character's wife had died in a car accident, for it was as strong as the shock and horror I felt when it was revealed that she had died while cheating on him with his best friend; and Shadow's ceaseless wandering around America echoed with my situation at the time: not knowing who exactly I was becoming, not knowing where to go and what to do, and finally, being led to follow a path not knowing where it would end up taking me. In short, the book became my companion in that difficult situation of leaving my teenage years behind and finding a path to adulthood – I felt I was inside a *bildungsroman*, having to face

a hard storm that seemed to be slowly approaching. Even though I read it in a very short time, since I could not bring myself to stop reading through the narrative, the story stuck with me. I read it a second time, returned the book to my friend, and then bought my own copy of it.

It is that same pocket-style, paperback copy that I have here with me now, with a new, dark hard cover I ordered bound on it. It now resembles a tiny Bible, and I carry it with me everywhere. I must seem like a sort of *American Gods* acolyte.

The first clear allusion that I was able to spot whilst reading Gaiman's novel was a reference to Poe's poem "The Raven". I had always like Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, and that led to me read all the literature I could find that had been penned by Poe. I found his poems were able to conjure similar sinister images to those he used in his macabre short stories, and "The Raven" was no exception to this rule. So when one of Odin's ravens in *American Gods* is mockingly told by Shadow to utter the word "Nevermore", I instantly chuckled and recognized the literary connection Gaiman had managed to create with a quick joke in the narrative of that scene. This peculiar interaction in the novel, along with the late awareness that I had missed many references to myths and ancient gods in the book's text, prompted me to read the novel a second time while paying close attention to the prose, so as to attempt to read the connections the author used during the telling of the story – the ones which were clearly meant to be found, such as the Poe reference; and the ones which required the reader to dig beneath the surface of Gaiman's writing and search for other texts that had been inserted into the narrative – whether through the means of quotation, allusion, paraphrase, parody or other literary techniques.

I was then glad to have perceived this, as in the second reading I was able to spot more and more of these. I wondered if anyone had ever read the book and missed some of these connections to other texts that I had been able to find during the time spent following Shadow's journey. Not only had *American Gods* sparked within me a deep interest concerning the myths it dealt with, but it also left me curious as to – what seemed to me at the time – this curious and amazing literary technique that Gaiman so often used in his novel, which allowed the reader to read not only Gaiman's "original" text, but also to be exposed to others authors' words – sometimes unknowingly.

In that way, Gaiman's ability to "weave" other texts together with his own led me to read many more literary works: parts of *American Gods* led me to the Eddas, some peculiar sentences in the novel led me to rediscover Robert Nye, whose *The Memoirs of*

Lord Byron I had read some years prior to my discovery of Gaiman's literature; there was also the Poe allusion, and some parts of the book seemed to me very similar to some of Gaiman's other works - Odin and Loki themselves having appeared in the Sandman series, possessing similar character traits, but in versions that were much closer to their depictions in the manuscripts of the Eddas than the ones which appear in *American Gods*.

As I read Gaiman's other books, I also noticed that this appeared to be very recurrent in his literature: *Good Omens*, a novel that has been written by both Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, is a satirical version of "the birth of the antichrist" trope in modern media, being very similar to the movie "The Omen"; the novel *Neverwhere* contains a paragraph that is very similar to a passage in William Gibson's famous cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*; and *The Graveyard Book* is very reminiscent of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* – both in the title and in the story, although Gaiman's narrative takes place in a graveyard instead of a jungle.

The plethora of ways in which Gaiman establishes textual connections to works other than his own amazed me. I began looking into literary theories that might explain this phenomenon. At first, the only word I found that was applied to this was "reference", but I was quite aware that merely calling this process "reference" would be oversimplifying things. There are many references in *American Gods* – things that are named, such as Shadow's humming of the Beatles' song "Help" (GAIMAN, 2001, p. 263) – but there are other textual connections, some of which are not explained in the text: some sentences which were slightly changed, but that appeared in books by other authors, and for these cases, where the reference is not as much a reference as it is an insertion of texts without indication from where they came from, and where the reader may or may not notice that there is a link between the words written in Gaiman's novel and the words in another book or written work, it seemed to me the term "reference" did not fit at all for the way the author established those connections. I stumbled upon other theoretical texts dealing with different notions for this process, until I found a very thin book by a Brazilian author that seemed to expose these cases in a very clear way: Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna's *Paródia, paraphrase & cia*.

In his book, Sant'Anna dealt with the concepts of parody, paraphrase, stylization and appropriation; and used an umbrella term for all of them: intertextuality. It was a somewhat simplified notion of the term, but it instantly stuck with me and seemed to fit exactly what I was looking to analyze in Gaiman's text. Sant'Anna's words pointed me in

the direction of the theoretical texts that regarded this subject, and it was clear to me then that those authors' works would be my next destination in this journey Gaiman had taken me on: thus, I packed my bags with all the impressions *American Gods* had caused in me and went in search of Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin.

Bakhtin dealt with many of the things that I had perceived in Gaiman's novel: his writings showed that he was greatly concerned with the issues of the narrator, genre in the novel and the "voices" which populated literary texts. In his analysis of Dostoyevsky's prose, the notion of "multi-voiced speech" clarified some issues regarding the use of words from other sources or voices as one's own – something that is vastly utilized in the prose of *AG* – and how writers may stylize their texts to convey different genres as well as to satirize, mock and parody other works.

I discovered that Kristeva penned the word "intertextuality", but used it in a very different sense to what is nowadays commonly referred to as "intertextuality" or "intertext". She argued that the act of reading did not comprise merely the process of texts transferring their meaning openly from the author to the reader directly – but that, instead, the reader would decode the texts according to an inner "filter", and that the resulting process of the writer's and reader's code repertoire being constantly expanded and transformed would generate an "intertextuality" – that is, a reconfiguration of a system of signs (text) in order to form a new one upon the act of reading. Her concept also borrowed many ideas and notions from Bakhtin, but expanded upon them and took a new direction. However, much like Bakhtin, Kristeva states that this new signifying system may be made up of texts borrowed from other sources – that is, both the author's and the reader's experience and repertoire may generate echoes and weave "new" texts into the written text.

With all of that in mind, I once more was unsure as to whether that word, "intertextuality", would apply to Gaiman's novel. Certainly there were many voices in the narrative, as Bakhtin explained, and surely the reader would have to make use of his own repertoire in order to understand some of the text in the novel (as Gaiman had to use in order to write it), but was it really possible to analyze the prose of the novel and explain this process for most of the punctual "intertexts" that one is able to perceive in the text? Or were those "intertexts" I found in *American Gods* what Genette called "hypertexts", and the "original" texts to which they had a connection, the "hypotexts"? Would that not be overly simplistic?

I read more books on the subject of intertextuality and found out that the debate on this concept is very much alive. Kristeva has become aware of how the term is now being employed with a different understanding to the one she originally meant, and has since tried to distance herself from it, adopting a different nomenclature for the process which she described: “since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources', we prefer the term *transposition*” (KRISTEVA, 1986, p. 111). The misled appropriation of the expression and what became the “popular” sense of the word in fact stand directly against Kristeva’s notion, which actively denies the idea of a definitive, final textual “source”. However, for the purpose of what I identified in Gaiman’s text, although I do not attempt to suggest that there is a “final textual source” to any intertext, I do wish to understand from where Gaiman “extracted” some of the texts that appeared in *American Gods* and to analyze how the intertextual connection in his prose came to exist and is able to be perceived by the reader.

Another topic that fascinated me in the book was the setting: Gaiman’s America. I was aware already, at the time when I first read the novel, that Gaiman had been born and bred in England, only having moved to the United States of America once he had already been working as a writer for some time. The book portrays a big country, with extensive roads and open fields one may travel through - as Shadow does during the course of the narrative - meeting many peoples, cultures and histories whilst one does it. There is, however, a deep sense of mistrust, of something unexpected and bad coming just around the corner throughout the entirety of the novel. This ominous tension makes it so that the exploration of America in the book is always uncomfortable and prone to unpleasant - however interesting - surprises. It is a country made up of various other cultures and creeds, and conflict hangs in the air, as the clash between the inhabitants of America seems to approach. In a sense, America as Gaiman portrays it mimics the use of intertextuality in the novel: there are words which come from somewhere else, lost voices that come into existence only when thrown into a boiling pot of other voices, and all of that contributes to framing Gaiman’s story about a place made up of people who immigrated from other locations, and how their myths survive and interact with a multitude of other foreign myths, legends and gods. In contrast with all that, there is the soil: the ground that holds all of these foreigners; and the ancient inhabitants of the place: the forgotten and ignored heirs of a land that has been collectively colonized by countless other peoples.

I have traveled along Gaiman's phantasmatic depiction of America many times now. It is always surprising and impactful. I have met African, European, Middle-Eastern and Asian gods in this place, and I have learned again and again that they are, in fact, American Gods.

It is really strange, then, that I have never gone to America, never stepped on the very soil that caused an Englishman to write the book that I hold so close to my heart. Perhaps I know that I will not be able to find Gaiman's mystical America if I ever set foot on the "real" place. Or maybe the "reality" that is narrated in the novel already fits my case. Who knows, maybe if I visited America I would end up bringing my own gods with me, and see a whole new 'America' through the eyes of my own Shadow?

In opposition to my own story, Shadow, the novel's main focal point, travels to many American cities – a small number of which are fictional – and his constant movement through the roads of the country serves not only to demonstrate the vast expanses of land in the United States as narrated in the book, but also to reiterate one of the novel's most important themes: that of trespassing frontiers, of living in the shadows, the "backstage" of the country that has been created through the sum many travelers settling in the same space.

I noticed that the idea of an unstoppable flux, of conversion and interaction, appears to be central to American God's plot: the new gods, the heralds of modern American society with its credit cards, internet, television and fast food, now inhabit a space that had been previously occupied by deities who were worshipped for their relation with nature and human behavior: such as thunder, war, love and strength. This goes to show that not only the intertexts that abound in *American Gods*, but also the core of the story itself exemplifies the conflicts that take place when various elements from different spaces are gathered and ultimately clash when put in the same stage.

And yet these conflicts do not necessarily need to break out into a full blown battle. The narrative incessantly builds up the tension of Ragnarok approaching (mostly through the repeated "mantra" that "a storm is coming"), but when we reach the point in the story's climax that has been proclaimed countless times during the narrative, the conclusion instead denies the release of the tension that has been building up until that point. The war that had been started through manipulation and conspiracy is stopped when the true meaning of the battle is made clear to both sides. The combatants quietly leave the arena; the violence has been averted – although not completely, as the clash had already begun by

the time Shadow exposes the reasons behind Odin's and Loki's need for the bloodbath. The conflict ends, but the tension persists. The impression I was left with, after reading through this chapter, was that the new gods and the old must learn to coexist, however contradictory their existences may be in the contemporary world. The new has not managed to supplant the old – the pantheon has merely expanded in size; the thrones of the gods are intact, but some gods now choose to sit inside black limousines and wear elegant suits instead of sporting long beards and riding eight-legged horses.

In short, it was clear to me that this novel, a weird novel that gathered a ton of myths, put them on the same foreign space and observed the ways they interacted had much to offer to an attentive reader who wanted to analyze the many issues the narrative brought to attention. For this reason, I dedicated the first chapter of this thesis to presenting some of the most important aspects of the book in the clear and orderly way: first, by describing the many myths and legends that make an appearance in *American Gods*, explaining briefly their origins and originating cultures, then diving into the problematic topic of the novel's genre(s) – with the timely assistance of Bakhtin - and finally exploring the America that the narrative of the novel offers the reader. This section should set up the stage for what is to come: the punctual analysis of the book's relations to other works and texts. The first chapter also demands that the reader focus on the figure of the novel's main character, whose ominous name suggests dark undertones to Gaiman's modern fantasy narrative: Shadow.

Shadow, the protagonist who manages to assume the role of the outsider in his own world, who seems to be ever the vagrant in a country of travelers, never quite fitting in the world of the gods (new or old) and losing his place amongst the normal Americans with whom he lived prior to his encounter with Mr. Wednesday, ends up being the only one capable of averting the battle that would ultimately serve as a collective sacrifice to the god of war. The many roles this character plays in the story seemed remarkable to me: Shadow was a hero who lived in the sidelines, who sometimes merely watched the story unfold; only occasionally taking action in order to advance the plot.

In that way, I surmised Shadow acts as a modern Americanized variant of the *flâneur* figure in Gaiman's expansive America, strolling from one place to the other, noticing his surroundings and learning from his experiences. By the end of the novel, the character still has not allowed the will to settle down someplace to overcome his need to travel and wander, as he finds himself walking around the streets of Reykjavik in the

book's final chapter. Shadow's unrelenting will to travel may be read in various different ways, when one attempts to explain this behavior according to the novel's plot, but one thing is for certain: *American Gods* thrives on the idea of travelling, and the road is Shadow's only true – and probably the only “honest” - companion throughout most of the narrative.

The notion of America as a large country connected by its long, winding roads is illustrated already in the book's original cover: a dark highway in a deserted landscape, with thunder falling down from the skies. It is no wonder, then, that the book has been several times referred to as a “road novel”. Granted, Shadow spends the entirety of the novel moving from one place to another – the location he spends the most time in, the fictional town of Lakeside, still cannot be his home, and even though he comes back to the place at the final section of the narrative, he resumes by leaving town once and for all after solving the mysterious murders that had been taking place there annually since times immemorial. Shadow, like most of the old gods in America, has difficulty adapting to his new reality: now that he knows his life is linked to that of the gods, he cannot regain his “regular” existence amongst simple humans but is nevertheless unable (and unwilling) to find a place for himself with the mythical figures that survive in contemporary society. It seems that for this reason, the character is in a constant state of movement.

However, as much as the “road” may be a central aspect to *American Gods*' story, the book is very well known for its ability to mix a variety of genres in its text. Although for a Brazilian reader the book may be easily found in the English Literature section, it seems to have generated quite a stir when it was released in English-speaking countries. I would imagine one could find it on different shelves, under “fiction”, “fantasy”, “horror” and, well, even “Americana” – and this is something that the interviews Gaiman gave on that very subject only served to confirm, as his publishers apparently really had a hard time trying to figure out how to market the novel and for which public.

This, however, would not have been the first time such a thing happened concerning Gaiman's works: *The Sandman* featured a similar genre-blend characteristic in its writing, the only difference being that *Sandman* was generally seen as a comic book, something that did not warrant an analytical, academic reading of its narrative, themes and genres. In fact, Gaiman helped bring attention to how “comic books” were also a part of literature – a debate that still goes on to this day, some arguing that comics cannot be read as literary works while others maintain that “literature” is something that cannot be defined

by the medium in which a work is published. Still, *American Gods* brought Gaiman's narratives' abilities of shifting from genre to genre to light perhaps in an even more impactful way than *The Sandman* did, as the reception of the work demanded that critics and readers focused on the text itself, rather than on the text and visuals, as in the case of a graphic novel series.

And *American Gods* has so much to offer on account of its many genres: the reader is taken on a rollercoaster ride, as the realistic tale of a convict spending the last days of his sentence in jail becomes a tragic account of the shock of losing a loved one, then shifts to the narrative of a series of encounters with a mysterious and peculiar stranger who seems to be following the protagonist everywhere, incessantly offering him a job position – all in the first chapter. From there, the text goes even further, featuring many sections that tell the stories of immigrants and their journeys to America (which are all written by one of the “main” narrative's characters) and occasionally giving way to scenes of horror, bits of fantasy, whole fragments of slice-of-life and Americana, as well as to travelogue text and even song, as there are one or two instances where verses appear between paragraphs of regular dialogue and narrative, a fact which requires a different way of perceiving those texts. Not only that, but if one looks at the complete structure of the novel as a whole, one might also see it as a *bildungsroman*: the book is divided in four parts, the first of which is called “Shadows”, and the second entitled “My Ainsel”. This reflects Shadow's development in the story from a catatonic bystander - who is employed by a man he barely knows and commits fully to his duty without question – into someone capable of making his own choices and being himself without the aid or assistance of other (he thus becomes “his own self”). This reading is so in tandem with the story, that, as Rut Blomqvist explains, “in the first chapter of part two, Shadow is actually reborn, though in a dream, through the Earth, and is then shortly given his Mike Ainsel identity” (2012, p. 5). I thought this the very first time I read the book and I stand by it: if nothing else, *American Gods* is undoubtedly a very diverse novel.

Shadow's journey acts as the main focal point of the story, and Shadow as a character, although he may appear simplistic at first, ends up being a very complex study case. However, the novel's protagonist has many things in common with the subject I chose to focus on in this thesis: his story (or “stories”, if one takes into account Gaiman's short stories featuring the same character) and role in the narrative brushes against many intertextual and archetypal tangents, so that his identity is never fully revealed, even when

the hints in Gaiman's writing point toward some direction. That is, Shadow's place is disputed throughout the whole novel – he is neither here nor there, he does not belong to any place, and yet belongs everywhere: he is the inhabitant of the borderlines. As Blomqvist wrote:

“Shadow does then, in spite of his many symbolic or archetypal traits, not become limited to any particular type of mythical figure. The protagonist realizes his own need to exist within a social context, but at the same time finds it impossible to wholeheartedly involve himself in American culture.” (2012, p. 5)

This resonates with *American Gods*' unique way of telling its story: Gaiman makes use of very well-known mythological figures, but in fact he also transforms them at the same time, not merely subscribing to their earlier depictions in ancient texts – he also makes them his own, and surprises the reader at times when our repertoire regarding a certain archetype or punctual god is shattered to pieces by the development in the narrative. Odin is still a war god, but he is also a grifter: and America, when observed from a certain point-of-view, may also be seen as a nation that worships war and feeds on the war economy, and yet it must do so by using a distraction – some form of misdirection -, a particular kind of excuse or a certain lie/conspiracy in order for the society to validate the violence. Likewise, Shadow, according to Gaiman's short story “The Monarch of the Glen”, has been associated with and given the name “Balder”, Odin's son; but in *American Gods* there are countless connections concerning Shadow's identity not only with this Norse god, but also with Jesus, since he acts as the savior that has been sacrificed; and with Odin himself, as part of the story demands that he mimics Odin's (again) sacrifice for wisdom (in a scene that likewise marks Shadow's “coming to life” and growing as an autonomous human being) while hanging from the World Tree.

The subjects I have discussed so far may be clearly seen in *American Gods*' narrative if one attempts to examine the text deeply and research its most obvious mythical connections. Still, one of the facts that I also loved about the book and that an intertextual reading would allow me to analyze was the presence of several allusions and appropriations of other texts in Gaiman's prose. This has already been exemplified when I mentioned the intertextual joke in the book linking Odin's ravens to Poe's poem “The Raven”, but there are many others in the novel which are not so easily spotted and which

have not been subject to much analysis. This, I hope, is one of the main ways in which this work will contribute to academic research concerning Gaiman's prose in *American Gods*.

One may argue that this aspect of the writing in the novel comprises mere detail; that it is superfluous to focus one's attention in these small facets of a book that offers so many themes and issues to be explored. To those, I would argue that detail plays a significant part in literature, and that in some cases tiny fractions of texts may offer completely different reading to whole novels. I do believe, however, that in *American Gods*' case, this peculiarity in the novel's text serves to perpetuate the movement that abounds in the plot and in the prose: the conflux, the blend, the coming together of separate, distant myths and texts.

When I first noticed the latent intertextuality in *American Gods*, I was confronted with a doubt. If Gaiman wrote an entire novel that "used" in different ways texts written in other works, is he really the only author of *American Gods*? At the time, it seemed to me like a serious, necessary question to be made. Nowadays, this issue is still debated, but Gaiman's writing is very rarely questioned on that account: we now have authors who "rewrite" satirical versions of old books by merely adding fragments in order to add a conflicting genre to the text. Gaiman's writing is his own, and the study of intertextuality is (mostly) not concerned with issues of authorship, for there is no set origin to any text. As Kristeva explained upon coming up with the term, intertextuality is an aspect of text itself. It is something that is an active part of the process of reading and writing texts. Although this view has been discarded by some theorists who aim to study the "origins" of texts, intertextuality as adopted for this analysis will be used in order to identify and study the connection between texts, not issues of originality and of authorship. I vow to examine Gaiman's writing and what it is meant to inspire, not to examine Gaiman's inspirations in order to apply my own meaning to his writings.

At this point, perhaps it would be better to clarify exactly what I aim to examine in this work when I say it will focus on "intertextuality". The general understanding of this textual process that will be taken into account in the proposed reading of Gaiman's novel is that which views the basic nature of intertextuality as a "matter of construction, thus of reading, and [where] the appeal to the intention of the author has to be abandoned" (EDMUNDS, 2001, p. 166). Furthermore, the view that will be used as a basis for this analysis is that the "foundation of intertextual phenomena is not the author but the reader" (ibid) and, to that, I would add "the text". Authorial intention is not the focus of the work

at hand, but instead the process of reading and the close examination of the text itself by its reader, with an academic approach in order to locate textual connections and similarities to other texts. As such, the word intertextuality will be employed to denote the (inter)textual relations that may be established during a reading of the novel if the reader is either familiar with the work that is being “alluded” to in Gaiman’s prose or if s/he simply compares the different texts (and their contexts).

One may argue that this proposal strays from the original definition of intertextuality as formulated by Kristeva – and indeed, this analysis demands that the term intertextuality be used to convey a different idea, since the aforementioned approach (as employed by Edmunds, for instance) to this phenomenon does not fit adequately in Kristeva’s Marxist concept which aimed to explain how texts are produced and which does not make its literary-critical applications its main focus (ibid, p. 164). However, the term will also not be employed with Genette’s near-structuralist approach, as this study intends to verify (much like Bakhtin’s writings on dialogism) the various voices in Gaiman’s novel as well as its use of different writing styles and the boundaries of the novel’s genre(s).

Parallels will be established between Sant’Anna’s proposals on the expanded model of parody, paraphrase, stylization and appropriation and Gaiman’s text, but although those terms will be used to describe passages of the novel, the focus of this work is not to simply categorize sections of the book into different “intertextual figures”, but to develop on the possibilities of readings that *American Gods* presents to its readers. Likewise, as I have already established, this analysis is not concerned with a final, determinate intention on the part of the author to define and express these intertextual relations to the reader, instead opting to simply extract from Gaiman’s texts what might be read as the “clearest” connections that readers may construct by examining and interpreting the text of the novel.

I would also like to clarify my choice of using the term “intertext” instead of Genette’s concept of the hypertext. While there are many allusions and references in Gaiman’s novel that plainly name the text with which they are establishing a relation, there are many cases in which this process does not occur, and thus, without any indication or quotation marks, it is left up to the reader to be able to discern that an intertextual process is contained within the prose. Whether the “hypotext” is identified or not might not be an issue for a “complete reading” of the novel (as the reader would presume an hypotext, if one agrees with Riffaterre’s ideas on how the process of intertextuality works), but as Edmunds points out, “intertextuality, thus, discriminates between one reader and another”

(2000, p. 46, 47) and the proposed reading this study intends to offers aims to indicate the possibilities of an intertextual perception on certain parts of Gaiman's text – however explicit or implicit they might be deemed by the reader.

Likewise, I intend to analyze the archetypal figures that appear in the story of *American Gods*. This, coupled with the intertextual approach applied to the reading of the novel, allows the reader to experience a sense of familiarity and of surprise at certain actions narrated in the prose, as Gaiman derives many character traits from older texts, but also inserts deviations – and that's one of the keywords when we discuss intertextuality, according to Sant'Anna – that contribute to the novel's unique take on myths and legendary figures from various folklores.

Gaiman's texts have been subject to academic analysis a number of times, but – even if one does not take into consideration the fact that the vast majority of articles focuses on his graphic novels instead of his actual novels – the general theory that is used to study his works are that of comparative mythology, in particular the works of Joseph Campbell regarding the journey of the hero. Campbell has determined that a significant number of ancient myths utilize the same basic structure: expanding upon Barthes' studies on myth, he has pinpointed some shared similarities regarding tales of heroes from various cultures and identified similar stages and steps in the narrative of journeys concerning heroic actions and stories that seem to abound for legends around the globe. Although this attempt at fitting Gaiman's plots and narratives into a fixed structure has been dominant in academic circles, this work will focus on other aspect that is frequently cited about Gaiman's famous novel on America but quite rarely examined at length: the amazing and overwhelming presence of intertextuality in the book's text.

As such, intertextuality in Gaiman has constantly been alluded to by other scholars, but very seldom been established as the center stage of a deep analysis that aimed to discuss and cross-examine the text's connections not only of a mythic nature, but also those that are related to literature and modern/worldwide culture in general. Gaiman's America as presented in the book stands as the gathering place for many legendary figures and gods, but it also attracts texts from different places and times, generating an intertextual aspect that does not limit itself to the novel's mythical context, instead allowing all manners of text to occupy the novel's prose.

When read under the lens of intertextuality, *American Gods* may be seen as a novel

where confrontation serves to show the very importance of literature. The new gods' conflict against the old gods amounts to the fact that the latter are no longer of any use to modern society. To defy that notion, the old gods need to find new places and roles where they can survive in America. However, the book's very subject demonstrates that gods are still something that attracts modern tastes – mythology is being reinvented according to the needs of the contemporary population, but there is still a space to be occupied by the mystical, rituals and idols. Gaiman's novel illustrates that in each of its aspects: old myths are reinvented and inserted in the late 90's American landscape, earlier texts are taken from their "original" pages and introduced in the novel's prose, and all of that is alluded to repeatedly during the course of the narrative. This also references America's tendency to self-reference itself constantly and is at times revealed in a tone of near parody, as Gaiman's subtle criticism toward real-life American society is demonstrated in his fictional however realistic depiction of a culture that "never refers to a first principle outside itself; it uses itself as proof for its veraciousness. I thus understand the symbolic system in *American Gods* as a form of mock symbolism--it mocks the self-referentiality of American culture" (BLOMQVIST, 2012, p. 5).

America as presented in the novel's text also exemplifies the contrast of self-referentiality against the multicultural - and, in the novel's case, highly intertextual – background (or "backstage") of the country. Credit cards seem to replace worshipped heroes of times past, but nevertheless reach a nigh-identical status as a powerful deity in modern times. In other words, the fact that the contemporary world has introduced new "gods" to the universal pantheon of the western superpower does not erase the importance and downright necessity of what may be deemed "old" by recent standards. The contemporary age is, after all, the result of our collective history across all past ages, and would simply not exist without our collected knowledge and experience from this time. Thus, literature, like the ancient gods in Gaiman's story, is still frequently cited as something that will wane over time and perish since it has less and less space in the age of computers and unlimited access provided by the internet, but one must be aware that literature will live on and adapt to the new media. Gaiman's book can be seen as a fantastical novelization of that very process.

And I also believe that at the same time *American Gods* manages to discuss this troubling issue of the notion that the new will replace the old, it also represents its own

age: Gaiman has repeatedly said that there might be a sequel to the book, since America has changed so much since the writing of the novel that there's more ground and topics to be explored in his mythic reimagining of the backstage of the country. Like Percy Shelley wrote when arguing that poetry would not lose its place in the age of reason—something that was being hailed as fact in his time – literature (as exemplified by Shelley's text on the importance of poetry) persists the test of time, since:

“It is impossible to read the compositions of the most celebrated writers of the present day without being startled with the electric life which burns within their words. They measure the circumference and sound the depths of human nature with a comprehensive and all-penetrating spirit, and they are themselves perhaps the most sincerely astonished at its manifestations; for it is less their spirit than the spirit of the age.” (1970, p. 197)

However peculiar America as depicted in the text of *American Gods* may seem, and as much as one could argue that this occurs merely as the result of the author not having grown up in the United States, it still encapsulates many of the aspects of the age. *American Gods*, if written in 2016, may have represented the physical manifestation of Television as an entity who sided with the old gods or as a completely different entity, since television is slowly migrating from giant broadcasting networks to video streaming services provided via internet. The novel still has been written at a determined point in history, although literature does allow its readers to mentally travel through time.

I hope the following pages are able to communicate the reasons why I have come to love this novel so much and to demonstrate why I think it is a work of literature that deserves to be read more than once. It demands that the reader pay attention to many of its latent aspects, and the more one dives into Gaiman's phantasmatic universe, the more one is able to feel at home in the weird destination for migrants of various other locations, worlds and legends. So this has been a caveat and warning for travelers: I intend to clear the skies of *American Gods* and openly show the mythic figures that have been hiding in Gaiman's prose all along, as well as many other characters and voices whose travels led them to this same place.

Gaiman's America might be a bad land for gods, but I hope to make it better by attempting to examine in proximity and explain the picture Gaiman has so carefully

painted. So I invite you, the reader, to take a look at this expansive pantheon and follow the roads of this amazingly curious novel to see where it all leads.

1 NEIL GAIMAN'S AMERICAN GODS

Gaiman's fourth novel *American Gods* sparked from a conversation Gaiman had with his movie agent, in which he was asked if he had an idea for a movie, since actor Robert De Niro was looking for a new script that would suit his acting skills and tastes. Although Gaiman could not think of a new idea for a script to show the actor, the exchange with his movie agent made him think of De Niro's character in the film *Taxi Driver*, and he pictured what De Niro's character would discuss with Rip Torn (another well-known American actor whose peculiar speaking pattern had caused an impression on Gaiman) if they seated one beside the other during a plane flight. This thought caused Gaiman to imagine a scene whilst he was half asleep one night:

“[...] in my head there was a man running through an airport, and he'd already had a hell of a day. He'd gone to the wrong airport, the plane had been diverted due to weather, it had landed in the wrong airport. He'd run across, gate to gate, as I often have, trying to get there. When he gets onto the plane there's somebody sitting in his seat. And the stewardess says come on, we have a seat in first class. And the man sitting next to him in the seat turns to him and says “You are late. Now, I want to offer you a job.” (GAIMAN, 2014, p. 224)

This situation Gaiman imagined would be later implemented as one of the first scenes in *American Gods*, a book which came into existence also as a way for the author to “translate” the America he had come to know in his six years after moving from the UK to the United States. When he first started writing comics, he worked from England but usually set his stories in modern America as he pictured it in his mind, which comprised a “place made out of bits of films and TV shows” (CAMPBELL, p. 224), but when Gaiman finally moved to the USA, he was struck with the many differences in comparison to his preconceptions about American society. However, the setting and the overall theme of the novel would only fall into place when, in 1998, Gaiman found himself in a similar situation to that of the scene he had imagined: during one of his travels to Norway, he took

the chance of a one-day stopover in Iceland since he had never been to the place. He arrived to the country sleep-deprived during the early morning and decided that in order to make the most of his day, he would not sleep. In the late hours of that sleepless day in Iceland, Gaiman saw a “little diorama showing the voyages of Leif Ericson across Iceland to Vinland [and] just thought ‘I wonder if they left their gods behind’” (GAIMAN, p. 225). His daydreams about the exchange between two unique characters in the airplane, the trouble in the airport, and his thoughts about the Vikings and their gods during the Norsemen’s travels to North America around the year 1000 all became important elements in Gaiman’s new concept for a novel. He wrote a letter to his editor explaining his idea to write a “road-trip novel full of eerie Americana in which the old gods of immigrants are abandoned in favor of the secular gods of technology” (CAMPBELL, p. 225) and received a mock cover for the book containing the provisory title he planned to use while he thought of a better one: *American Gods*. Upon seeing the fake book cover his editor had sent him, Gaiman chose to keep the title and the overall design of the paratext, and with the picture in mind, he began to write the novel.

At that point in time, Gaiman was still perceived as the author of the critically acclaimed graphic novel series *The Sandman*, which had come to an end in 1996. The theme of gods and mythology was already something clearly associated with Gaiman, as in *The Sandman* the titular character was a sort of deity (the anthropomorphic representation of dreams, generally called Dream, but given many names: one of which is Morpheus, as in the Greek god of dreams) and interacted several times with reimagined versions of different gods, such as the figures of Bast, the Egyptian goddess of warfare, and Loki, the Norse trickster god. Not only that, the novel also bears a slight sense of tribute to previous “appropriations” of gods from ancient mythologies in newer texts – one might look no further than Marvel’s own “Thor” super-hero, a character that is taken right out of Norse mythology.

American Gods was finally published in 2001, and it had some elements that were similar to the ones readers could find in *The Sandman*. As Gaiman himself stated, *American Gods* is “a very strange book. It's probably the closest thing to Sandman [he wrote] since Sandman. It has that kind of texture, and that kind of taste.” (GAIMAN, p. 223). Many characters that had appearances in *The Sandman* were featured in certain moments throughout the prose of *AG* (since both works deal constantly with appropriation

of myths and folk figures in their respective plots), but they were shown as different versions of the same figure (the figure of Odin in *AG* differs from the Odin which briefly appears in *The Sandman*, and so on). Not only that, but Gaiman seemed to try and explore as much as he could the possibility of ancient gods from other lands having to adapt in order to live and survive as they lose their believers and purpose in modern-day American society. Many different pantheons and creatures from folklore are thrown in this situation, as the main character's journey has him crossing the United States and meeting those forgotten "immigrants" from several cultures in various places.

This multicultural, pan-pantheistic portrait of America served as the setting for Gaiman's novel and comprises his own fantastical landscape in a book which "was a way of making sense of America" (GAIMAN, 2012) for a writer who had come from England. Months after the publication of *AG*, which took place on June 19th, 2001, the 9/11 terrorist attacks took place in New York City. The event deeply transformed American society and had international repercussions, resulting in a global war against terrorism and a rise in the prejudice against Muslim populations in the West. Gaiman has repeatedly stated that if he ever wrote a sequel to the original *AG*, this pivotal tragedy would need to be addressed in the book: "I think if I go back and do *American Gods 2*, that will be my way of making sense of what America has become, post 9/11 and post post 9/11" (ibid). In fact, the novel treats America's relations to other countries exclusively in terms of foreign cultures and peoples that arrive and come to reside amongst – and become a part of – American society, devoting very little space to the global tensions and conflicts in which the USA is involved. Mythological figures from Arab culture and Islam actually appear as characters in the novel, but are given a secondary, accessory function within the novel's plot. The only aspect of the book which could genuinely be read as a partial comment on America's political warmongering is the theme of war between the old gods against the gods of modern media technology – a story which, analogies with real wars and conflicts notwithstanding, still remarkably echoes Norse mythology's unique aspect of the Ragnarök: the final confrontation between the Aesir gods and their enemies.

The literal *American Gods* which Gaiman so dutifully (re)constructed derive from diverse global backgrounds, beliefs and legends, especially relating to how those legends were expressed in their respective "original" texts (such as the *Eddas* for the Norse Gods and the *Quran* for the Queen of Sheba). The narrative of *AG* attempts to insert those

foreign elements into the setting of what Gaiman perceived to be the day-to-day in pre-9/11 United States. From the first scene Gaiman imagined (as a result from a completely different context), to the final fully-fleshed out narrative dealing with the contrast between contemporary American society and the many cultures which came to live in the new country - Gaiman himself also being a foreigner to the culture and customs of the USA -, *AG* grew in scope during its writing process and came to be, at the time of its original release, Gaiman's longest novel to date. The vast plurality of legendary figures which the author inserts in his story as well as his intention to explore, in a "road trip-style" narrative, the geography of the country in which he chose to reside contributed to the book's dimension – so unlike Gaiman's usual shorter novels. That being so, the following examination will detail the legends and fables that inhabit the prose of this unique novel and which comprise Gaiman's all-encompassing mythological map of America¹. The figures from various folklores, the various genres that are expressed in the novel's prose and the theme of the narrative showcase *AG*'s great intertextual setup, as the book relies on many (previous) utterances, genres, speeches and figures in order to construct its whole.

1.1 DISPLACED GODS

1.1.1 Scandinavian Mythology

American Gods is an exercise in appropriation of different pantheons and legendary figures from various folklores as it inserts them into modern American society, the most notable of which being the ancient Scandinavian gods from the Viking era, commonly referred to as the Norse Gods. An Americanized version of the All-father god Odin is the main support character/antagonist in the narrative, and introduces himself to the main character (Shadow) as "Mister Wednesday" (ibid, 2002) as that is the day of the week in which they meet. In fact, that presentation and codename of sorts is a clear joke on the origins of the word "Wednesday", which derives from Old English for "Woden's day" – Woden being an older spelling for the name of the god Odin (GRZEGA, 2001). Not only

¹ For a quick guide, check the glossary in Annex 4

that, but Loki, the trickster god, is also “recreated” and Americanized in the narrative, where he is presented by the name “Low-key Lyesmith”, another play on words, this time related to Loki’s deceiving ways and ability to disguise himself and fool the other gods (low-key) and his well-known alias of lie-smith, the mischief-maker, as his entity is generally connected to the concept of chaos, lies and corruption.

The Scandinavian pantheon is central to the narrative of *AG*, since not only two of the most well-known Norse gods are used as important figures in the overall plot of the book (Wednesday acting as the force that sets Shadow in motion on his quest to meet the other *American Gods* and Loki disguising himself as the leader of the “modern gods” in order to cause the outbreak of war), but also because the main character himself is revealed to be connected to the figure of one of the mythological Odin’s sons, Baldr: during an important scene late in the novel, an intertextual connection can be made in a line spoken by Loki which seems to clearly indicate that Shadow is the *American* Baldr, a Norse god of light and purity. This supposition is confirmed in a short-story set in the same universe of *American Gods* entitled “The Monarch of the Glen”, and published in Gaiman’s short-story collection *Fragile Things*, where a dream sequence contains the following sentence “The name on Shadow’s birth certificate was Balder Moon” (GAIMAN, 2007, 382-383).

Although other figures from Norse mythology are mentioned at certain scenes in the novel – Wednesday comments that the “American” version of the Norse god Thor committed suicide in 1932 (2002, p. 386) and Yggdrasil, the World Tree, is also an important element in a part of the book – these three Viking gods play a central role in the book and are given essential roles in the overall plot of *American Gods*. However, many other important characters possess a mythological background from origins other than Northern Europe.

1.1.2 African Myths

Another prominent character in the prose of *AG* is presented under the name “Mister Nancy” (ibid, p. 125), but is later clearly revealed to be the West-African Spider entity known as Anansi, a trickster figure that is present in many folktales where he uses

his wisdom and cleverness in stories from the oral tradition where “the Puny Spider” would manage to persevere over the “Mighty Tiger”. Although originating from Africa (Ghana), the folk figure of Anansi is usually associated with West Indian countries in the Americas where slave plantations were settled - mainly Jamaica: “West Indian cultural pantheon immortalizes him in tales fashioned out of the particular West Indian landscape where he has become a synecdoche for Caribbean ingenuity, endurance, and commitment to self-preservation” (JAMES, 2004).

A symbol for the resistance of the oppressed cultures and peoples in the slaver colonies, Anansi is reinvented by Gaiman as a cheerful, smart old man who wears bright colors and likes to tell stories. The original Anansi in the West African folktales is also seen as an entity related to the telling of stories, as most of the “Spider tales” were told from one generation to another in order for them to survive European oppression. Anansi and his sense of humor often relieve the tension in the narrative of *AG*, contrasting Shadow’s silence and the other gods’ serious mood as they contemplate the onset of war.

Mister Nancy is a side character throughout most of the narrative in *AG*, but Gaiman devoted his next novel entirely to the sons of this character. *Anansi’s Boys* seems to take place in the same fictional universe as *AG*, but has a much lighter tone, more comical and family-friendly than gloomy, suspenseful and serious. The Spider figure from African folklore is also described as having children in many stories, so the narrative incorporates many aspects from the original legend into Gaiman’s new narrative, just as *AG*.

The Anansi from oral tradition is often also seen as a protector of mankind, as in some versions of his stories he is seen as the creator of the sun and the moon as well as the one who taught humanity how to sow grains for agriculture (LYNCH and ROBERTS, 2010, p. 8). In this way, Mister Nancy also plays the role of a benevolent god who helps Shadow in his journey and shelters him from danger, but who is opposed to open conflict against the modern gods unless it becomes unavoidable.

1.1.3 Egyptian Gods

AG's story, although relying on only one narrator, has major switched in the speech style. The novel is narrated by a third-person omniscient narrator, but there are smaller pieces of narrative inserted in some chapters of the book where the implied author is intended to be one of the characters in the novel: Mr. Ibis, one of the people that Shadow meets in the American town of Cairo, Illinois. During these segments, the fact that the narrator often resorts to direct speech gives the impression that the characters are in control of the narrative, but they are not; their voices are appropriated and reproduced by the narrator, which renders the narrative voice more subtle and seemingly reliable. Mr. Ibis' voice is presented through a wise, learned man's prism. The character enjoys writing – and the contents on which he writes are comprised of many tales of immigrants who came to America in times past and, during their travels, managed to bring with them the gods from their native homelands.

Mister Ibis' name, as it happens in most of the characters' names in *AG*, contains a subtext which serves as a clue as to the identity of the god which the character represents. In Mr. Ibis' case, the word Ibis refers to the African sacred ibis, a bird that was the object of veneration in ancient Egypt. Thoth, the Egyptian god of knowledge and writing, was often drawn with the head of an ibis, which seems to indicate that Mr. Ibis in fact represents the “American version” of the god Thoth. The style that is shown in the narrative of the stories in *AG* which are supposedly written by Mr. Ibis – in sections under the title “Coming to America” or otherwise with the date of travels to America – is full of flourishes and personal reflections, which contrasts his writing style with that of the main narrator of the novel.

Also residing with Mister Ibis is Mister Jacquel, who works as a mortician, and whose name is related to the jackal, the animal whose head was often attached to a human body in illustrations in ancient Egypt that aimed to portray the god Anubis. Anubis was venerated as the god of the dead, and also as the god of embalming, which fits Mr. Jacquel's job and life in *AG*'s narrative. Anubis was said to be the god who would weight a person's heart after their death, and then determine whether that person was allowed to enter the realm of the dead

Bast, the Egyptian goddess of the sun who was portrayed as having the head of a cat, is also a character in *AG*, but both the American Bast and the American god Horus are described by Gaiman as being comfortable living as the animals which they were

associated with in Egyptian mythology. Bast is described as a housecat (although she does appear in human form during one of Shadow's dreams) and Horus spends his time flying through the sky as a hawk. Both talk to Shadow and interact with other characters in the book, but their personalities are less well developed than that of Mr. Jacquel and Mr. Ibis – Bast usually described as seductive and Horus as someone who has gone mad over time and who does not enjoy interacting with humans.

1.1.4 Slavic Deities

The first of the many forgotten gods Wednesday contacts in order to increase his army for the future war against the modern gods is Czernobog - a Slavic deity mentioned in the *Chronica Slavorum*, a medieval account on the pagan culture and religion of the Polabian Slavs penned by the Saxon Christian priest Helmold of Bosau. Czernobog means “black god” in proto-Slavic (“Chernobog” is its equivalent in Russian), and Helmod mentions that the Slavic pagan tribes he observed would relate all bad fortune to the evil “black god” (TSCHAN, 1935, p. 159). Helmod also refers to an opposite god, which was perceived by the local pagans as being a benevolent entity, but this god is given no name - although this deity of light has been called (with little evidence to support this theory) Belobog – literally meaning “white god” (DIXON-KENNEDY, 1998, p. 37). Gaiman portrays the Americanized version of this god as a short man with grey hair who is as short tempered as he is trustworthy.

The Czernobog in *AG* lives in an apartment in Chicago with his relatives, the sisters Zorya Utrennyaya, the goddess of dawn, and Zorya Vechernyaya, the goddess of dusk. There a third sister who lives with them in the same apartment, Zorya Polnochnaya, the goddess of midnight. The third sister is rarely mentioned in ancient texts, however “some accounts describe three daughters; but the third, the goddess of midnight, remains nameless” (ibid, p. 322), and Gaiman has admitted that he invented the specific name and character of Zorya Polnochnaya for the story when he spoke on the research that he made regarding Slavic gods before writing *AG*:

“Honestly, the amount of research, when it comes down to original sources, is

incredibly slim. You're down to a few pages of stuff that the Church hasn't burned. [...] I was fascinated by two characters in it – the Zorya. [...] And there were two of them [...] and I thought 'you know, it would be even cooler if there was a third', and I decided to name her after an Iggy Pop song. So, I went up and found out what the Russian for 'midnight' was, so she became Zorya Polunochnaya – Sister Midnight – and I put her in my book.” (GAIMAN, 2011)

The Zorya in *AG* bestow Shadow with a magical coin – she plucks the moon from the night sky and presents it to Shadow, who sees a silver coin in her hand. This token serves the function of a protective amulet of sorts during Shadow's journey, which reinforces the idea that the Zorya sister as mystical entities. The fact that there are three sisters can also be intertextually read as a reference to the recurring idea of three female figures who possess supernatural roles in myths and stories – this topic will be further discussed in the upcoming chapter on mythological projection and allegory.

1.1.5 Arabian Figures

Entities from Arabian folklore are not as plentiful as Egyptian gods in *AG*, but two figures from pre-Islamic legend appear in isolated narratives that center around these characters (thus deviating from the main narrative of the novel, which focalizes Shadow). In an interlude at the end of the first chapter of the book, a prostitute asks to be worshipped by one of her customers and, in a surreal scene, swallows the man whole during sex, consuming him. Later in the book, in another interlude section, it is revealed that her name is Bilquis, Queen of Sheba.

Bilquis is a queen who appears not only in the Islamic Quran, but also in the Bible, where the Old Testament details her visit to King Solomon. In *AG*, Bilquis has the role of a prostitute presumably due to her fantastical nature in the Quranic version of the story, where Solomon summons the queen with the help of a jinn. Also to note is that her name “Bilkis” is believed to derive from the Greek word for “concubine”, which might be the implicit subtext behind her portrayal in *AG* as someone who has the “world's oldest profession” and needs to be worshipped through sex.

The other legendary figure from Arabian background to be featured in the prose of Gaiman's novel is an ifrit, a monster of sorts from pre-Islamic folklore which is usually portrayed as a fire demon and which is also present in *One Thousand and One Nights*. The scene in which the ifrit appears is reminiscent from Gaiman's first thoughts about the movie *Taxi Driver*, as the narrative is focalized in a middle-eastern character who boards the cab of a taxi driver in New York City who happens to be a creature from legend. Salim, the focalized character, recognizes the driver as an ifrit after noticing that his eyes glowed red with flames. The men find comfort in each other and in their shared background as foreigners to the metropolis of America. This small narrative within the book culminates in a sex scene between the two men, the outcome of which has the ifrit and Salim trading bodies, one becoming the other and resuming life as the other person (or god) due to their mutual wish to escape their own lives².

1.1.6 Native-American Legends

AG delves into the theme of American identity and folklore and may be read as a narrative that attempts to indicate that much of modern American culture sparked from the sum of foreign peoples and legends that settled in North America long ago. However, the story also brings to the forefront the issue of the pre-Columbian inhabitants of North America and what has become of their myths and history in the contemporary world. That being so, Shadow has recurrent dreams in which he talks to a man with a buffalo head – and when the protagonist asks whether the mysterious figure is a god or not, he receives the answer “I am the land” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 549).

Shadow also has dreams in which he sees thunderbirds, a supernatural creature who the Natives Americans on the North Pacific Coast believed was the entity responsible for lightning in the sky, due to the flapping of their wings striking trees (BRUNVAND, 2006). Also called “Spirit Birds”, these animals were seen as an omen of war by some indigenous tribes, which would explain the reason behind Shadow's visions –as Wednesday's ultimate goal is to start a war.

² For a more detailed account and the analysis of this passage in the novel's prose, see chapter 3, section 3.2.3.

Wisakedjak, another figure from Native American folklore, is also a character in *AG*. He takes the form of an old Native American man in the novel, and discusses Shadow's dreams of thunderbirds, explaining their meanings, whilst also refusing Wednesday's pledge for an alliance against the modern gods. In Gaiman's book, Wisakedjak is called "Whiskey Jack", an English corruption of the sound of the original name. While in *AG* he serves the role of a cryptic but gentle advisor to Shadow, in the folktales he is often depicted as a trickster figure related to the coyote and the raven (JENNES, 1997).

While not generally seen as a Native American figure, Johnny Appleseed was made into another character in *AG*. Johnny Appleseed is the popular nickname given by Americans to Johnny Chapman, "a historical figure (1774–1845) who established apple orchards in the early 19th century from his native Massachusetts westward through Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana" (BRUNVAND, 2006, p. 859). Stories spread in North America about this peculiar man, and his fame reached such heights that he is commonly seen as a folk hero:

"Although undoubtedly influenced by both the ersatz literary treatments and Johnny Appleseed's fakelore notoriety, stories about John Chapman do have a continuing role in some local oral traditions, where people can still point to remnants of original Chapman." (ibid)

His character in *AG* may be read as another representation of how the figures Gaiman names American Gods come into existence – the fact that "Johnny Appleseed" became such an important part of the American imaginary (regardless of it being based on a fakelore) works in similar fashion to religious faith: both legend and religion work through a sense of belief and survive due to the telling of stories. In that way, Johnny Appleseed is still a "living" idea in America (and, therefore, an *American God* in Gaiman's story).

1.2 GENRE IN THE NOVEL

Gaiman achieved fame by writing the *Sandman* graphic novel, and it is already apparent in these publications that his work is frequently hard to define within a certain genre. While *The Sandman* was generally referred to as a “graphic novel” or simply “comics” regarding its genre, which is a generalization of a whole medium, *AG* is no exception to this characteristic of Gaiman’s stories: the book is commonly referred to simply as being a fantasy novel -- which certainly seems adequate due to the narrative’s reliance on the presence of supernatural beings in America and the implication of godlike powers interacting with human reality -- but many aspects and sections in the novel indicate the use of different specific genres, a trait that generates a shift in the narrative voice, the overall style of the writing and tone of the story.

According to Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, the words in a novel must take into account (and inherently, as a medium comprised of language, will *have* to make use of) the many voices of social stratification - which implicate different types of speech - as well as attempt to discursively combine past texts (utterances, genres, even languages) in a dialogic manner (2014, p. 100). In *AG*, this principle can be frequently observed, as the style and speech constantly change during scenes and whenever the story uses Mr. Ibis’ voice to convey more on the story.

It’s no wonder that the novel is said to contain elements of “horror” literature. Attentive readers will notice a distinct change in the language of the story when the prose shifts into the genre of a horror narrative:

“There was a whispering noise that began then to run through the hall, a low sussurrus that caused Shadow, in his dream, to experience a chilling and inexplicable fear. An all-engulfing panic took him, there in the hall of the gods whose very existence had been forgotten—octopus-faced gods and gods who were only mummified hands or falling rocks or forest fires...” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 59)

The paragraph above, which takes place during one of the novel’s many dream sequences, showcases a brooding, tense account of the effects that inexplicable events and the sight of eldritch creatures cause in Shadow. The style is very alike the narrative of H. P. Lovecraft – a writer to whom Gaiman has paid tribute in the short-story “Shoggoth’s Old Peculiar” – and Guy de Maupassant, French writer who is well-known for his horror

stories. One may compare Gaiman's paragraph above with the following excerpt from Maupassant's 1881 short-story "On the river" and realize that, regardless of the change in the narrator's perspective, the genre and writing style are very similar: "This stupid, inexplicable fear increased, and became terror. I remained motionless, my eyes staring, my ears on the stretch with expectation. Of what? I did not know, but it must be something terrible" (MAUPASSANT, 1881).

It must be noted that literary genres are generally perceived as architexts – that is, according to Genette, "the entire set of general or transcendent categories – types of discourse, modes of enunciation, literary genres – from which emerges each singular text" (1997, p. 1). Thus, genres are categorizations of certain texts that "abide" to predetermined standards – horror narratives are built on human tension and fear and rely on suspenseful and obscure writing in order to convey this discernment to the reader, whilst fantasy has the supernatural or magic as the main focus of the narrative. Gaiman's novel certainly contains aspects of all those genres, but it shifts seamlessly from horror to fantasy and other literary categorizations.

As it was already mentioned, *AG* is a novel that is deeply concerned with the concept of America, the author's current country of residence. Gaiman has described the country as "one huge road novel", a place in which one should "get into a car and [...] go places" (GAIMAN, 2009, p. 331). This fascination with American that remounts to the writing of *The Sandman*, is reflected in *AG*'s exploration of the geography of the United States via the travels that abound in the novel. As such, *AG* is often described as a "road novel", a genre which was made popular by beat writers such as Jack Kerouac and the novel *On the Road*. Likewise, US TV series also explored narratives which had road-trips as a central aspect of the plot, as "the spirits of Tod Stiles and Buzz Murdock of *Route 66* [a famous American TV show from the 60's] fame accompany Gaiman's hero" (WAGNER, GOLDEN & BISSETTE, *ibid*).

To subscribe to a certain determined literary genre never occurred to Gaiman during the writing of *AG*, as he asserted that he simply devised to "write about myths" and "write about America as a mythic place" (GAIMAN, 2011, p. 540). In fact, most of Gaiman's stories seem hard to fit within a single genre. Arguably, the same can be said about most writers as every text will inadvertently reuse narrative styles and tones which are commonly associated with a literary genre, but Gaiman's work usually makes that

aspect of his narratives quite evident to the reader – to such a degree that the author has been included in an appendix of the 2014 book *The Reader's Advisory Guide to Genre Blends* as a prime example of a contemporary writer who blends various literary genres within the same literary work (MCARDLE, 2014). Not only that, but one may consider the “road narrative” genre itself as a literary genre which stems from earlier ones, as Meredyth L. Bird explains: “The road narrative is a combination of earlier genres, such as the travelogue and picaresque, that has evolved into a highly popular form of literature in America” (2008, p. 1).

Therefore, in its constant refusal of a central categorization regarding its genre, *AG* stands as a narrative which is built upon what Lowell Edmunds has referred to as “quotation” or simply “intertexts”. According to Edmunds, quotations are “part of another text in such a way [...] that its status as a quotation and its source may be discernible” and may “indicate a topos- or genre- affiliation, too, and even ‘weakly lexicalized’ relations between texts and genres or topoi” (2001, p. 134). That is to say: *AG* places various figures from folklore and several aspects from different genres – the framing of the story as a road novel and the many times Shadow travels in the U.S.; as well as the horror narrative during scenes in the novel, especially in the instances when Shadow’s dead wife appears as a walking corpse in the narrative – and in doing so, it highlights one of the novel’s main strengths: that its text reaches the reader while unabashedly pointing that the familiarity one may experience during a reading of *AG* occurs due to the vast plenitude of relations the language of the novel establishes with other texts - such as genres, myths and even some exact “hypotexts” from other works of fiction. Due to that characteristic, the novel is in a way capable of transcending its own boundaries as a text (and as an architext).

In *AG*, the supernatural aspect of the gods is often contrasted with long sections where realism seems to take over the narrative. As a way to “read” America *mythically*, the novel focalizes a world with no major changes from the perception of reality, but where there is a *hidden* (one might say forgotten or ignored) reality or plane of existence where supernatural forces and powerful entities interact and generate minor changes to the “real world”. In that way, the world depicted in *AG* establishes a parallel to religious belief, although it makes use of ancient pagan legends and figures to demonstrate the workings of faith – and how its power over humanity is perceived.

If one examines genre from a reception point-of-view, one might conclude that the concept is closely related to reader expectations regarding the text, and how those expectations will affect the way the text is recognized. Thus, upon reading a text, the reader constructs a “strategic intertextually determined ‘horizon of expectations’ [which] thoroughly influences [the reader’s] common understanding of literary text” (GEEST & GORP, 1999, p. 42), and the same procedure takes place when one first reads Gaiman’s novel: *AG* clearly “borrows” from other recognizable genres, but readers of Gaiman’s *The Sandman* will immediately be reminded of the authors’ trademark stylizations and appropriations of mythological figures in his works, thus recognizing the novel as another “melting pot” in which characters from various other texts are reinvented and transformed in accordance with the writer’s ideas. For that reason, the reader’s reception of the novel tends to produce a reading in which “the overall effect is one of reference and strategic borrowing” (COLLINS, 2008) more than that of a supposed perspective of “imitation or facsimile” (ibid) in the author’s narrative.

Rationalizing the issues of genre in *AG* demands that one takes into account the fact that one of the novel’s most important and fundamental themes is that of movement - which relates to the road narrative - and the crossing of boundaries - between the human world and the world of the gods, between *AG* as a contemporary work of fiction which establishes connections to other texts. The exploration of those aspects in the novel is aided by Gaiman’s use of fantasy blended with realism, which results in a narrative “in motion”, where tension is built through movement and uncertainty

The story of *AG* takes place in the post-NAFTA era in the United States and the narrative style of the novel exposes the anxieties of that period in time. In the book’s exploration of America and Americana, there is a lingering sense of tension and dread for what is to come, as one may interpret the many references to a coming storm in the narrative and the book cover itself – a paratext which had an essential role in the writing of the story – as clear indications of imminent violence and war. As such, “Gaiman’s fantasy thus provides a more visceral, though less overt critique of the contemporary scene, while also maintaining a pervading spirit of ambiguity and vague menace” (TALLY, 2014, p. 3) which leads to a construction of “America” as not only a mythical place, but also as a “bad land for gods” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 538).

1.3 AMERICA: MISDIRECTION AND DYSTOPIA

Although it abounds with fantastical imagery deriving from folklore, *AG* may also be read as a phantasmatic portrait resulting from an outsider's perspective (a "Shadow") of America and the many constitutive ideas upon which the collective subconscious concept of United States of America is constructed as a mythical space. As Mr. Ibis explains to Shadow at one point in the narrative, "this country has been Grand Central for ten thousand years or more" (ibid, p. 196), due to the many peoples that have travelled to and from the country since ancient times and the beliefs they brought with them. America is generally perceived as the most important countries in the Western world mainly due to its media exposure and political strength, and *AG*, to that effect, translates this key position of the nation in the international setting by exposing the international (at least from a modern standpoint) forces that went into the construction of the current concept of America worldwide.

Therefore, this all-encompassing stage upon which humans and mythological figures from diverse origins meet stands as a place of movement: a busy railroad station where travelers pass and meet before resuming their journeys, a trade hub for knowledge and legends as well as commerce. It is no wonder that *AG*'s bulk is spent on the road, narrating Shadow's journey from metropolis to small towns and roadside attractions: America is written as a place where tradition gives way to movement and opportunity while simultaneously persisting in an attempt to survive where there is a constant need for renewal and reinvention.

Gaiman's experience as an Englishman who chose to live in and write about the USA clearly influenced the themes of *AG*. As the author stated in an interview, "England has history; Americans have geography" (GAIMAN, 2014, p. 225), so the need to travel - and the fact that it is a country which is commonly thought of as being mostly inhabited by immigrants - plays an important role in *AG* and its reliance on transgressivity as "an essential constitutive feature of America" (TALLY, 2014, p. 8). However, the reality of America does not differ immensely to that of the author's homeland, since, although the United States is a large country in territory, it is still marked by borders and divisions in its territory - and the story in the novel is clear to point out that its main characters are

trespassers, breaking state borders as well as the law (in some events) and even the boundaries of human capacities due to their god-like nature.

The very first chapter of the novel begins with Shadow serving time in prison for aggravated assault and battery; the fact that the main character is already behind bars before the start of the narrative immediately transports the story to a space outside the realm of “regular” society: Shadow is locked in a cell for transgressing the norms of coexistence according to the country’s law. As Robert Tally suggests, in the plot of *AG*, “the commonplace definition of transgression is established as a theme even before Shadow’s peripatetic movements begin” (p. 8). Shadow is released a couple of days early from serving three years, half of his intended sentence (due to good behavior), after notice is given to the warden that Shadow’s wife has died. Once the reader and the protagonist learn about the exact events of her death, another transgression is made clear: Laura, Shadow’s wife, died in car accident while performing sexual acts with Shadow’s best friend, Robbie. This sequence of events showcases what’s to come in the narrative, as “the “transgressions” begin to pile up in the novel” (ibid).

Thus, Shadow’s journey is brought to an early start due to a transgression that takes place in the world out of prison – Laura’s affair with his best friend – which, by its turn, brings about an instant break of boundaries in the narrative focalizing Shadow, as he leaves jail – a place that is presented in the prose of the book as a “non-space”, a zone that is detached from society and which the narrator does not bother to name or situate in any specific part of the United States’ geography – and ventures back into the outside world. Shadow’s name becomes even more relevant once he is out of prison, as now his wife and his best friend are dead and he cannot come back to the life he expected to have once he was released. Instead, he meets shady figures with strange names and motivations who progressively guide him further and further away from the idea of “common” human existence and societal norms. In that way, his future wandering around the country turns him into a transformed version of the literary figure of the *flâneur*: that is, Shadow is an outsider that is constantly in movement all throughout the novel’s setting (America) and made aware of the insider-knowledge on the workings of the country.

However removed from society and distant from “the life of America” the time the reader spends with Shadow in prison may be, it does not lack in anxiousness and fear of what is to come. In the days before his release, the protagonist experiences the strange

emptiness of anticipation, but suspects that something is not right; to add to Shadow's concerns, his prison companion Sam Fetishier tells him that a "big storm's on the way" (GAIMAN, p. 10) and warns Shadow that he would be better off inside his cell than out on the outside. This feeling of unease, expressed since the beginning of the novel, persists as the narrative continues and amplifies as the games of illusion and trickery become more and more convoluted and reaching its peak right before the final confrontation between the old and new gods of America. It is the theme of conspiracy, of hidden forces with secret motivations acting from behind the drapes that drives the plot of *AG*, and even that aspect of America cannot be completely destroyed even after the complex "confidence game" of Wednesday and Loki unfolds and is thoroughly explained in the end of the novel.

The ever-present suspense and tension in the prose of *AG* thus derives from an element other than the imminent outbreak of war; instead of acting as a mere ominous atmosphere that announces the preparations for violence, the uneasiness of *AG*'s text relies heavily on aspects of *suspicion* and, more importantly, what may be called *misdirection*. Throughout the narrative, there are recurrent references to coin tricks and illusions. Shadow attempts to learn coin tricks during his time behind bars as a distraction, something to pass the time. This motif in the novel relates analogically to the narrative itself - Wednesday and Low Key Lyesmith are deceiving all of the gods, distracting them from their main goal: to feed on the violence of war, using the "death" of the gods in the battlefield as sacrifices to Odin and the resulting chaos as a tribute to Loki. However, the narrative of war itself also works as a distraction, clouding another story and construction in the book: that the America which serves as the novel's setting is shown as a dystopian space where a sinister uncertainty reigns:

"In American Gods, the state of transgressivity within the United States is a dialectical reversal of the utopian prospects of transgressive movements across porous national and social boundaries. With its tenebrous hero Shadow winding his way around the continental United States on his odyssey to find himself, the novel's mood is anxious and foreboding, consistent with Peter Fitting's view that the dystopian mood is 'a sense of a threatened near future' [...], but without the science-fiction projection of a future tense at all" (TALLY, 2014, p. 7).

Thus, Gaiman's portrait of late 90's America as a dystopian society is allegorically reflected in the movements of Shadow across the country and on the uncertain future of the weakened old gods. In that, one may recognize the suggestion – which permeates the narrative – that America as a utopia for the “freedom” of people and the “land of opportunity” is as much a myth as any of the *American Gods* that is featured in the narrative. Instead, America is a land of ups and downs, of constants, unstoppable movement and transgression, where fluctuations occur in all areas, including economy and politics as well the country's stances on values such as peace, freedom and equality.

One clear example of the “American utopia” is the town of Lakeside in the novel. The place is a representation of the idealistic view of the country: a rural town in Wisconsin inhabited by friendly and hardworking people that has somehow survived the economic turmoil and continues to prosper in its own right in a zone where all other small communities are faced with hardship. Shadow, under the orders of Wednesday, moves to Lakeside with a fake ID and passes as “Mike Ainsel”, getting to meet the townsfolk and settling in his new apartment in the cold city where he's supposed to wait for Wednesday to contact him.

The first character Shadow meets in Lakeside is called Hinzemann, a short man who seems to be loveable and active in the community. During his stay in the town, Shadow learns that there is one bad side to the otherwise welcoming Lakeside: each year, a child goes missing, but the inhabitants have no idea of the reason and generally suspect it occurs due to wishes of leaving the countryside and traveling to the big city. In the cold post-Christmas winter, the town also has a tradition of leaving a “klunker” – an old, broken down car – in the middle of a frozen pond, and they sell raffles where each person must try and guess the date in which the cold will subside, the ice will melt and the car will sink. Shadow returns to Lakeside near the end of the narrative and solves the mystery: as it turns out, Hinzemann was an Americanized version of a “kobold”, a folk creature from Germany who arrived with immigrants to the USA long ago. The town's harmony and wealth were direct results of the “magic” which Hinzemann used to create this utopian reality, but he took a price for his work – he sacrificed children to keep the town in a constant ideal state, hiding the bodies in the trunk of the “klunker”. Shadow solves the mystery manages to retrieve the most recent missing girl's corpse from the trunk of the car as it sinks. He is rescued by Hinzemann, who ends up confessing all that he has done since

before the town had a name. A police officer shows up, also listens to the story and ends up shooting Hinzemann after the old man throws a hot poker at him.

The death of Hinzemann disturbs the reality of the city. Now that the old creature that kept the town “safe” through magic is dead, Lakeside will return to the “bad place” that is America. As Tally states, “Lakeside will re-enter history, re-enter the late-twentieth-century’s post-NAFTA world of economic uncertainty and dystopia” (p. 15-16). The character’s death can also be read as another sign of the idealization of America since the country was conceived on paper and how it is based on myth and some traditions and values which are confronted by current reality. Another clear aspect of Gaiman’s masterful grasp of the importance of stories and legends in the creation of the collective imaginary is showcased in the intertextual connection that the tales Hinzemann tells Shadow in the narrative of *AG* have with the extremely exaggerated stories of Baron Munchausen, another German character from literature (despite being based on a real person)³.

AG relies heavily on the theme of deception and distraction. Hinzemann, Low Key and Wednesday assume the role of trickster figures that constantly deceive others and hide their intentions and actions; and Shadow’s coin tricks are constantly alluded to in the novel and compared to the god’s “magic”. However, there is another manuscript which is inserted into the text – the narrator explicitly mentions that Shadow reads the book in prison - that has an intertextual relation not only to the theme of traveling in *AG*, but also that of lies and deception: Herodotus’s *Histories*.

Herodotus’s tome details various cultures, historical facts from ancient times and places from Western Asia, Northern Africa and Greece. This text is vastly considered to be one of the most important texts in the Western world, not only being regarded as the founding work of History but also of vital importance to the development of the travelogue as a literary genre. Thus, the reading of *AG* as a “road novel” is not something that relies solely on the reader’s interpretation of the narrative, but is highlighted in the fact that one of the first written texts known to be based on travels is part of the novel’s story.

In his *Histories*, Herodotus compiles various folktales from different regions to which he travelled, and his recounting of these many fantastic stories in his manuscript coupled with the critiques on the accuracy and purpose of his work made by ancient

³ The third chapter of this work will sufficiently detail the relation between the two characters in depth.

historians who succeeded him caused critics to brand Herodotus as “the father of lies” (LATEINER, 2004, p. xv). As Evans states on this nickname for Herodotus, “the Renaissance rediscovered him with delight. But at the same time he was treated as a story-teller who disregarded truth and aimed rather to give his reader pleasure”⁴ (1968, p. 12). The possibility of fictitious accounts being part of *Histories* would thus make a liar out of Herodotus for if he was the most important historian in the West, he should not write on things that did not reflect reality.

Analogically, the historical debates and issues historians have with *Histories* are another subtext in Gaiman’s novel. *AG* constantly challenges the notion of what is myth (and therefore a lie) and what is real (and therefore truth). The novel also does not limit itself in implicitly debating this topic only in the sense of fantasy against realism as literary genres – two genres which are *blended* into the narrative of the novel and that reinforce its constant tension in the dystopia that is America⁵ – but also in the sense of frankness versus treachery, as conspiracies abound in the narrative and honest people (and gods) unknowingly act as agents of chaos and violence through misleading ways.

The plot of *AG* thus evidently insinuates that in the dystopian place that is late 90’s America, deception is a tool that is used in order to obtain *control* over people’s actions and opinions. The old gods as well as the new ones – the gods of technology and modern capitalism – are both manipulated and used as pawns, but the con men whose complicated scheme aimed to start a war never achieve their goal, and the announced climax of the story is discarded in lieu of the exposition of the big lie and the withdrawal from the battlefield. Therefore, the conclusion of Wednesday’s plans does not result in victory or defeat for any side and neither in the violent chaos that the American Odin and his son Loki wished for. Instead, the “inconclusive or open-ended ending allows for mere continuation or radical changes with no discernible clue, beyond Shadow’s own personal revelations, of the new America about to emerge in the next millennium” (TALLY, 2014, p. 18). Shadow returns to Lakeside, solves the mystery which results in the death of Hinzemann, and decides to wander, leaving America for the time being and traveling to Europe, where he meets another manifestation of Odin in Iceland (GAIMAN, p. 558). In

⁴ Evans writes that Francesco Petrarca was the first one to discuss Cicerus’ words on Herodotus as “the father of History” and to point out the contradiction of the title if there truly are fabrications in *Histories*.

⁵ For further elaboration on how fantasy and realism in Gaiman’s prose contributes to the aspect of dystopia in *American Gods*, see Tally (2014) p. 3.

line with the novel's theme of transgressivity, Shadow crosses the border of America, but he cannot escape the power of myth and legend – just as he cannot escape himself, a being who is partially myth in identify, as Baldr, the American Odin's son. The novel's protagonist thus stands as someone who inhabits a world in-between, someone who has been partially shaped by myth but nonetheless interacts with the society that adapts and shapes those myths.

2 YANKEE RAGNAROK

AG's climatic culmination occurs when Shadow finally reaches the battlefield in which the war between the gods will take place. The place is a parking lot in the “real” world, but Shadow goes “backstage” – an alternative reality where the mythical forces that inhabit America can be clearly seen, where all of the entities that cannot be perceived by humans interact and exert their powers – and sees that two armies face each other, just after the start of the battle. The two pantheons, the Old Gods and the New Gods, believe they have reason to go to war, as the ancient entities want to battle for survival and the modern figures feel the need to fight in order to prove their existence (p. 538).

Shadow arrives at the scene just after holding the vigil for Wednesday's death – as part of their initial agreement when Shadow accepts Wednesday's job offer. The New Gods, under the guise of “Mr. World”, had killed Wednesday and broadcasted his death to the Old Gods, which finally fuels their anger and motivation for the final battle. Before the battle begins, Shadow is tied to the American “World Tree” (a clear Americanized version of the Yggdrasil from the Norse myths) and left there, next to Wednesday's body, as a sort of sacrifice to honor the death of the god. During this process, Shadow dies in the tree, visits the world of the dead – where he meets once more Mr. Jacquel and Mr. Ibis, although now they present themselves under their “real” names, Anubis and Thoth - and learns a great deal about his identity and about Wednesday's and Low-key's schemes,

including that Mr. World did not really exist - this entity had always been Low-key disguised as a New God. He also learns that Wednesday was his father, and that he had been deceived from the beginning in order to serve as a sacrifice in the vigil for his father's death. Luckily for Shadow, Easter, a female figure from legend whom Shadow meets earlier in the narrative, is guided by Horus toward the World Tree and manages to bring him back to life. Shadow, Wednesday's sacrificed son, heads to the battleground with the knowledge he acquired in order to inform the gods that they were pawns in a greater scheme.

The journey of Gaiman's hero is one which aims to prevent conflict and death, not only with the intent of saving lives, but also of making up for the confidence game which Shadow had helped Wednesday and Loki pull off. He finally realizes that he was the "third man" in Wednesday's complex "con-men" trick, but does not resign himself to his role of victim in the overall scheme and instead seeks to expose the lies to the deceived gods.

The fact that Wednesday actually chose to "die" in order to fool the other gods and become more powerful may be seen as ironic, as gods are generally perceived as superior to humans due to the fact that they cannot die, but one needs to be reminded that not only the gods in the narrative live among humans and actually interact with the human world – thus reinforcing the "fantasy" aspect of Gaiman's novel – but also that the gods in Norse Mythology were not generally perceived as immortal beings due to the belief in Ragnarok – the twilight of the gods, a war that marked the end of Odin's rule as the All-father of the gods, where the Scandinavian Aesir gods would battle the invading Jotuns, giant creatures from another realm, as well as Loki and his sons: the wolf Fenrir and the Midgard sea-serpent Jörmungandr (BELLOWS, 1923, p. 22-24).

This particular aspect of the Norse gods, which is presented in the Eddas, clearly marks them as closer to the human condition of mortality than most deities from other myths and folklores (LINDOW, 2001, p. 199). The fact that Ragnarok was taken as a prophecy, a future event that was foretold in the myths, rendered the Scandinavian gods almost human-like in the Nordic belief, as even divine powers were seen as ephemeral, and gods were described in the myths as entities that actively aged with time, having to feed on Idun's apples in order to become young again, according to the Prose Edda (ibid).

In this way, Gaiman's conception of the Americanized Norse Gods subscribes to this punctual factor in the earliest mythic texts regarding the gods of the ancient Vikings. Although the setting surely changes in the novel (the gods are *displaced*) in comparison to the Eddas, the space that mythical figures inhabit in Gaiman's "fantastical" America has a distinct parallel in this peculiar trait.

The theme of death (and rebirth) and myth in *AG* and how one concept overlaps the other (the gods fight for existence, for survival) may be read as commentary on the very definition of myth. According to Barthes, "myth is a type of speech", "a system of communication [...], a message" (p. 107). As such, myth is built through and by language, and comprises form, feeding on the semiological organization of the concepts of sign, signifier and signified in language: instead, myths are built in a second level language system which refers to the first [semiological] language system – a kind of metalanguage. The position of the signifier in the first language system is replaced by a sign in the mythic system. Thus, myth unites the "materials" which it absorbs as mere language: myth is comprised of a sum of signs. This lack of solidity to the concept of myth, displacing the system of the sum between signifier and signified as sign and thus diminishing the importance of the "object" to its conceit, causes myth itself to be as fluid as human language, to be ephemeral and ever-changing in its existence. Therefore, myth itself depends on language, is bound to form and is subject to "death", as "one can conceive of very ancient myths, but there are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical language" (p. 108).

One possible reading of *AG* is that the novel is a myth in itself: that is, the organization of the mythic system proposed by Barthes states that "myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us" (p. 115). Gaiman's novel plays with mythic forms and meanings, presenting the linguistic elements that comprise the sign but displacing them in order to deviate from our perceived notions. *AG*'s metalanguage discusses what myths are made of, how they come to be and how they are subject to change and death, and it does so *allegorically* by blending mythical language (through form) with Gaiman's fantasy narrative and his peculiar construction of a fictional America.

Narratively, the figures from myth and folklore in Gaiman's text are given personalities, motivation and thoughts; and through that process, the concept of myth as

proposed by Barthes seeks to occupy a “physical space” – that is, it attempts to become or to encapsulate an “object” within its formation. Myth ceases to be just utterance, and reverts to the classic linguistic system of signifier, signified and sign as the narrative shapes them into a new formulation, a displaced (con)version of the message. The theme of awareness of their condition as mythical figures in Gaiman’s universe only reinforces this drive for survival – and, in Wednesday’s and Low-key’s case, the drive for violence. The “mythic” meaning thus appears to be clearly presented in the prose of the novel, but in fact it is surrounded by the outlying “second language” of the mythic system, which discusses the language-object of the mythic figures – and it does so by juxtaposing the reader’s notions of *America* and the preconceptions on legends and ancient deities.

This newly embedded drive for the “objectification” of myth in *AG* acts as the reason behind the final conflict between the old gods and the new: the divine figures are not only constituted of belief, but also of their own ability of perceiving themselves and their form (their “existence”). As such, the narrative leads Shadow towards a “storm” right from the beginning, a symbol of turbulence and violence which finally culminates in the scene of the war in the “backstage” of Rock City, the American battlefield for the Yankee Ragnarok that is about to take place.

Shadow manages to stop the ongoing war by informing the gods in battle that they have all been deceived, and that the conflict between them had been brewed in order to serve as a mere war for Wednesday to feed on the battle-slain and become more powerful through the sacrificial death of the American Gods. He also reveals that Low-key pretended to be one of the new gods (Mr. World) in order to contribute to the resulting chaos, thus fulfilling his duty as the trickster god of chaos. When the gods ask who he is, Shadow responds that he is Wednesday’s son, and through that validation the entities slowly evacuate the battlefield, returning to their lives in America, where they will attempt to make the best they can in order to survive in the modern world.

As such, the war in *AG* is mostly averted, since Shadow manages to put a stop to the confrontation. The mythic reaffirmation which is sought by the deities in the novel is deterred by an intertextual connection with the main focalized pantheon of the narrative: the conflict was set into motion through Loki’s ability in deception and with the intent of strengthening Odin’s power as a war god. This parallel between the ancient functions of the gods and their roles in the plot of Gaiman’s novel is a central aspect in *AG*’s

commentary of myth and displacement, as the text derives on mythic language and manages to evenly transform as well as maintain critical characteristics of ancient material.

Tally argues that “modern popular fiction can actually bring the function of myth into the modern times” (2014, p. 92), as Gaiman’s novel serves the purposes defined by Campbell of containing within the text a cosmological, a sociological and a mystical function. The “modern myth” that is *AG* would therefore subscribe to Campbell’s formulation of the hero myth, a product which ultimately recreates “an emotional and spiritual experience similar to what our ancestors found in old mythologies” (ibid, p. 93). This cultural analysis, however, is largely based on an attempt to apply perceptions on the novel toward a modern sociological function for the book. Gaiman’s novel is certainly set into a new cosmology, a modern reimagining of ancient myths in America, but it does not seem to attempt nor has the aspiration to be an explanation for life and death or as a way to understand how the current world functions (except, of course, if one applies it only to certain aspects of contemporary events through a metaphorical point of view). *AG* is a novel, perhaps a genre-defying novel, which gathers elements from various folklore and places them in a new, foreign setting – late 90’s America – whilst attempting to map the mythological landscape of this space in a journey of (self-)discovery where misdirection and deception play a major part in the narrative.

However, the novel does succeed in approaching and expanding upon the theme of war through allegory. America is a current superpower, possessing immense influence on economy and in conflicts on a global scale. As such, *AG*’s setting presents, in its subtext, a country where war is exploited as a profitable industry, and the plot delves in similar notions through means (one may argue) largely employed by American politics and American media as a way of justifying war: misdirection and deception. Although the actors change, the setting of the story seems amazingly adequate to support this reading of the novel’s plot, and, when one traces a parallel to ancient history, the Viking gods served a similar function: at the gates of Valhalla an eternal feast awaited those who were battle-slain. War, pillaging and raiding other territories are synonymous with the Viking invasions in Europe, and the belief in the Norse gods must have certainly strengthened the resolve of this ancient people and fueled their hunger for conflict).

2.1 MYTHOLOGICAL PROJECTION AND ALLEGORIES

In the paragraphs above, one may perceive the many times that *AG* was described as allegoric in one way or another. As such, the allegorical aspects of the novel will now be explored and studied, as the term “allegory” has been subject to large debates on whether it is a “valid” art form. Gaiman’s prose is immersed in textual connections to other works of art – at least this is the whole hypothesis upon which this examination is taking place -, and as such, allegory is adamant for the story to be told.

To presuppose that the reader of *AG* might read the novel without ever being able to perceive the allegory in the text is an illogical thought, since, as Northrop Frye asserts, allegorical works usually indicate the direction of their own commentary (1969, p. 54). As such, not only *AG* offers the reader the clear names of the mythic aspects Gaiman’s writing is reorganizing and expanding upon, which already guides the readers toward some of these relations, but also offers commentary itself, as the various characters of the book often allude to the usual “popular” American perception of the very legends from which they originated. Therefore, the very text as presented in the novel is read (or subject to reevaluation, as soon as the “other text” is mentioned or shown) under through the lens of another text, which marks Gaiman’s prose quite rich and pulsating allegorical aspect. As Craig Owens explains:

“In allegorical structure, then, one text is read through another, however fragmentary, intermittent, or chaotic their relationship may be; the paradigm for the allegorical work is thus the palimpsest.” (OWENS, 1980a, p. 69).

Allegory is thusly one of the most important characteristics not only of *American Gods*, but of Gaiman’s whole catalogue, as it is embedded in his writing style and in the very topics he chooses as his book’s settings and themes. For what reason, then, is allegory often missing in the many works that analyze Gaiman’s literature?

Craig Owens has explained that “allegory” has been subject to critical suppression in modern art, as it was deemed to be linked with historicism and often contrasted with realism and modernism. This attitude in fact was so strong that even some artists whose

works are powerfully allegorical stated their disgust for allegory in art (such as Borges). For that reason, terms like “parable” or “fable” were employed for allegorical works, as calling any work of art allegorical would be reducing it to derivative and preoccupied only with the past, as opposed to the present. It was seen as an effort to “rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear” (ibid, p. 68), and little else.

However, this well-spread notion failed to recognize allegory for its supplementary quality: it not only appropriates from a pre-existing text, but it also adds another meaning to the text. It is the very fact that a new view, a new approach, is being applied to something that was once recognizable and clearly understood that marks allegory as a phenomenon that establishes a link to the past whilst also dealing with the present and the renewal of ideas, the current path to progress that does not discard tradition or past progress.

Through those means – for allegory is “an attitude as well as a technique, a perception as well as a procedure” (ibid) – Gaiman achieves his task of dealing with “forgotten” gods in a new cultural setting. He takes figures and scenes from early mythic texts and “confiscates” them, places them in the mixture that is his prose and adds changes to the content that he chose to work with. The resulting text is a story retold, that is read and seen as recognizable and that, at the same time, is perceived as something that stands out as completely new and strange to the reader.

The re-signification that takes place during allegory is very similar to that of parody as theorized by Bakhtin, but since it also contains within itself appropriation and can only exist by a process that demands a connection between texts (an intertextual process), allegory is also a method of reconfiguration, if not destruction and reconstruction, of any authoritative claim to meaning that an earlier text might have (ibid, p 69). It detaches images from their correspondent ideas and links them to new ones.

Through this technique, for instance, we see Gaiman’s Odin (Mr. Wednesday) use trickery and lies in order to establish dominance and control over the other deities. Since this trait is not usually taken as Odin’s, it replaces or adds to the god’s well-known aspects, such as knowledge, strength, power and death. Wednesday’s allegiance to Low-key is another aspect that defies the original telling of the Aesir’s story: according to the Eddas, Odin condemns Loki for his trickery - that leads to Baldr’s death -, and confronts the

trickster's sons in Ragnarok, meeting his doom when he is consumed by Loki's son Fenrir, a giant wolf. The new significance that Gaiman's narrative offers to the reader creates a new image – the American Odin – which does not depend solely on the “classic” traits associated with the Norse All-father divine figure.

Mister Wednesday is Odin transformed into the American trope of the con-man, only he has remnants in his personality of the early Scandinavian depiction of the Viking god as well as many characteristics which one associates to deceitful people and how they survive due to their lies and manipulations. The resulting amalgamation is a gangster whose heists and schemes go undetected due to, in part, his magical, god-like powers of enchantments and charming. He is perceived by most as a kind old man, a sort of father figure, but in truth he is a manipulating, sarcastic and mysterious participant in a plot – of his and his son's own devise - to gain great strength from the death of many others.

Ironically then, the American Odin joins Loki in attempting to murder Baldr – he sacrifices Baldr, and, by doing so, expects to be able to deceive all gods long enough for him to gain his strength through war and death. Instead of sentencing Loki to death for Baldr's death, Mister Wednesday sentences Baldr (Shadow) to death, sacrifices his own life at the hands of Loki, and hopes that this plot will prevent his fate: death in Ragnarok. However, his plan does not come to complete fruition and the outcome, in the end, is very similar to that of the Ragnarok as described in the Eddas: Odin dies, Loki dies, but Baldr is reborn and left to prosper in a new world.

Allegory is present in a variety of modern (and post-modern) works of art. The resurgence of allegory after the years of suppression led scholars such as Owens to analyze allegory in post-modern art. Although Owens examines art such as paintings, collages and photography to apply his views on allegory, the same can be applied to literature, as it constitutes art. *AG* is a narrative with many interruptions – analepsis, detours and narratives within the narrative are commonly found when one reads the book from start to finish. These disruptions in the sequence of the story do not “break” the narrative or make the events impossible to follow, but instead supplement the “main” storyline by adding context to it as well as descriptions and insights – in the case of Mr. Ibis' written pieces – regarding America as shown in the book. Therefore, this plurality of complementary texts within the narrative serve to offer many readings to the story, since the reader will be able to connect each section of text inside the book, thus inducing an allegorical nature to

Gaiman's narrative without the need for "external" texts (the most commonly perceived "intertextuality" in the novel). As Owens observes,

"Allegory concerns itself, then, with the projection-either spatial or temporal or both-of structure as sequence; the result, however, is not dynamic, but static, ritualistic, repetitive. It is thus the epitome of counter-narrative, for it arrests narrative in place, substituting a principle of syntagmatic disjunction for one of diegetic combination. In this way allegory superinduces a vertical or paradigmatic reading of correspondences upon a horizontal or syntagmatic chain of events." (OWENS, 1980a, p. 72).

When one reads *AG*, one is made aware of the configuration of the narrative, its structure: two books, each with many chapters. However, interspersed with the chapters narrating Shadow's journey, are tales of immigrants who came to America in different times. An example of an allegorical reading to Mister Wednesday's existence and eventual defeat in America is the account of the first Vikings to land in American soil, which narrates how the native people of America, as well as the land itself, managed to scare and ultimately eliminate its invaders (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 69). However, this particular interlude already announces the Norse god's dreadful fate in this new land: to be forgotten, to be left alone with no worshippers and diminished power, as the fragment ends with ominous lines concerning the Scandinavian gods in America after the first Viking settlement is killed: "They were there. They were waiting" (*ibid*).

AG is an allegoric text, since it is already read through the eyes of other texts, whether they be the mythic texts which are alluded to in the narrative or the book's many interludes, which supplement the central narrative of the novel. The motto "a storm is coming", which is repeated throughout the narrative in various different occasions, acts as a way to announce the approaching Twilight of the Gods, the culminating scene in the novel. Therefore, the Twilight of the Gods as described in the Eddas acts as one of the most important metaphors for the story in Gaiman's book, but the text in the book itself is comprised not only of this metaphor, but also metonymy - that is to say, the metaphor is merely included within the text, but the narrative tells a completely different story from the one that is described in the Eddas. As such, Gaiman's Yankee Ragnarok is his - and the reader's - own Ragnarok. Regardless of the content that might be seen as its metaphor, the

novel's text remains allegoric, as it blends many aesthetics and cannot simply fall under the category of "metonymy", which is generally associated with realism and prose, or "metaphor", which is usually associated to poetry and romanticism (OWENS, p. 72-73).

Adamant to Gaiman's novel is the issue of conflict between what constitutes faith ancient and modern. What in olden times constituted forms of worship has greatly changed, and America, as the most modern western superpower, is exemplary of the new procedures of "faith" in a capitalist, globalized world. The rebellion of the young against the old is a theme that is largely represented at the core of many European myths, therefore it is plain to see how Odin's slaying of the ancient creature Ymir in the Norse myth (STURLUSON, 2003, p. 11) is comparable to Zeus' rebellion against the Titans in Greek myth. Likewise, in *AG* this classic story from legend is retold allegorically: the new gods, the personifications of technology and modern capitalism have replaced the old gods from ancient myths. Thus, the conflict between the deities must occur – and that is precisely the reason why the Ragnarok in *AG* has such an important place in the narrative: it stands for the main allegorical point of the narrative whilst also allowing for severe deviation from the earlier texts, as the war is ultimately avoided and the complete and utter replacement of the old with the new gods never occurs in the book. Instead, each "pantheon" is left to their own devices, the old gods attempting to adapt to the contemporary world and the new gods fearful that society might rapidly overcome the need to worship them.

The very title of the book implicates the mythic connections the narrative formulates in America. The so-called "American Gods", however, are not those who inhabited the land before the arrival of European settlers. Although these mythic figures do appear in the narrative – such as Whiskey Jack and thunderbirds –, Gaiman's personification of the American land in the form of a mysterious buffalo-headed deity who appears periodically in Shadow's dream to guide him and offer presages regarding the coming battle. Yet the title does not seem to refer to this enigmatic figure: instead, it encapsulates all mythic entities that populate modern America, including the demi-god figure of Shadow himself, the novel's main focal point. For this reason, *AG* may be seen in parallel to scriptures detailing the origins of Gods and their genealogy – the most clear examples being the Eddas, since the relation between Norse myths and the novel's characters is obvious; but also other written documents pertaining ancient pantheons

possess a deep connection with Gaiman's post-modern mythos in *AG*, such as the Greek Theogony.

Therefore, Gaiman's prose in *AG* is building a new, expansive and all-encompassing pantheon of mythic deities from different cultures. "American" is an identity that is not completely defined, and still susceptible to changes. The way the novel seems devoted to expressing this thought repeatedly only reinforces the thesis that the narrative is deeply concerned with issues of identity as well as critical of the concept of complete distinctiveness determined by one's country. As Mister Wednesday says: "Nobody's American, [...] Not originally. That's my point." (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 105). It is at the very core of the patriot act of calling oneself American that one may see the marks the incompleteness in the idea of being "American". As Carroll asserts in his piece on the novel,

"This insight may come as a revelation to the reader who has bought into the fantasy quest tropes that Gaiman invokes at the beginning of the novel, only to undermine them in its conclusion, and it represents a fundamental assault on one of fantasy's central tenets: that identity is, indeed, coherent and definable." (CARROLL, 2012, p. 307).

And allegory, as Owens explains, is "consistently attracted to the fragmentary, the imperfect, the incomplete" (p. 70). It is a concept that has supposedly been born out of the fascination with ruin, as an attempt to preserve that which is dying or disappearing. For that reason, allegory is at the very epicenter of the plot of *AG*. It is a story of survival, of the will to preserve that which is in ruins and may be lost forever. Read through these lenses, the novel acts as a photograph of America and of how all the cultures that have congregated in this country managed to formulate the delicate and ever subject to change label of "American" to all things – Gods included.

Therefore, not only is the text in *American Gods* a sort of allegory, but it also discusses allegory in itself. The novel's metalanguage – although only present in its subtext – allows the reader to perceive how allegory works through the reading of an allegoric text that, in its many layers, debates the very existence (and persistency) or allegory in the current world.

In fact, *AG*'s genre as a literary work and the fact that it is so hard to define within only one style of narrative may be due to the book's allegorical text. The novel seamlessly switches between writing styles, with some verses interspersed with the prose text, as well as different tones in the narrative voice, emulating many types of fiction. This "collage" of literary languages generates a unique aesthetic to the book by disregarding the need for a coherent, simple and bounded aesthetic for the entirety of the novel. This aspect of Gaiman's work contributes to the "pictogrammatical nature of the allegorical work [, for in] allegory, the image is a hieroglyph; an allegory is a rebus-writing composed of concrete images" (ibid, p. 74).

The novel's overall composition thus reveals its many allegorical aspects. Its capacity of blending genres and aesthetics, utilizing different languages and voices in its text (via hybridization) and finally its cryptic yet understandable depiction of mythic figures clearly subscribes Gaiman's book to the allegorical field in contemporary literature. Even the figure of Shadow as the protagonist of the story, an entity whose identity is never thoroughly revealed in the narrative, as someone capable of traversing the barrier between American states and the world of the gods and men echoes the characteristic and qualities of allegory in Gaiman's literature, for "the allegorical work is synthetic; it crosses aesthetic boundaries. This confusion of genre, anticipated by Duchamp, reappears today in hybridization, in eclectic works which ostentatiously combine previously distinct art mediums" (ibid, p. 75).

When read from this angle, *AG* may even be seen as a work that aims to serve as a criticism to the simplistic labeling of ideas and people. American culture as depicted in the book rapidly attempts to formulate a complete, yet simplistic idea on foreign concepts. It is for that reason that figures such as Mad Sweeney are parody-like, encapsulating most characteristics that Americans link to all things Irish: drunken, violent, red-headed, loud and vivacious people. America is very quick to judge and make assertions on the personality of foreign people and on how decent are their cultures and traditions, and this American behavior is described at length in a novel that refuses to subscribe to a single genre, a single language, a single label. *AG* depicts a world – much like it did happen in the "real" world when the novel was released - that would not have been able to classify what kind of narrative *AG* presents to its reader.

Perhaps the most unique feature of America that Gaiman has made use of in order to build his new American “mythos” is the phenomena of roadside attractions that abound whilst one drives along the highways of rural America. These peculiar places, with all sorts of attractions to call the attention of bored and curious drivers, are very much American. They prey on drivers in the middle of long journeys as they pass desert roads with almost nothing to see, and offer museums of sorts that feature peculiar collections. The most famous of these roadside attractions is featured in the book: the House on the Rock. Gaiman’s mythic approach to the United States transforms these bizarre places that are “hidden” in American maps into temples for the forgotten deities that inhabit the country. The gods congregate in these places and use them as portals in order to meet and discuss their situation in the face of a rapidly evolving society that threatens to cause their collective extinction.

That being so, American roadside attractions take on the role of temples where thoughts and prayers are directed to forgotten entities. They also simulate the ancient custom of Oracles and Places of Power, since they are used by the American Gods as a way to hold conference, debate the issues they must confront and reassert their status as gods who exist due to human belief in them.

Also in line with what is commonly perceived as the American way of thinking is Shadow’s initial skepticism when Mister Wednesday approaches him. As Bossert asserts on this fact,

“He didn’t believe in gods when the novel started [...] and he was skeptical of the gods even when he met them. (Professor [Ted] Cohen, coincidentally, describes a “healthy skepticism” as a hallmark of American thinking). That skepticism turns out to be fairly useful when the gods turn out not to be what people think they should be.” (BOSSERT, 2012, p. 38).

America is usually not seen as the epicenter of mythic forces in the world. Instead, it is seen as the pinnacle of Western culture, the latest superpower. Gaiman therefore resolves to adapt the America he has chosen as the setting of his tale and reconstruct the country adding mythic and spiritual nuances to its conception. Gaiman’s exploration on how modern-day America came into existence and how all of these “forgotten” beliefs

persist to this day in a country mainly inhabited by immigrants is the cornerstone of the novel.

Perhaps the issue of deviation in Gaiman's big collage of myths in America is best summarized by what Owens comments on the subject of postmodernism and the postmodernist work:

“Postmodernism neither brackets nor suspends the referent but works instead to problematize the activity of reference. When the postmodernist work speaks of itself, it is no longer to proclaim its autonomy, its self-sufficiency, its transcendence; rather, it is to narrate its own contingency, insufficiency, lack of transcendence. It tells of a desire that must be perpetually frustrated, an ambition that must be perpetually deferred; as such, its deconstructive thrust is aimed not only against the contemporary myths that furnish its subject matter, but also against the symbolic, totalizing impulse which characterizes modernist art.” (OWENS, 1980b, p. 80).

As such, the abundance of references in Gaiman's novel challenges the very concept of referentiality, since the images and figures the text evokes are at the same time the classic symbol that spark in the minds of the readers as well as perverted version of these own symbols, which are transformed and “replaced” by the symbols that are overwritten through the book's narrative. For one may describe the character of Mister Wednesday in the book the following way: Odin is Odin and, at the same time, is not Odin at all. When Shadow meets Odin in Iceland, in the Postscript of the novel, is that the “true” symbol of Odin, the first image that springs to mind when the readers think of Odin? Or is it simply another corruption of the figure?

AG does not offer a clear explanation of this issue to the reader. In fact, even when one's identity is made clear in the novel's universe, the reader still does not know the level of deviation which that character will be subject to. Shadow is Baldr, one of Odin's many sons and god of light, beauty and purity, but he is a completely different character to the one described in the Eddas. In fact the narrator's somewhat brief description of him in *AG* stands for almost the complete opposite to the way this god is generally perceived in the Norse myths with regards to his complexion and appearance.

The novel's text is cryptic at times, which accounts for the many figures and cultures it deals with. Given the fact that the narrator clearly does not wish to merely describe and lecture on the many myths and legendary entities that act as characters and forces within the story, one could argue that *AG* is a book that begs the reader to perform complementary readings other than the novel in order to fully understand the book's references. In this way, Gaiman's novel acknowledges that it cannot fully encompass all the mythic subject matter and symbolism that should be present in the fictional phantasmatic America that is uncovered in the narrative. In fact, there is one mysterious god that is referenced in many scenes throughout the story and is never given a name. This deity is usually called the nameless god or the unnamed god by readers of the book, and there are many theories on its true identity – one of which offering the explanation that the figure would account for all gods from other cultures that were not sufficiently depicted in the vast pantheon that exists within Gaiman's narrative.

However, it seems to me that the unnamed god's presence in the story is a bit simpler than that: it stands as a pictogram of the illegibility of allegory and the readability of symbols. For the intertextual connections that abound in Gaiman's text, its high referentiality and allegorical aspect leave the reader in a constant state of suspense, particularly in *AG*, where every identity must be questioned, where things are not what they seem and where the theme of misdirection and transgression permeates the whole of the narrative. It has been said, and it is very unlikely that one will confront this assertion, that Gaiman's novel is extremely intertextual, but the way intertextuality is inserted and functions within his writing is also varied, to the point where some connections are clearly alluded to whilst others are present in the text, discernible and even highlighted but never properly explained or given the appropriate "direction" which indicates their origin or purpose.

It is in those cases where the connection is obscured from the reader, where Gaiman's appropriation has travelled the full course, where the image is given an allegorical meaning that fully replaces the antecedent one, that the text in *AG* allows the reader to deeply examine its significance and function in the narrative. For, although the novel is built with many interruptions in the form of interludes, many genres and voices in the form of the suggestion of different narrators and verses inserted into the prose narrative, it is consistently constructed with intertextual nuances and allegorical types.

Therefore, it is not only the clearly identifiable mythical projections in Gaiman's tale, but also the use of many metaphorical "palimpsests", where texts are overwritten and echo from the novel's prose, that *AG* acquires its most enigmatic and curious overtones. There are many antecedent texts that add a new layer to Gaiman's writing in this particular work, and such is the importance of the allegorical impulse in this book: Gaiman's text is doubled by another, which it has partly utilized in order to become the novel's prose.

2.2 INTERTEXTUAL GODS

Throughout Gaiman's comprehensive mythical selection of figureheads for ancient legends and obscure entities from nearly forgotten religions, traditions and beliefs, the novel's reader might identify some punctual intertextual connections to other written works. Not only that, but the omnipresence of spiritual and divine referentiality within the book's prose contributes to the reader's ability of linking certain sections of text - as well as some overall tones in the narrative - to other well-known texts.

2.2.1 Wednesday becomes Odin

Perhaps the most clear and paraphrastic of these instances occurs unexpectedly during a dialogue between Shadow and Mister Wednesday, when Shadow asks whether or not Wednesday, with his god-like powers, would be able to completely bring Shadow's wife, Laura, back to life. For the purpose of thoroughly analyzing this particular scene in the narrative and its intertextual connections, the corresponding texts in the Poetic Edda - the Ljothatal section of the poem *Hovamol*, according to Bellow's English translation (1923, p. 63-67) and in the novel's prose (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 288-289) are attached as annexes 1 and 2 in this work, respectively. To improve the readability of each passage,

numbers have been inserted before each charm is explained, in order to further approximate the texts as lists.

AG's narrative language takes a turn as soon as Wednesday hears Shadow's question "She wants to be really alive. Can we do that? Is that possible?" (ibid). The narrator switches from the informal, light tone of the scene inside the plane to a brooding, sinister description of Wednesday's response to Shadow's doubt. As one might notice from the trance-like, hypnotic stance attributed to Wednesday during his monologue ("staring ahead of him as he talked"), the reader is approaching a different sort of text, entering a realm that is distant and yet close to *AG* and Gaiman's literature (Annex 2). What follows is a clear paraphrase of the *Ljóthatal* (or *Ljóðatal* – a list of Odin's charms) as written in the Poetic Edda, down to the number of spells, the actions Odin performed in order to have acquired the ability to use these charms on himself and bestow boons upon his comrades, as well as their respective functions. Although it is not written in verse form, this passage is so similar to the Poetic Edda's text that one may call it a slightly adapted translation of the original text inserted in Gaiman's prose. The narrative does allow for the reader to notice the change in tone as a sort of clue concerning the presence of something from afar in Wednesday's words, but no clear reference is made regarding where this list came from or how relevant it is in the Eddas. If not for its intertextual quality, this particular scene serves no other purpose than establishing that Wednesday is indeed a creature that still has a connection to otherworldly matters: powers and knowledge that simple men do not possess.

Contrasting with the Edda's text, which features a language that is fit to ancient times (when one takes into account Bellow's approach), Gaiman's version is much simpler verbally, but still manages to sound foreboding and mystical. There are, however, many aspects that were maintained in the text: the very first charm mentions "pain and sickness" in both texts, but "sorrow" in the original manuscript's translation has been changed to "grieving" in Gaiman's book. It stands as a very minimal, minor deviation from the antecedent text, which further qualifies Wednesday's monologue in *AG* as a paraphrase – of another version of "himself", in ancient times, in another land.

In this peculiar case, the relation between the novel's prose and the ancient Viking manuscript are made more noticeable due to the order in which Odin's charms are described. Not only has Gaiman borrowed this text from the Poetic Edda and placed it into

his story through Wednesday's mouth, but the form has been kept so close to that which is inscribed in Hovamol that all the items occupy the same position in the monologue. The numbering of the charms in the annexes serves to highlight this aspect that has been maintained in this intertextual passage. In both cases, Odin has eighteen charms at his disposal, the same ones, at the same order. The only difference is the reason why Wednesday recites this list to Shadow: he does so in order to explain his limitations, his inability of helping Shadow bring his wife back from the realm of the dead.

Despite of the similarities, given the novel's setting and context, many spells acquire an altered significance when Wednesday declaims them. For instance, the fourteenth charm in Hovamol details Odin's ability of "knowing well" all regarding the gods and elves (Annex 1). In *AG*, this charm acquires an extended meaning, as the novel deals with gods and legends from various cultural and geographical backgrounds. Therefore, Gaiman's Odin utters this particular description in an almost deleterious intonation, as if it had become more of a curse than one of his prized mystical talents as the Norse All-father god. He simply states: "I know the names of all the gods. Every *damned* one of them" (ibid, Annex 2).

Therefore, Gaiman utilizes the Edda's own text in order to deviate from its original meaning through means of appropriation in *AG*. The reader's presumptions on Odin's knowledge are therefore insufficient, as the deity's skill regarding his awareness of other gods is expanded so as to include gods from various pantheons, not only mythical beings native to Northern Europe. As such, in this passage a very peculiar intertextual process occurs, which poses a question regarding Sant'Anna's separate notions of paraphrase and appropriation.

Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna, whilst expanding upon Bakhtin's and Tynyanov's model of parody and stylization, proposes that the concepts of *paraphrase* and *appropriation* be added to the list as additional, necessary intertextual procedures which often appear in literature and song. Paraphrase, he explains, is a stylistic and rhetorical device or process that aims to achieve a kind of "ideological translation" of another text; while appropriation is the apotheosis of the displacement of a text – the process in which a text is taken from its original setting and placed in a new one, outside its own usage, resulting in a complete reintroduction of the text that causes it to be viewed through defamiliarized, chaotic lenses (2008, p. 44-45). Both processes are similar in that they do

not interfere much in the text itself: paraphrase is very close to the process of translation, in that it aims to communicate the same ideas as the text from which it sparks; while appropriation achieves its purpose of defamiliarization mostly through the reader's perception of contrast and displacement when the text is transported to a setting other than its original one.

However, this punctual insertion of the Ljothata in AG's prose at the same time validates the songs of spells from the Poetic Edda and subverts their original meaning – it all depends on the reader, and for which context the reader finds Wednesday's words applicable. Given that the novel explores the very notion of America as well as what become of ancient, foreign gods in this new land, it seems evident that intertextual instances such as these would reinforce the reader's uncertainty on how much of the antecedent text is being corrupted in order to fit the book's context.

As such, one could say that the Edda's text *paraphrase* - the rewritten text or speech that seeks to convey the same meaning as its predecessor - has been *appropriated* - placed on a new setting, offering a new reading that causes the reader to question the very meaning of the antecedent text. Much of AG's mythical impulse derives from this will to question the power of these beliefs in modern society, and the intertextual process in the prose offers, at the same instant, conflicting results: reaffirming its validity, but denying its authoritative voice.

Although it might not be immediately recognizable to readers who are unfamiliar with the Poetic Edda, Gaiman does include short bits of narrative during Wednesday's two-page-long monologue. The mysterious, sinister tone in these interruptions echoes the intertextual nature of the passage:

“His words were quiet, urgent. Gone was the hectoring tone, gone was the grin. Wednesday spoke as if he were reciting the words of a religious ritual, or remembering something dark and painful. [...] Shadow could feel his skin crawl. It was as if he had just seen a door open to another place, somewhere worlds away where hanged men blew in the wind at every crossroads, where witches shrieked overhead in the night.” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 288-289).

Wednesday becomes less like himself during this scene. His easygoing, sly demeanor is replaced with a serious, melancholic and entranced posture. The reciting of Odin's own sayings in the Eddas – Hovamol, or Hávamál, roughly translates to “The High One's Words” or “The Ballad of the High One” (BELLOWS, 1923, p. 28) – awakens within the Americanized Odin his ancient behaviors, or at least triggers within him memories of who he once was, and who he has become in America. He quotes himself in olden times, and in doing so becomes less like his modern self, reverting momentarily to his ancient self – enveloped in a mystical veil of god-like knowledge and power that America and modernity have vanquished from him.

Likewise, Gaiman's text explicitly states that Wednesday's declamation causes Shadow to imagine a door to another place, where these charms would be seen as more fitting and useful for the society – as Bellows comments, Hovamol “presents the wordly wisdom of a violent race [and] also shows noble ideas of loyalty, truth, and unfaltering courage” (1923, p. 29). It is made clear to the novel's reader that the section details a text which does not completely belong in modern America, so much that its mere reciting acts as a spell, transporting the listener - and, in this case, the reader, who accompanies the narrative through Shadow's focal point – to another reality. It echoes, as such, the very process of intertextuality in this passage: Gaiman's narrator explains through resonance what the very textual process the narrative is making use of in order to capture the reader's attention and to generate the scene's aesthetic and tone.

Another difference between the Ljóðatal and the enumeration of charms in *AG* is Wednesday's recalling of how he has acquired the spells. In the Edda's spells, there is no mention of Odin himself hanging on the tree during his sacrifice for knowledge during this segment, but in *AG* Wednesday explains, after the ninth charm is declaimed, how he came to acquire his powers (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 288). Instead, this peculiar insertion by Gaiman narrates an important event in Norse myth that is account for in the antecedent poem in Hovamol as compiled in the Codex Regius: commonly known as “Rúnatal”, it comprises from stanza 138 until 146 and details “how Othin won the runes” while serving as a “natural introduction to the Ljothatal” (BELLOWS, 1923, p. 28). This punctual insertion in Wednesday's otherwise perfectly corresponding enumeration of charms stands as the single moment during this passage in Gaiman's prose that completely deviates from the Edda's sayings. It serves the purpose of further deepening Wednesday's “becoming” the

Odin of old during the scene, as not only is he quoting from one of the oldest known documents that attempted to preserve early Scandinavian poems describing the ancient Nordic beliefs, but he is also establishing the facts as he remembers them: the only reason he knows the list of his own spells is because he obtained the knowledge on how to perform said spells during the time he hung from Yggdrasil, a sacrifice from himself to himself (ibid, p. 60).

Finally, Wednesday's hypnotic recalling of his own origins and his waning powers also functions as an ominous clue to his own purpose for Shadow: his need to reassert his sacrifice on the tree is foreboding of Shadow's own fate, as by the end of chapter 14 in the novel, Shadow himself is hung from the "American" World-Tree as a sacrifice to Odin. Thusly, once more Gaiman's writing plays with its obvious allegorical impulse. The sacrifice in Yggdrasil happens once more in *AG*, but it is redesigned, it is changed and transformed into something new and unique: an Odin who sacrifices his own son to himself, who has lost his olden identity and seeks to reaffirm it by sacrificing his legacy in the form of a Baldr who is yet to learn about his own self (his "Ainsel").

In short, Mister Wednesday, throughout *AG*'s story, wants to regain his powers and old status as a respected god, but his plan to achieve his goals will necessarily turn him into something completely different. Gaiman's character is an exemplary chance for the reader to witness an uncanny analogy to the nature of the modern acceptance and resurgence of allegory as well as the still recent trend of negating the allegoric impulse in art: he cannot deny who he is and where he came from, and yet he is constantly reinventing himself by becoming something new⁶ whilst constantly feeding on ancient content – his own antecedent text.

2.2.2 Wednesday's aliases

This same parallel clearly explains Wednesday's choices regarding aliases: when he needs Shadow to hide in Lakeside for a while, he gives him the name "Mike Ainsel" (GAIMAN, 2003, p. 243). "Ainsel", a term which also appears in Book 2's title (*My Ainsel*), is a different spelling for "own self", which aims to mimic how this is pronounced

⁶ Through means such as metonymy (as exemplified by the name he gives himself, "Wednesday") and metaphor (Shadow's hanging in the tree as a second sacrifice of Odin – in the form of his son – to Odin).

in Northern England. According to Joseph Jacobs, a very traditional English fairy-tale is centered around this very term, so Wednesday's choice for Shadow's alias not only echoes a mythic background, but also resonates with Shadow's development as a person in the latter half of the book, where he breaks his routine of following Wednesday's orders and is reborn – metaphorically, during his vigil for Wednesday while hanging from the World-Tree. Wednesday also chooses a new name for himself, which one more perfectly enrolls to his allegorical impulse: “I shall be rejoicing in the unlikely name of Emerson Borson” (ibid, p. 244). This name is, of course, not unlikely at all when one breaks it down: Emerson comes from “Ymir's son”, Ymir being one of the primeval beings in Nordic myth, “the ancient frost-giant”, one whose existence gave birth to all living things; and Borson means literally “Borr's son”: Borr was the one of the first Aesir to come into existence according to the Prose Edda, being the son of Buri, the first man (STURLUSON, 2003, p. 11-13). So, once more, Wednesday's uses a cryptic metonymy to hide his own identity in such a way that only a very attentive reader, one that's well-versed on the ancient Scandinavian origin myth, may perceive the meaning behind his words.

2.2.3 Odin's three glasses of mead

From another of Wednesday's cryptic peculiarities arises one more allegorical connection in Gaiman's book. This happens soon after Shadow finally accepts to listen to what Wednesday has to say: they both sit down in a pub and discuss the work that the mysterious old man needs Shadow to do. He offers Shadow a drink, a glass full of a liquid with a “tawny golden color” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 36). Wednesday has Shadow taste it, and then explains what it is: “‘Mead,’ said Wednesday. ‘Honey wine. The drink of heroes. The drink of the gods.’” (ibid). Mead is a key-item when one takes into account the writings in the Eddas, for it appears frequently as a prized possession and as means of negotiation. This aspect is mirrored in *AG*, as Wednesday utilizes the drink in a similar manner – to seal his agreement with Shadow.

In the Prose Edda's Skáldskaparmál (“the language of poetry”) section, in which Aegir, the god of the sea, and Bragi, the god of poetry, discuss various topics, the mythical origin of the drink is exposed in detail: the Aesir gods made a truce with the Vanir people to stop their ongoing war, and as a sign of peace, both Vanir and Aesir spit into a vat. From

their spittle, a man was created, called Kvasir – fruit of both peoples, he was so wise that “no one could ask him any questions to which he did not know the answer” (STURLUSON, 2003, p. 62). He was killed by two dwarves, who spilled his blood into two vats and a pot, and mixed it with honey, creating a mead that would make anyone who drank it become a poet or scholar. Later, the dwarves killed a giant named Gilling, and his son Suttung went to seek revenge. Begging for their lives, the dwarves offered the mead of poetry in exchange for mercy, and Suttung accepted. Then Odin sought out the mead, tricked Suttung and lay with his daughter, Gunnlod, who guarded the mead. He spent three nights with her, and each night he drank from one recipient. After drinking all of the mead, he turned into an eagle and flew home, spiting the mead of poetry in vats for the Aesir. Thus, poetry is seen as “Odin’s booty and find, and [mead is] his drink and his gift and the Aesir’s drink” (ibid, p. 64).

It is clear, then, that mead plays an important role in the Norse myths: it is seen as a prize and means of reconciliation, for it was produced from an offer of peace between the Vanir and Aesir, and was also used as a bargaining chip for the dwarves’ lives when they were threatened by the giant Suttung. Not only that, but the fact that Odin lay with Gunnlod for three nights, drinking out of the three recipients of mead, is also significant for AG’s storytelling, since Wednesday is only satisfied when Shadow drinks three glasses of mead, otherwise their contract will not be valid. When Shadow asks if he really needs to drink his third glass of honey wine, Wednesday replies: “I’m afraid you do. It seals our deal. Third time’s the charm, eh?” (GAIMAN, 2003, p. 41).

There is yet another detail in the passage where the drinking of the mead takes place that echoes the Edda’s account of mead and its properties. Shadow, who had been very quiet up until this point, starts finally telling Wednesday what he truly thinks, saying that he does not like the old man, but that he does not have anything left in his life, so he will work for the old man. The narrator describes Shadow’s thoughts in this moment in the following way:

“He wondered, suddenly, somewhere in the back of his head, whether the mead was responsible for loosening his tongue. But the words were coming out like the water spraying from a broken fire hydrant in summer, and he could not have stopped them if he had tried.” (ibid, p. 38-39).

Here, Gaiman is once again playing with the reader's interpretation of his writing. The passage possesses two distinct readings: one simple, trivial; and one that offers an intertextual reading, an allegorical parallelism to the scene that is being narrated. For mead is an alcoholic beverage, and as such it could be described as something that would lower one's inhibitions, which would fit the scene, as Shadow is drinking his second glass of mead and might be getting a bit drunk. However, if one analyzes the passage in its allegorical connection to the Prose Edda, Shadow is drinking Odin's mead, the drink of poetry and inspiration, and as such is finally being more agreeable, becoming able to communicate and engage in an exchange of ideas with Wednesday. It is the drinking of the mead that allows Shadow to take his first step towards acquiring his true identity, becoming his true self.

This also precludes Shadow's first confrontation in the narrative, as Wednesday asks him to fight the drunken Mad Sweeney in the bar right after the mead-drinking ritual is over. It has already been established that mead was regarded as the drink of poetry in ancient Norse myths, but it must also be noted that the beverage might be likewise related to the berserker state that Viking warriors were known for, in which they would enter a battle-trance and have no regard for their own safety, battling like madmen in the midst of war, with reckless courage.

2.2.4 The three women

One of the most recurrent archetypes in ancient myth is that of the three women with mystical powers. Many legends of old feature this: the Greek had the Moirai, the Norse pagans had the Norns. Their names were Urth, Verthandi and Skuld, "Past", "Present" and "Future" (BELLOWS, 1923, p. 9), and they knew all events that had been and that would come to be. Gaiman inserts their American versions in *AG*, as they help Shadow perform his sacrifice in the vigil for Wednesday's death. The narrator does not specifically name them in the book, but Shadow notices three women, very different amongst themselves, who seem to be waiting for him to take his place on the tree. Through Shadow's focalizing point, the reader is allowed to confirm his suspicions due to the following passage: "The biggest woman, whose name seemed to be Urtha or Urder –

Shadow could not repeat it back to her to her satisfaction [...]” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 455). It is safe to assume, from this sentence, that Shadow is talking to the American Urth (or Urd), one of the Norns.

However, it is not only these well-known figures from ancient Scandinavian myths that mark the archetype of the three mysterious women in Gaiman’s novel. The reader is made acquaintance of the Zorya early in the narrative. The Zorya are two Slavic goddesses related to the dawn (Zorya Utrennyaya) and dusk (Zorya Vechernyaya), who assist their father, Dazhbog, god of the sun, on his daily journeys, the first daughter opening “the gates to her father’s palace so that he can ride forth at the start of the sun’s journey”, and the second daughter closing the gates after he has returned home (DIXON-KENNEDY, 1998, p. 321). Although Dixon-Kennedy frequently says there was a third sister who remained nameless in the sources that mentioned these figures, Gaiman wanted to insert a third sister to the equation. It has never been established why exactly Gaiman chose to create a name for the sister - other than to pay homage to an Iggy Pop song, as it has been explained in the first chapter, something that is easy to verify since it was mentioned by the author himself. One could argue, then, that the third sister only reinforces *AG*’s quantified possibilities of allegorical parallelisms and intertextual readings. Here, the term “intertextual” serves to illustrate that this archetype is not exclusive to mythic text and accounts of ancient beliefs, for the female trinity is featured in many works – perhaps one of the most notable of which is Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. The very first scene of Shakespeare’s famous play features three witches ominously announcing the cursed fate of Macbeth, his ascent to the throne and, later in the play, his eventual downfall (1988, p. 1). These female figures have been subject to many studies and analyzes by various scholars, but they doubtlessly also subscribe to this frequent image of the three mystical women in literature and myth.

The third Zorya sister that appears in the prose of *AG*, Zorya Polunochnaya, stands as a completely new figure, and is also the most prominent of the three in the narrative. She wakes up briefly, at midnight, and spends some minutes with Shadow on a rooftop in downtown Chicago. During this time, learning that Shadow had cast his golden coin – which he had acquired from Mad Sweeney – in his wife’s grave, she “takes the moon” for Shadow, reaching out to the skies and seemingly plucking the moon out of the celestial firmament. Shadow stares at this, astonished, but accepts her gift: the full moon has been

turned into a small silver dollar coin, which the novel's protagonist keeps close to him as he proceeds with his journey, as a sort of good-luck token (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 91). The midnight sister explains that the coin is meant to have protective powers and that it will keep him safe in his travels, but that it is not as powerful as the golden coin that he once had. His encounter with Zorya Polunochnaya ends abruptly after she kisses Shadow upon each eyelid, which marks the passage as something that might have only been dreamed, but the fact that the coin is still with Shadow seems to suggest the conversation really took place.

It is not simply the fact that the presence of three gathered women who possess mystical powers is recurrent in Gaiman's book, but also that most instances where this archetypal image is featured in the novel are related to time. The Norns are even named after the time period they are associated with, and the Zorya sisters too are associated with the cycle of the day. In his meeting with the Norns, Shadow revisits his past and chooses his future – during his time hanging from the tree, he remembers his childhood and has to make a decision regarding where he is heading: either life or death. During his meeting with the Zorya, he makes a deal with Czernobog and agrees to let the Slavic deity to smash his head with a sledgehammer after his journey. His encounter with the Zorya sisters also results in contemplation of the past – as he remembers Laura – and in making preparations for the future – when the midnight sister bestows upon him a protective token to keep him from harm.

In both cases, the female trinity's actions help Shadow in his journey. Although the Norns tie him to the tree to serve as a sacrifice, they do so because Shadow is willing to sacrifice himself. Therefore, they actually assist him in doing what he is committed to do. Even the results of his vigil on the tree are beneficial to Shadow himself: it is through his agony while hanging from Yggdrasil that he decides he wishes to live, finds his new purpose, realizes Wednesday's scheme and is finally reborn, in a sense, so that he may put an end to the conflict between the new gods and the old. Likewise, the Zorya sisters – in the form of Zorya Polunochnaya - assist him by offering him safety after realizing he is defenceless in a world of dangerous entities struggling for power.

2.2.5 The power of belief

Discussing *AG*'s dystopian portrait of America, Robert Tally succinctly exposes how the mythic figures in Gaiman's novel acquire their abilities to intervene with human life and their own fates. He states that "a god is only as powerful as the belief in him or her that the faithful maintain" (2014, p. 5) and quotes the book itself, reiterating that, within the novel's fictional universe, gods only truly die when they are forgotten. In his notes on the same article, he discusses these aspects of the narrative, saying:

"The same principle is evident in a number of key intertexts, among which I mention only Terry Pratchett's *Small Gods*, where the more powerful the belief, the more powerful the god. In that novel, a formerly mighty deity is shocked to discover himself almost utterly powerless, since—even though the society of his purported believers is essentially a theocracy—he has only one faithful follower." (ibid, p. 19-20, note #5)

As clearly exposed by Tally, Gaiman's mythical-realist novel shares a common approach with Pratchett's satirical fantasy novel on religion. In both works, gods are featured as important characters in the books' plots and are described as sentient beings that exist only because people believe in them. As such, their survival is dependent on humans: in *Small Gods*, the god Om has only one true believer left, so he has to work to reacquire his power through his only disciple, the one person who is still capable of hearing his commanding voice. Meanwhile, *AG*'s plot also centers on a god's need for people to believe in him: Wednesday's scheme, however, would have gods modern and old believe in him and sacrifice themselves in battle for him: he has become aware that seeking human believers would be far too difficult in modern society, and thus plans to prey on the bloodbath that he has set in motion between the weakened gods of old and the high-rising gods that have come to exist in contemporary times.

It is then a topic that is essential to both *AG* and *Small Gods*: the issue of the survival of gods through belief. Both novels utilize the same notion in order to convey their stories, and ultimately argue that the ideas behind the gods, the lasting ideals or images for which they stand, tend to survive longer than the outlines of mystical figures with their own appearances and personalities. In Pratchett's *Small Gods*, the following dialogue takes place between Om and his only true follower, Brutha:

““[...] Do you know how gods get power?”; “By people believing in them,” said Brutha. “Millions of people believe in you.” [...] “They don’t believe,” said Om. [...] “Belief shifts. People start out believing in the god and end up believing in the structure”. (PRATCHETT, 2013, p. 191)

Yet another parallel may be defined, then, between Gaiman’s and Pratchett’s novels. Both play with the reader’s notions of what makes a god. In *Small Gods*, Om is regarded as the one true god by most characters, but the belief itself in the entity has been lost: people merely follow the church blindly, not actually believing in the god’s existence, since the church attends to their needs. In *AG*, the ancient gods and goddesses’ function in society is next to null, as thunder is no longer seen as such a powerful force – credit cards and television, on the other hand, are much more appealing and useful for contemporary citizens. However, it does not mean that the ideas usually associated with ancient gods have been forgotten – America still engages in war against other countries, and Odin, the most prominent of the American Gods in the narrative, is a war-god.

It is thus through means of war that Wednesday seeks to reacquire his power. If people cannot be convinced to believe in his existence as a proper god, they might as well at least worship the structure to which the old Norse peoples connected him to. Although his plan is ultimately stopped by Shadow, Wednesday remains a lingering figure in Shadow’s and the other gods’ minds, since not only has he managed to fool all the deities, but he had also become an example of just how far forgotten gods are willing to go to ensure their own survival. The simple fact that Shadow still thinks of Wednesday by the book’s end and finds himself uncomfortable in the presence of the Icelandic Odin upon meeting him in Reykjavik is another testament of his cunning: his presence haunts Shadow, he has attained the belief of his own son, albeit through lies and treason. The con man could not escape with his loot, but he still managed to escape, and remains at large.

2.3 GAIMAN’S PANTHEON

Although Gaiman, in *AG*, inserts the same “principle” his one-time collaborator Pratchett used in *Small Gods* - that gods gain strength through belief in *AG* – in his narrative, this is not the one and only time Gaiman’s prose contain definable intertextual connections to Pratchett’s texts. One could, for instance, take the title of Gaiman’s short-story “Troll Bridge” (GAIMAN, 2005, p. 59) as a homage to Pratchett’s short-story of the same name (PRATCHETT, 1992, p. 34), although the overall plot of the stories and settings are completely unrelated. In fact, his writing in *AG* generates a few textual relations not only to other authors’ words, but even to Gaiman’s other works.

This same example of the recurrence of trolls in Gaiman’s writing can be seen in the prose of *AG*: when Shadow finds Mad Sweeney under the bridge, he says “You keep hanging out under bridges [...] people gonna think you’re a troll” (2002, p. 216). Sweeney, who had drunkenly given his protective golden coin to Shadow when they first met, is visibly troubled and scared, and, confused, replies that he’s not a troll. Shadow responds “I know you’re not a troll, Sweeney” (ibid, p. 217). The scene seems weirdly fixated – at least when both characters start their conversation – in the idea of troll under bridges, which not only resonates with both Gaiman’s and Pratchett’s short-stories⁷, but also with the mythical background of the novel and its most prominent folklore – the North European one. In fact, the image of the troll creature is also quite popular in America, to such an extent that the town of Seattle has built a troll statue under one of its bridges. Therefore, the text might have been once more referring to the many Scandinavian myths and stories that were carried over to the new country and that eventually became a part of its social imaginary, the figure of trolls being a perfect example of this particular phenomenon.

There is also the fact that the fictional universe Gaiman envisioned for *AG* has been the setting of more than one of his short-stories⁸ and of the whole novel *Anansi Boys*, which deals with the same theme of old gods and mythic creatures living amongst the human in modern society, although it centers on Mr. Nancy’s son, Fat Charlie. In the latter example, one may also identify parallels to the narrative approach in *AG* and its choice of

⁷ As one would expect, both short-stories feature trolls under bridges, but Gaiman’s also deals with transformation as the protagonist becomes the troll under the bridge by the story’s end. That being so, the intertextual connection between the scene in *AG* and his short-story is even stronger, as Shadow implies that Mad Sweeney will be perceived as a troll.

⁸ As of the time of this writing, there have been two short-stories featuring Shadow as the protagonist in Gaiman’s short-stories collections, namely “The Monarch of the Glen” in *Fragile Things*; and “Black Dog” in *Trigger Warning*.

protagonist: both novels feature an ancient deity's son as the main character and central focalizing point of the narrative. Both novels also share some of their characters – Mr. Nancy is an important character in *AG*, being one of the old gods who trusts Wednesday the most, and someone who ends up becoming close friends with Shadow.

Nevertheless, *AG*'s ability of seamlessly encapsulating various distinct mythic figures within the spectrum of modern America also offers some possibilities regarding punctual insertions, in its text, of some of Gaiman's own characters from his graphic novel series *Sandman*. In *Sandman*'s internal lore, The Endless are eight god-like entities who correspond to forces or aspects of the universe, one of them being Delirium, who is portrayed as a young girl whose hair is often colored in different tonalities⁹ and who always reacts in a mad, deranged fashion, since she embodies the concept of insanity. In her appearances in the graphic novel series, she is frequently seen with a dog by her side, named Barnabas.

In *AG*, when Shadow is in San Francisco with Wednesday, he briefly meets a girl whose description makes her suspiciously close to how Delirium is shown in *Sandman*. The narrator tells the reader: "A young girl, no older than fourteen, her hair dyed green and orange and pink, stared at them as they went by. She sat beside a dog, a mongrel, with a piece of string for a collar and a leash. She looked hungrier than the dog did. The dog yapped at them, then wagged its tail" (*ibid*, p. 306). Shadow hands her a dollar bill, to which she asks surprised, and then tells her to buy food for the dog, which causes her to smile. The exchange between the two ends there, and the girl is never mentioned again in the novel. However, her description matches Delirium so perfectly that most readers who were familiarized with Gaiman's previous endeavors immediately identified the character as the Endless. As one may see from the text, just enough clues are given to the reader for him/her to suspect that it might be Delirium, but no final validation, no complete confirmation is given and the scene ends just as abruptly as it began. This marks one more possible intratextual relation – as defined by Sant'Anna: "when the writer re-approaches his work and rewrites it" (2013, p. 12-13) – between Gaiman's novel and his graphic novel work.

⁹ See Annex 3

Finally, Gaiman's use of mythic figures from the Nordic heathen legends in *AG* not only showcases how intertextual and allegorical is his work, but it is also a repeated instance of this "borrowing" of key-figures from this particular pantheon as character in his literature. The Sandman also featured Odin and Loki as characters in its stories. After Morpheus gains control of Hell in the Seasons of Mist storyline, Odin and Loki come to try and exchange information for the key to Hell, as they believe having control of Hell will allow them to stop Ragnarok.

Odin's appearance in *The Sandman* is much closer to how the All-father god is described in the Eddas: he sports a long brimmed hat, wears a long cloak and carries a staff, resembling a lone and mysterious wanderer. Likewise, Loki as represented in *Sandman* is a thin fair-haired man usually with a long smile in his face. During the course of the graphic novel's narrative, Loki is bound and sentenced to suffer the venom of a giant snake dripping on his face until Ragnarok comes, which matches perfectly the account of the Eddas regarding the trickster god.

It is clear to see when one compares Gaiman's appropriated versions of these gods that he has fit each one to the author's setting and context. The Loki and Odin that appear in *The Sandman* series are much closer – whether in appearance or regarding the story that is told about them – to the gods as they are mentioned in the Scandinavian legends. However, in *AG* the level of distancing from the earlier antecedent text known to detail the Viking myths is much stronger than in *Sandman*: the gods' appearance is strikingly different, their motivations and stories are completely diverse and their behaviors differ from what one could assume based on the personality traits usually associated with them. In fact, when one analyzes the plot of *AG* and notices just how corrupted Wednesday's character is when put in contrast to Odin as described in the Eddas, the narrative of the novel acquires unexpected parodic overtones, for the caring father in the Eddas that seeks extreme revenge for the death of his son attempts to become his son's murderer in order to profit from it, in Gaiman's complex book.

Odin, then, has been the object of Gaiman's intertextual appropriations at least three times: his appearing in *The Sandman* series in a version that's very close (almost paraphrastic) to his likeness in the Eddas; in *AG*, Odin's corruption in the form of his "Americanized" version under the alias Mister Wednesday; and Odin's representation, once more in *AG*, in his native land of Scandinavia during the Postscript section of the

novel, where he seems even closer to his descriptions in the Eddas than the Odin one finds in Sandman, but so little is told about him that the reader is not allowed to know whether this Odin is indeed what one would call the “original” All-father god or another version of the same god with changes from its depiction in the ancient manuscripts.

3 IMMIGRANT TEXTS

In the previous chapters we have established that Neil Gaiman is well known for (re)using concepts and ideas that had been previously featured in earlier novels authored by other writers in his own works. For instance, Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* is a modern, gothic retelling of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* based largely in a clear change in the narrative's setting; and the comedy novel *Good Omens*, written collaboratively between Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, is a satirical take on popular horror media with narratives that focus on the coming of the Antichrist - Richard Donner's and David Seltzer's movie *The Omen*. Those are, perhaps, the most obvious example of such phenomena, as the very title of the collaborative novel borrows from the name of the film. Not only that, Gaiman has also repeatedly developed his own stories inside the fictional universe of various tales which may already be considered a vital part of the Western subconscious: he has written a short-story entitled "Snow, Glass, Apples" which sparked from him "pondering the stranger parts" (GAIMAN, 2014, p. xxxv) of the fairy tale *Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs*; he has produced two narratives based off of the popular fairy-tale *Sleeping Beauty* in his most recent short-story collection (as Gaiman notes in the book's introduction); he has made extensive references to the writings of H. P. Lovecraft in his short-story "Shoggoth's Old Peculiar"; and has most notably crafted his own retelling of Shakespeare's play *A Midnight Summer's Dream* in his *Sandman* graphic novel series, the repercussions of which have earned him the World Fantasy Award for Best Short Fiction in 1991.

Gaiman is not shy when it comes to declare that his books and stories encompass and draw from texts contained in other literary, filmic, musical or otherwise sources, generally regarding this phenomenon as a great way for untrained readers to discover other writers through his works: "I learned about things and people from stories, and I learned about other authors from stories" (ibid, p. xv). In his introduction to his short-story collection *Trigger Warning*, the writer states: "We authors, who trade in fiction for a living,

are a continuum of all we have seen and heard, and most importantly, all that we have read” (p. xiv). This view seems to be in consonance with Barthes’ and Kristeva’s concept of what comprises the process of writing and reading a “text” – that is, that a text necessarily presupposes and contains within itself other voices, past utterances which constitute the texts that are used in order for writers and readers alike to create the present “text”. Gaiman resumes his thought on this topic affirming that “Many, perhaps most, of the stories in this book are part of that same continuum. They exist because other authors, other voices, other minds, have existed” (p. xv). His statements thus concede that his stories do not “originate” from his thoughts alone without the intervention and mingling of ideas and texts from various other sources. This basic characteristic of all texts which is very briefly discussed in Gaiman’s introductory notes highlight the fact that Gaiman’s works are in general highly intertextual. As Culler explains,

the notion of intertextuality names the paradox of linguistic and discursive systems: that utterances or texts are *never* moments of origin because they *depend* on the prior existence of codes and conventions, and it is the nature of codes to be always already in existence, to have lost origins. (1976, p. 1383)

Gaiman’s novel extensively employs characters, situations, sentences and allusions to other texts, as it deals with various themes, amongst which are mythology, folklore, the onset of the digital era and modern American culture. The language in the narrative often offers indication to the texts that it is referencing, some of which are made clear and some of which are done in a cryptic manner. In this chapter, the intertextual connections of Gaiman’s prose in *American Gods* to other artistic texts (literature, music, films) and to various genres and their codes will be examined and discussed in order to offer a intersemiotic reading of the novel’s text.

3.1 LITERARY ALLUSIONS

Perhaps the first instance of an instantly recognizable intertextual sentence in *American Gods* takes place during the final paragraph of the book’s first chapter. Shadow

is unexpectedly reunited Mister Wednesday, who is relentlessly trying to give Shadow a job, although Shadow seems intent of refusing the offer. When Shadow sees the old man in the lavatory of the road diner in which he arrived for dinner, the narrator states that Wednesday “grinned, like a fox eating shit from a barbed wire fence” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 26-27). This sentence is an insertion in the narrative text of a folk-phrase, but the punctual use of an image of a fox partaking in the described action is rather unusual. In this case, Gaiman has used a satirical novel by an English author which employs a similar sentence – Robert Nye’s humorous and poetic retelling of the Arthurian legend entitled *Merlin: Darkling Child of Virgin and Devil*. In this particular book’s prose, the sentence “like a fox eating shit off a wire bush” (1979, p. 11) is used as a sort of mantra, being repeated nine times throughout the novel’s prose. Gaiman himself has admitted to seeing this sentence being employed in one of Nye’s novels before he used it himself in the telling of *AG*’s¹⁰ plot. This marks an intertextual relation between the text in *AG* and the one in *Merlin*. Gaiman’s novel uses the phrase to depict a very similar notion to the one it conveyed in the earlier text - the depraved, almost sadistic smile in Nye’s narrative implies insanity and lust, as well as cruelty and mockery. Likewise, in Gaiman’s novel it is used to indicate Wednesday’s mockery and amusement at Shadow’s inability to escape from his presence and constant pestering on the job position he is being offered, to the point where even in the lavatory he stumbles upon his grizzled tormentor.

The subtle curiosity that this unusual phrase might spark in a reader due to its sudden insertion in an otherwise “clean” and linear narrative constitutes what Riffaterre deems the “ungrammaticalities” that intertextual connections produce when a reader is performing a semiotic analysis of a given text. According to the theorist, the reader first approaches the text on a mimetic level, in which a simple, linear reading attempts to relate the signs to external referents, but once an ungrammaticality is spotted in the text, a second reading takes place “in a non-linear fashion, [in order to] unearth the underlying semiotic units and structures which produce the text’s non-referential significance” (ALLEN, 2000, p. 116). If one accepts Riffaterre’s postulations on the effects of intertextuality in the reading process, then Gaiman’s use of this strange sentence would certainly cause readers

¹⁰ “I’ve seen it used a few times, although if memory serves the first time was in a novel by Robert Nye – either *Merlin* or *Faust*, I forget (both wonderful books)” - GAIMAN in a fan Q&A session in *The Well*: available at <<http://www.well.com/conf/inkwell.vue/topics/104/Neil-Gaiman-Countdown-to-America-page72.html>>. Last access: March 2015.

to either identify Nye's corresponding phrase as they examine *AG*'s text or, alternatively, would cause readers to presuppose that the sentence refers to a text other than itself and which is not clearly indicated in the novel – be it the similar folk-phrase or the use of the fox as an intertextual comment on *AG*'s reliance and overabundance of elements relevant to folk tales, fables and myths. The figure of the anthropomorphized fox in various fables and cultural legends further highlights the many possible readings that this single well-placed sentence in the novel's first chapter might trigger in an attentive reader. Not only that, but the connection to Nye's writings in this case does not deviate completely from what one may presuppose: after all, both novels deal with myths and legends and rely heavily on figures from folktales in order to populate the text as archetypal characters. This further reinforces Riffaterre's thesis that the "second reading" of an intertext does not demand that the reader be familiar with the antecedent text in order to realize the full significance the words are bringing to a "new" text. This, however, may happen in other textual instances in *AG*, so let us resume our reading of the novel's most evident intertexts.

In the following chapter, after Shadow is introduced to Mad Sweeney (a personalized and Americanized version of the Irish mythic hero Suibhne), he marks his acceptance of Wednesday's offer of employment as a private bouncer by drinking mead¹¹. This results in Shadow and Sweeney engaging in a drunken fistfight after Shadow attempts to calm Sweeney's enraged temper. During the conversation that takes place between the two combatants as the bar-brawl ensues, Shadow questions his opponent on a recent coin-trick he had demonstrated in the bar. Sweeney responds that he had already told Shadow how he had performed the trick earlier that night and that "there's none so blind-ow! Good one!-as those who will not listen" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 43). This statement (minus the interjections) is a corruption of a popular idiom based on at least two passages in the Bible: the first one being "Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matthew 13:13) and the second "Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not" (Jeremiah 5:12). The resulting proverb, "There are none so blind as those who will not listen", has been used in verbal communication for a long time now, being traced back to John Heywood's collection of proverbs in 1546¹², and being

¹¹ See chapter 2 for the significance of mead in the Norse myths.

¹² "Who is so deafe or so blinde, as is hee; That wilfully will neither heare nor see?"- HEYWOOD, 1546, 154 in *The Proverbs of John Heywood*. Available online at <

employed vastly in literary works, including Jonathan Swift's 1783 *Polite Conversation*, a satirical commentary on the conversations the author heard from the upper-classes disguised as a guide for people lacking in conversational skills (1783, p. 112).

The proverb is blatantly misquoted to comic effect, a characteristic which is strengthened by the context in which it appears within the narrative (a bar-brawl) as well as by the interruption in the character's speech, implying that he was hit mid-sentence by Shadow's punch. Sweeney's switching of the term "see" with "listen" does not seem to imply there is much to be taken from a "semiotic reading" of this passage, as the Biblical allusion does not appear to hold much relevance to the scene. Nonetheless, when the phrase is analyzed in parallel to the overall plot of *AG*, the fact that it suggests the constant theme of misdirection is made clear. Shadow had learned how to perform coin-tricks during his term in prison at the start of the novel, and his fascination with magic tricks and the many techniques behind the performance of magicians comprises a text that can be read in parallel to that of the large "trick" in which Wednesday and Low-Key attempt to fool the other gods into a conflict with the assistance of an innocent Shadow. Sweeney is making use of an old proverb to alert Shadow that he is unaware of the "Americanized" Norse gods' overly complicated scheme, and, thusly, is acting like a fool, unable to clearly understand what he is getting involved with. As Robert Tally stated, the novel is set in a "bad place", where a sense of constant menace for what may actually be taking place "behind the drapes" pervades the narrative: "the dystopia in *American Gods* will have more to do with the movements of the shadows than with the twilight of the gods" (2014, p. 7).

AG incorporates many subsections that further detail how various Gods from other lands and cultures found their way to modern-day America, entitled "Coming to America". The very second of these subsections features an "old rhyme" that is sung by an old Cornish immigrant as a cautionary tale about the many creatures of the woods from English folklore. She sings "Elm he do brood; And oak, he do hate, But the willow-man goes walking, If you stays out late" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 97), which seems to be one of the many versions of a popular folk song from the south of the British Isles. Although this old saying is recited by a Cornish character in Gaiman's novel, this particular rhyme is often

cited as deriving from a local legend concerning the treacherous flora of Somerset – especially the willows -, as Katharine Mary Briggs explains in her book *The fairies in English tradition and literature*¹³, which presents a slightly different version of the song.

The insertion of the rhyme organized in verses during the course of the narrative causes a brief stylistic break in the reading of the novel, which allows for a moment of change in the reading process due to a clear change in the text's form. Not only that, the italics during this section of the text serve to indicate the voice of the speaker, as these subsections of the book are supposed to comprise the actual notes of a character in the narrative (Mr. Ibis). Thus, the voice which serves the function of heterodiegetic narrator - "the narrator absent from the story he tells" (GENETTE, 1980, p. 244) - for the master narrative is showcased only briefly in this segment and is distinguished from the voice that is "writing" this segment – that of Mr. Ibis, "the narrator present as a character in the story he tells" (ibid) and who speaks on an intradiegetic level to the main plot – by the italics. However, the traditional English rhyme is marked in italics as well and is separated from the general narration, which seems to imply it constitutes what Bakhtin would deem double-voice or multi-voiced speech, where "[the word in language] becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his/her own intention, his/her own accent, when s/he appropriates the word adapting it to his/her own semantic and expressive intention" (BAKHTIN, 2014, p. 100). The folk song about the "willow man" serves Mr. Ibis' purpose of narrating the story of a Cornish immigrant and her peoples' legends, as well as the Englishwoman's purpose of singing a cautionary tale about the folk creatures which inhabit the distant shores of her homeland to a younger generation in America. The fact that italics are also used in the beginning of this subsection to highlight the heterodiegetic, true narrator's voice in sentences like "[...] *wrote Mr. Ibis, in his leather-bound journal, [...]*" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 92) adds to the multitude of voices that permeate these "embedded narratives" within AG's overall narrative frame.

3.1.1 Poe's Raven projected in Odin's

AG's narrative constantly alludes to myths as well as other texts. The reader is introduced to the novel's protagonist and shortly thereafter is told that Shadow is reading

¹³ "Ellum do grieve, Oak he do hate, Willow do walk, If yew travels late" (BRIGGS, 2002, p. 99)

Herodotus' *Stories*. However, in order to properly build the book's fictional space, Gaiman's prose manages to also merge the two, to create connections between myth and legends – some of which do not possess many surviving written documents detailing the beliefs of ancient peoples – and project one text on top of the other. It is a phenomenon that is deeply related to that of allegory, whilst not abiding to allegorical impulses in its basic function.

Perhaps the scene in which this process is most evident in Gaiman's writing technique occurs when Shadow is guided by one of Mister Wednesday's ravens. The animal is able to communicate with the protagonist, so that Shadow understands Wednesday has sent the bird to instruct him on where to go next. At that point, the novel tells the reader of Shadow's thoughts as he wonders "which of Odin's ravens this was: Huginn or Muninn, Memory or Thought" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 157). This clearly shows that the character recognizes the bird's significance and role in the Norse myths: Odin has two ravens that are sent flying to the human world and as "a result he gets to find out about many events" (STURLUSON, 2003, 33). That being so, Gaiman's narrative makes use of the preconceived notion of Odin as a god whose ravens patrol the Earth and watch events unfold. As such, the novel presumes that the reader is also acquainted with these details regarding the Scandinavian myths, or at least it provides many clear clues and indications that allow the reader to get familiar with many aspects of ancient Norse pagan beliefs.

However, as the scene progresses, Shadow gets increasingly annoyed at the raven's cawing and enigmatic words. While being led back to the road by the bird, Shadow says: "Hey, [...] Huginn or Muninn, or whoever you are.' The bird turned, head tipped, suspiciously, on one side, and it stared at him with bright eyes. 'Say "Nevermore,"' said Shadow 'Fuck you,' said the raven. It said nothing else as they went through the woodland together." (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 158-159). The whole dialogue is set up as a joke, and the resulting silence after Shadow's mocking request gives way to long descriptive paragraph, thus ceasing the exchange between the novel's protagonist and the animal. The raven flies back to the woodland and Shadow resumes his journey.

Shadow's quip is an obvious reference to Edgar Allan Poe's 1845 poem "The Raven", a narrative poetry text where the narrator (who is also the poem's story protagonist) is visited by a ghastly raven in the middle of the night. Having recently lost his beloved Lenore, the poem's narrator is grief-struck, and the grim raven further

intensifies his pain by sitting perched upon a bust of Pallas and answering the narrator's questions and mourning with the same term Shadow refers to in *AG*. "Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore!'" (POE, p. 915, 2009) and variants of this line are repeated in the poem in a chorus-like fashion, a sort of insistent mantra that ails the heart of the scholar who lost his loved one.

Poe's poem has become a cultural phenomenon since its publication, sparking countless parodies and references in many other works. Gaiman is of course another example of a contemporary writer who references Poe's work. The insertion of the allusion to the "Nevermore" chorus in the middle of a dialogue between Shadow and Wednesday's raven clearly causes a punctual defamiliarization in the reader at first, since the word appears to not fit into the context. It is only through the process of intertextuality that the reader is able to fully capture the humorous tone of Shadow's comment. Thusly, faced with Odin's raven from Norse legends, Gaiman's character jokingly approximates the foreign text to its American counterpart regarding talking ravens. The raven's rude reply further indicates the mocking tone in Shadow's speech, and would supposedly intensify the defamiliarization in a reader of the novel that is not familiar with Poe's literature.

This scene in particular marks one of the most easily identifiable intertexts in Gaiman's whole novel. Not only the prose indicates the mythic connection by having Shadow call out the name of Odin's ravens, but the literary connection relies on a short and very famous line from one of English language's most well-known poems. For most readers, the mental link is created immediately after the reading of the passage, making this instance one of the most important showcases of Gaiman's ability of playing with literary allusions throughout *AG*'s prose.

It is yet another instance in the book where the theme of Americanization is made evident. The very particular and unusual figure of the talking ravens from Scandinavian pagan myths is transfigured into American Literature's equally famous talking raven. Shadow's projection of Poe's character in Wednesday's bird serves as another way to illustrate the constant movement in *AG* as a novel: the appropriation of foreign cultures and customs into an American amalgam that is not equal to the object it has derived from, but still retains the same name, although it is only similar in regards to its representation and inner, detailed identity.

The humorous tone during the dialogue is also hard to define. It is not a complete parody or satire of Poe's text. Instead, the passage stands as a mere allusion to the poem, but one that does not simply mention the text. There is, as stated above, a clear connection between Gaiman's narrative with the figure of the talking raven and both the Eddas and Poe's poem. The gothic, grim atmosphere that the bird evokes in Poe's literature derives from humankind's perception of the animal as a corpse-feeder, and Odin is described as the raven-god and the god of the gallows in ancient manuscripts, so that the instant connection between death and ravens is immediately linked to the figure of Odin if one sees the bird according to the Norse myth's perception.

AG's ultimate climax revolves around the notion of Odin as a war-god whose powers derive from the dead in the battlefield. He is, as such, a creature who is closely associated with death, as his pet ravens suggest. The shady appearance of the ravens, deemed by Poe as ominous and ungainly, is thus subverted through (the appropriately-named) Shadow by means of intertextual mocking, which endangers for a brief moment the identity of the mythic Norse ravens, to the point where the foul response offered by the bird makes for a comedic scene where laughter may ensue for the attentive and good-humored reader.

3.1.2 The hue of the sky

Gaiman's previous novel *Neverwhere* contains a sentence which is a stylization of the very first sentence in William Gibson's famous novel *Neuromancer*. While Gibson's book begins with the statement "The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel" (1986, p. 3), Gaiman's *Neverwhere* stylization reads: "the sky was the perfect untroubled blue of a television screen, tuned to a dead channel" (2005, p. 353). In this case, the intertextuality is clear due to the ending of both sentences being the same. This intertext may serve to illustrate how paraphrase works: Gibson's use of grey as the color of television tuned to a dead channel as perceived by Gibson in 1984 no longer made sense by the time *Neverwhere* was written, since television sets showed a blue screen instead of grey noise by 1998. In AG, however, two distinct sentences seem to bear some connection to this punctual texts and their link.

The novel has a motto of “a storm is coming” – a sentence that is actually used as a paratext, serving as the tagline for the book in various editions –, therefore sentences detailing the sky are fairly frequent in the novel’s prose. It is the color of the sky and the way that these sentences are built that might cause the reader to perceive a textual connection to other texts sparking from Gaiman’s prose in *AG*. “The sky was a uniform battleship gray” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 108), asserts the novel’s narrator. While the image of a battleship surely fits the novel’s theme of impending conflict and the outbreak of war, the expression “uniform battleship gray” is also frequently used in American newspapers in the weather section¹⁴. The other sentence that appears in the novel is: “the sky was impossibly blue, and white industrial smoke rising from the factory chimneys was frozen in the sky, like a photograph” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 177). The sentence, in this case, has a structure that is very close to Gibson’s text, however detailing an intense hue of blue, like in Gaiman’s stylization in *Neverwhere*.

These instances, however, do not present clear clues and indications as to the connection between the sentences other than the fact that Gaiman has already used an intertext related to a sentence describing the color of the sky in another work of his. Instead, this might serve as an illustration of how the reader may perceive intertexts due to his own familiarity with a certain author’s works and even the author’s past reading experiences, as the sentences may or may not have been intended to generate the possibility of an intertextual reading in those cases. Nevertheless, it seemed appropriate to pinpoint the similarities in context and ideas so that the reader of *AG* may reach his own conclusions regarding the textual connections between those four passages – three in Gaiman’s own prose, and thus possibly a case of intratextuality when one takes into account the writer’s whole literature collection.

3.1.3 The internet attempts to quote Yeats

After Wednesday’s broadcasted death at the hands of Mr. World, the gods – old and new - gather at “the center of America”, which stands “on a slight hill to the northwest of Lebanon”, in an abandoned 50’s motel (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 430). They meet at that

¹⁴ As one may attest by checking, for instance, this article in *The Observer* by Sports Afield available at <<http://bit.ly/K4e2tf>>

location since it is “neutral ground”, and so that the new gods may turn over the body of Wednesday to the old gods. During the event, there is a sort of religious ritual as all entities surround the body and each speaks at a time: a sort of secret funeral for the American Odin. As the narrative describes a silent, serious gathering of angry olds who mourn the loss of their friends and the cynical, blasé behaviour of the new gods, the grave tone of the scene is suddenly broken when one of the new gods attempts to quote a poem by William Butler Yeats.

Known as “The Technical Boy”, the entity embodies the new technologies that abound in America: cellphones, the internet, videogames. As such, his appearance is often depicted as similar to stereotypes regarding teenagers who are obsessed with the internet: fat, with an acne-ridden face and an arrogant demeanour.

Finding the whole situation funny, this new god exclaims “I’ve got it” (ibid, p. 446) and proceeds to quote the first three lines of William Butler Yeats’ “The Second Coming” (2016). Then, suddenly, the text breaks off and the narrator’s voice describes the Technical Boy’s inability to remember the rest of the piece.

In this instance, as in other few passages in the book, the quoting of a text from another source is marked by a different form: Yeats’ text appears between quotation marks and in italics, which clearly indicate that the text is being quoted in *AG*’s story, and that the words that are being read in the novel are not Gaiman’s. However, no mention is made regarding the authorship of the verses that have broken off Gaiman’s narrative, and the novel’s story progresses without explaining fully where the quotation came from or the reason why the Technical Boy chose to mutter Yeats’ words at Wednesday’s funeral.

This marks another clear textual insertion in Gaiman’s prose, which is not at all subtle: the text’s form changes abruptly and returns to simple narrative prose with equal suddenness. Despite not mentioning the author of the words the Technical Boy chose to recite at the scene, the novel allows the reader enough clues as to the foreign nature of that piece of text woven into the narrative. In fact, the first lines in Yeats’ poem bear the very notion of something that has lost its way and cannot recall its origin: the gyre is spinning out of control; the falcon cannot hear the falconer and things are falling apart (2016). The very words that are spoken by Gaiman’s character reflect his own actions: he recites a

poem, does not indicate its origins and ultimately fails to recall the whole literary piece, thus abandoning the declamation halfway through his reciting.

One may, of course, interpret the poem's relation to Gaiman's book in many ways. The textual links are clear enough: the fact that Yeats is being plainly quoted makes this one of the simplest intertextual connections to decipher in the novel. Although Yeats' name is not mentioned, most readers who speak English as a native language or who are acquainted with important works in English Literature will surely identify the interrupted stanza. Thusly, once more Gaiman's text presumes that the reader be familiar with other literary works in order to fully perceive and understand even the most obvious intertextual connection in his work.

Despite the fact that the novel's reader will undoubtedly be able to notice what Riffaterre deems the "ungrammaticalities" of the text, the ability of distinguishing how the narrative directs – or at least attempts to direct - the reading of an intertextual link between Gaiman's prose and Yeats' poetry will still be lost if the reader is completely unfamiliar with Yeats' poem. Likewise, a reader may know the words of the poem but remain wholly oblivious to the context in which the literary work was published: "The Second Coming" was written and published in the aftermath of World War I, thus explaining the overall theme of Apocalypse and "things falling apart". That the poem is entitled "The Second Coming" also suggests a hope that rebirth or renovation will take place, but in a world that has seen the terrors of worldwide bloodshed, the hope is dim and disturbed by thoughts of what the renovation could mean and bring to mankind.

Then, it is by having a close understanding of the antecedent text's context and significance that *AG*'s reader may encounter ways to interpret why the passage is being quoted in Gaiman's book. When seen in parallel with Yeats' poem, which heavily relies in allegory, the novel's plot presents an allegorical structure of its own: the reader is able to read Gaiman's text "through another" (OWENS, 1980a, p. 69), as the plot of *AG* presents the aftermath of a conflict – Wednesday's death at the hands of the new gods – and the announcement of a new war – Apocalypse in Yeats; Ragnarok in Gaiman. Supplementing these intertextual relations is the idea of rebirth, the titular "Second Coming": the disturbed, corrupted return of Christ according to Yeats' poetry; the actual rebirth of Shadow after hanging from the American World-Tree; and finally Baldr's coming back to life after Ragnarok in the Norse myths as accounted for in the Eddas.

What appears to be a simple attempt of displaying erudition on the part of the Technical Boy through a cynical reciting of a poem, which borders on appropriation, given the context of the scene described in the novel, ends up being an interrupted paraphrase that is met with silence. The declamation of the words does, however, weirdly predict the events that will unfold in Gaiman's narrative.

3.1.4 Shakespearian reference

Gaiman is no stranger to Shakespeare's works. Having garnered critical acclaim and literary prizes for his graphic novel re-creation of *A Midnight Summer's Dream*, the contemporary British writer often inserts references and punctual intertexts connecting the Bard's plays to his own authorial works of fiction. Shakespeare himself is turned into a recurrent character in the *Sandman* graphic novel series, and much of the Bard's inspiration for plays is fictitiously attributed to the help he receives from Gaiman's original god-like characters in the Sandman mythos. As such, his novel dealing with America and myths did not fail to present an intertextual reference to Shakespeare's works.

When Shadow arrives at the scene of the combat between the new gods and the old, he manages to stop the conflict by exposing the great scheme which convinced both sides to go to war. His arrival at the battlefield causes the gods to cease the fight and look at him with suspicion. He starts telling them "if any of you thinks this is a war, you're deluding yourselves" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 538), to which the old gods answer they are fighting for their survival and the new gods argue that they are fighting for their existence. This causes Shadow to utter one of the sentences that, in one way or another, serves as a sort of motto for the novel¹⁵: "This is a bad land for gods" (ibid).

Directly after Shadow says the phrase, the novel's narrator assumes a mocking tone, reflecting Shadow's own thoughts on how the gods were receiving his words at the battlefield. Thus, before the narrative allows Shadow's monologue to resume, the following critical comment is shown: "As an opening statement, it wasn't *Friends, Romans, countrymen*, but it would do" (ibid).

¹⁵ See section on America and dystopia in Chapter 1

Yet again the novel's narrator uses italics to punctually insert text from other literary works in Gaiman's prose. In this case, the fact that the word "friends" is capitalized further demonstrates that a section of text is being directly quoted by the narrator, since the sentence has not ended by the time the quote occurs and the textual insertion places only the beginning of a very famous dialogue line from one of Shakespeare's plays in the book's storytelling passage.

The terms in italics comprise the beginning of the first line spoken by Mark Antony while addressing the town's citizens in Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar* (p.73, 2005). Therefore, this instance of intertextuality in the novel is very similar to the reciting of Yeats by the Technical Boy earlier in the narrative. In both cases, the italics present enough change in the text's form in order to suggest that content from another literary work is being examined by the novel's reader. Likewise, in both instances the narrative highlights this foreign voice within the novel's prose but does not indicate from where the unaltered sections of text were extracted from. Shakespeare and Yeats are either presumed to be writers AG's readers should be acquainted with, or the language in the novel is managing to be at the same time indicative that these other works exist and should be read but denying an easy identification of these antecedent texts by not exposing clearly the authors of the words that are generally attributed to them.

It is perhaps this factor that marks Gaiman's general approach to his most unaltered instances of intertext: when AG's author's prose features sections of earlier texts made by other writers punctually inserted in it, the reference is clearly made but the reader is left with the challenge to recognize the intertext or else simply feel a sense of defamiliarization with the passage. This, when one thinks back to the concept of "ungrammaticalities" proposed by Riffaterre, does seem to be one of the writer's most prized abilities when it comes to intertextuality: his text is at once discriminatory, in that readers unfamiliar with the antecedent texts will not fully comprehend part of Gaiman's novels' prose – thus marking this as an "obligatory" intertext (RIFFATERRE, 1983, p. 22-23) – but at the same time it presents curious sections of other texts and leaves just enough information for the reader to seek these other works and read them in order to get acquainted with the literature that is projected in Gaiman's intertexts.

3.1.5 Wednesday is Odin, but Odin is not Wednesday

As this work has discussed in earlier chapters, the issue of identity is constantly brought out and deliberated upon in *AG*'s prose. The America that serves as the background to Shadow's journey is a place inhabited by ancient entities whose names are mostly forgotten, therefore, it is no surprise that the perceived identities these beings once had as deities in their respective cultures' beliefs are transformed into mundane, near-powerless humanlike individuals who live in the contemporary world of globalization and capitalism in the United States.

The American Odin thus asks Shadow to call him "Mister Wednesday" upon their first meeting inside the airplane. Odin's attempt to mask his true identity – even if in this case it is not so much an unusual alias – in Gaiman's book recalls many punctual scene in the Eddas where the Norse All-father does the same. In fact, the American Odin in *AG* not only assumes the name his week-day, but only "Emerson Borson", and other gods call him by different names, such as Czernobog's greeting him as "Votan" (p. 75). There are countless names attributed to Odin in the ancient manuscripts, as is made evident, for instance, in stanza 54 of *Grimnismol*: "Now I am Othin, Ygg I was once, Ere that did they call me Thund; Vak and Skilfing, Vofuth and Hroptatyr, Gaut and Jalk midst the gods; Ofnir and Svafnir, and all, methinks, Are names for none but me" (BELLOWS, 1923, p. 105). This recurrent action thus acts as an intertext in that Gaiman's character re-enacts the deeds of the olden god from Norse legend.

Regardless of this clear and unmistakable similarity between the two figures in the texts that depict them, it must be noted that *AG*'s narrative features two distinct characters that share the identity and name of Odin, although Mister Wednesday in America is evidently mostly referred to by his alias, not by his old, traditional name. As mentioned before, in the "Postscript" section of the novel, Shadow meets another Odin in Iceland, one that's much closer in appearance to the usual figure associated with the figure of the All-father god in Scandinavian myths. The scene is brief, and marks the end of the novel as Shadow presents the old man with Wednesday's glass eye, shows the "Lord of Asgard" some coin tricks and ultimately leaves without looking back, supposedly free from the gods' schemes (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 587-588).

During this brief encounter, the old man says he recognizes Shadow, and Shadow understands that he is talking to Odin. But upon questioning the mysterious figure on his actions in *American*, Odin denies that he has performed these actions, as the following dialogue shows: “[...] You tried to destroy so much for power. You would have sacrificed so much for yourself. You did that.’ ‘I did not do that.’ ‘Wednesday did. He was you.’ ‘He was me, yes. But I am not him’” (ibid, p. 587). This exchange clearly explains that the man Shadow talks to in Iceland is supposed to be the actual “original” ancient All-father god, and that Wednesday in America is a sort of corrupted copy version of this olden entity who wanders the streets of modern-day Iceland.

It is once more through Odin’s voice that the book’s prose contains a punctual intertextual link with another literary work. When the old man says “He was me, yes. But I am not him” (ibid), the line is reminiscent of yet another written work that deals with the troubled identity of fictional mystical beings from legends and myths. In this case, the antecedent text is from Gene Wolfe’s short-story entitled “And When They Arrive”, in which St. Nicholas explains to a child his relation to the Christmas figure of Santa Claus: “[...] and though I am not Santa Claus, Santa Claus is me” (WOLFE, 2001, p. 177).

This could be simply justified as a simply case of “aleatory” intertext (RIFFATERRE, 1983, p. 22-23), something that the reader might identify as an intertext simply due to circular memory, as the resemblance of the texts is not completely self-evident. In this particular case, the similar sentence structure and idea was kept between both texts, but Gaiman’s prose is much simpler than Wolfe’s in this case, which may throw off the hunch of readers attempting to connect both passages.

However, authorial intention aside, Gaiman has already established in interviews that the sentence Odin uses to explain his relation to Wednesday in the novel’s final scene comes from a piece of text taken from Gene Wolfe – who is a personal friend to Gaiman – that was reused in the writing of *AG* since it matched the context of Shadow’s conversation with the Lord of Asgard. As *AG*’s author himself explained,

Well, it was my favorite line, and I stole it from Gene Wolfe, in a short story where he has St. Nicholas explaining his relationship to Santa Claus. “He is me, but I am not him”. It seemed to encapsulate the relationship between my Odins very well... (GAIMAN, 2000)

It does seem very curious, then, that Gaiman openly mocks the way in which he inserts intertextual connections in his text by claiming that the line was “stolen” from his friend’s short-story. As it is made evident by analyzing the two sentences in contrast to each other, this intertext is not a clear case of inserting an unaltered version of Wolfe’s text in Gaiman’s prose: it is, instead, a clever but subtle nod to the earlier sentence in Wolfe’s short-story, where the intertextual relation is made much closer due to the meaning of the words than to the actual form of the statement. While Wolfe’s text appears at the end of a more complex and long dialogue line detailing St. Nicholas’ identity, Gaiman’s version is shorter, much more impactful and direct, although it retains the enigmatic and mysterious charade-like tone of the former.

Although in this particular case the appropriation of Wolfe’s St. Nicholas character’s line appears at such an important moment in *AG*’s narrative – almost in the last page of the novel – Gaiman is known to pay homage to other writers in similar ways by using similar intertextual devices in his text. One may look no further than the writer’s last short-story collection, which contains a short-story entitled “A Lunar Labyrinth” (GAIMAN, 2015, p. 4), a title directly derived from one of Wolfe’s most praised short-stories, “A Solar Labyrinth” (WOLFE, 1995, p. 218). Once more, as in *AG*’s intertextual link with “And When They Appear”, Gaiman has explicitly stated that his short-story’s title is indeed an adaptation of Wolfe’s text, since the short piece of prose was written “for Gene” (GAIMAN, 2015, p. XVIII).

When one studies the scenes in parallel, one may notice that in both cases the writers had the character who is supposed to be the original version of a mythic figure say the line as a way of explaining his connection to an entity that has been created only “based” on him. The popular figure of Santa Claus is as much a corrupted form of St. Nicholas as Mister Wednesday is a corrupted, completely transformed conversion of how the god Odin is usually depicted in the ancient manuscripts detailing the Norse myths from olden times. The context is thus almost the same in both scenes, only the characters at play change. In a way, this intertextual passage in Gaiman’s text is once more exemplary of the phenomenon of intertextuality itself: the antecedent texts – St. Nicholas, the Icelandic Odin – are explaining what their relation is and what kind of connection they have to the newer texts which rely upon them for their existence – Santa Claus, Mister Wednesday.

3.1.6 The Media's speech variation in the novel's prose

In another of *AG*'s important passages, Shadow is watching TV when suddenly the new gods take control of the sitcom and proceed to talk to Shadow as well as broadcast Wednesday's apparent treasonous murder during negotiations for peace (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 406). During this scene, the dialogue lines attributed to the new gods – thus, the lines that are spoken to Shadow through the TV – possess a distinct style: they are made out of Media jargon, using clichéd expressions employed by American news programs as well as phrases that could be clearly connected to the speech of politicians in American television.

Due to this peculiar way that the language shifts at this particular scene in the novel, most readers would read through the passage and be able to identify what kind of speech the new gods are emulating. This marks, thus, a form of intertextual connection the novel's prose is presenting: the text is stylized at times according to that of American mass media. As Bakhtin asserts, the stylized text echoes the intentions of the original speech from which the style is being, for the lack of a better term, emulated:

“Stylization as such must be internally consistent in the highest degree. Should contemporaneous linguistic material (a word, a form, a turn of phrase, etc.) penetrate a stylization, it becomes a flaw in the stylization, its mistake: an anachronism, a modernism.” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 363)

It must be noted, however, that the narrative does not completely shift in language in this scene. The narrator's voice preserves its note and usual speech: the stylization seems limited to the dialogue lines spoken by the new gods to Shadow. Not only that, but even their speeches are not completely transformed: instead, the stylization that takes place seems incomplete at times, as some informal slangs and even curse words are incorporated into the Media's speech, which usually takes on a more formal, direct and clear approach in television broadcasting.

Therefore, it seems obvious then that the novel's text is populated by these “anachronisms” and “mistakes” that Bakhtin has marked as being factors that would prevent a complete, perfect instance of stylized text. For if one analyzes the novel's prose,

there are obvious terms and sections of the lines that seem out of place when one thinks of mass-media speech. At one point, a character from the American sitcom “Cheers” says the following line: “Hey, *jerk-wad!* We interrupt this broadcast to show you something that’s going to make you *piss in your friggin’ pants*. You ready?” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 406). I have marked in italics the sections of the sentence where unusual speech is used in the context.

Although in other dialogue lines appearing in the same scene the instantly recognizable language from television seems unaltered, the fact that this whole part of the narrative switches between three very distinct styles of speech marks this as an instance where variation is used to further highlight the very particular aspects of each speech. Thus, it appears that the “inconsistencies” in the novel’s prose style during this passage are deliberate and organized:

“the stylizing language consciousness may not only illuminate the stylized language, but may also itself pick up a word from outside and introduce it as its own thematic and linguistic material into the stylized language. In this case we no longer have stylization, but variation.” (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 363)

As such, the technique of variation during this section of the novel’s prose serves not only to mimic the Media’s distinct form of speech in the narrative text, but also to highlight particular elements and generate “a special pattern of accents” which allows for specific “resonances” between the stylized language and the contemporaneous language with which it develops a markedly intertextual connection. In other words, Gaiman’s use of variation as a literary device in the narrative of this punctual scene in the novel sparks the creation of “a free image of another’s language, which expresses not only a stylized also a stylizing language - and art-intention” (ibid, p. 362).

Fitting to the novel’s theme of new gods whose existence humans are unaware of, the changes in style caused by variation in the prose come to an abrupt end as one of the new gods says “We now return you to your regularly scheduled programming” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 409), another staple of TV programming lines. The sitcom resumes from where it left off, the other character who had fallen asleep next to Shadow - and who did not get to

notice the disturbing change in the television's broadcast - suddenly awakens, and the story in the "human world" goes on as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place.

This intertextual passage relates to a more general phenomenon in literature: it relies on antecedent texts, and develops an intertextual link to them, but it does not relate to a punctual text from another literary work or author, instead deriving from a generally perceived style of speech. In this case, Gaiman's prose stylizes journalistic speech, as well as general entertainment television language, in order to further highlight how the new gods are turning Wednesday's murder into a sort of televised spectacle for Shadow and the old gods to watch: something that directly causes outrage in the old gods and finally convinces them to engage in war against the new gods.

The scene equally mimics America's constant speech of patriotism and makes use of the country's known attitude against terrorism: despite being written before the events of 9/11, there is already mention of fight against terrorism, as Wednesday is identified as one: "Terrorists hide behind weasel words, like 'freedom fighter.' You and I know that they are murdering scum, pure and simple. We're risking our lives to make a difference" (ibid, p. 406), says Mr. Town, one of the new gods who embodies the trope of the under-the-covers authority of entities like the CIA and FBI in America, before the live feed in the TV shows the negotiation with Wednesday, during which he is shot in the face and dies. At the end of the broadcast, as if it was the end of a journalistic report, the announcer utters a fitting tagline, given the context of the book's plot, which is once more obviously borrowed from the style of TV news' language when addressing the home viewers: "Yes, it's still God's Own Country [...] The only question is, which gods?" (ibid, p. 409).

The question of whether the use of variation actually constitutes a process of intertextuality in the novel's prose is, of course, up to debate. Affonso de Sant'Anna sees intertextuality as an umbrella-term encompassing the phenomena of parody, paraphrase, stylization – under which one could place "variation" – and appropriation (SANT'ANNA, 2008, p. 81). This works takes into account the view that any part of a textual work that contain an inherent relation to another, earlier text that is made clear through the text's form, message or perceived referentiality comprises a case of intertextual relation, and that this connection may be established through a wide array of literary techniques, such as stylization and appropriation, as well as simply quoting another text.

Likewise, the concept of what constitutes a text is also an issue to be debated – however, it is one that sparks a very heated debate, as perceptions of what the term may be applied to vary immensely. For this work, we will take into account the notion that the term text encompasses many different fields and media formats: ranging from literary texts in books to popular songs, TV shows and movies as well as general aphorisms and sayings whose authors are not known and that have come to be incorporated in general speech.

3.2 DIVINE POP CULTURE AND THE DIGITAL ERA

All throughout the narrative of *AG*, the titular new gods are presented as being products of the general notion that Americans have begun to worship different concepts, like credit cards, television, the internet and cigarettes, much more than actual religious deities are worshipped in modern society as a whole. The relatively new concept of cyber-culture and the internet is encapsulated in the figure of the Technical Boy, who often quotes and references texts originating from what is commonly deemed “pop culture”: some type of product of cultural work that has come to be well-known in a whole community, so that elements from this text permeate speech and other aspects of social life and are instantly recognizable through their obvious referentiality.

This phenomenon takes place repeatedly in *AG*, since the narrative plays with the notion of the new gods occupying the space of the old ones. Thusly, the novel’s high reliance on intertexts seemingly makes no distinction, and establishes connections not only to literary texts – the most obvious ones having been already analyzed in the first section of this chapter – but also to common “pop culture” icons and works. The latter will be now exposed and read through intertextual lenses. The instances have been selected on the basis that none of them actually clearly mentions the text with which they retain an intertextual link, since other clear references, where the title of the work or the name of the author is indicated, abound in the novel’s prose and thus the connection is already explained – or at least more clues have been given to the reader regarding how the text’s inclusion in the narrative has been made and the reasons for its insertion in the novel’s prose.

3.2.1 Timmy falls down another well

During the same scene where Wednesday's raven comes to Shadow's rescue and guides him through the woods, also where the intertextual quip regarding Poe's poem "The Raven" takes place, Shadow says yet another mocking remark regarding the whole situation: "'You want me to follow you?' asked Shadow. 'Or has Timmy fallen down another well?'" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 158). In this case, Shadow is referencing the TV series "Lassie", where the titular dog would save the lives of her human companions repeatedly. Although the catchphrase concerning Timmy falling down in a well does not relate to any known Lassie episodes, it has become synonymous with situations where humans are rescued by highly intelligent animals that manage to communicate infallibly with their owners and human companions despite not being able to talk. Despite not being based on an actual scene from the series, this idiom has become so popular to the point of being overused in popular media. It has originated due to the fact that Lassie would bark at someone in the show and the person would usually understand completely what the dog was attempting to communicate – usually that someone else was in danger. In fact, the phrase has become so popular that the actor who played Timmy in the TV series entitled his biography "Timmy's in the Well" (JACOBSON & PROVOST, 2007).

The TV series was very popular in America during the 50's and 60's, to the point of becoming something most Americans identify instantly, especially when the idiom Shadow used in the *AG*'s narrative is said. The fact that Shadow seemingly jokes about his own situation by making use of the catchphrase showcases how popular media occupies an important place in the heart of America: even when faced with hardships, Gaiman's American protagonist relies on television and its idols in order to understand the situation through parallelisms.

3.2.2 If you're going to San Francisco...

Another punctual intertextual link related to pop cultural can be spotted when Wednesday tells Shadow they are going to San Francisco next in their journey to “recruit” old, forgotten deities to aid them against the new gods. Over the phone, Wednesday jokingly exclaims: “We’re going to San Francisco. The flowers in your hair are optional” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 305). This is another clear reference to an earlier text springing from America pop culture: in this case, a song by Scott McKenzie entitled “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)”, for which, redundantly enough, the chorus is “If you’re going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair.” (PHILLIPS, 1967). The song is almost synonymous with the hippie generation in America, and achieved the status of a pop culture phenomenon, having been recorded by many other American artists, including Frank Sinatra.

Although the reference is obvious to any American readers or readers that are familiar with hugely successful 60’s pop songs, Wednesday’s allusion to Scott McKenzie’s single marks a clear change in meaning from the assertion in the song: the flowers in your hair are now optional, as the hippie trend had mostly died out by the late 90’s and early 2000’s. It is a simple joke, but one that evokes American culture and the products that it is most familiar with, and equally demands that the reader understands some of these aspects of America in order to perform a complete reading of Wednesday’s words, understanding fully what is being said and why.

Despite the fact that most readers would unmistakably identify the antecedent text to which Wednesday’s jokes bear a striking resemblance, the intertextual connection is clearly marked. It is therefore evident that on a form spectrum, Scott McKenzie’s song is being quoted or incorporated into Wednesday’s words – which, given the context of the scene in the novel, most people would instantly recognize even though the musician’s name is missing from the reference in the novel’s prose.

3.2.3 “Are you talking to me?”

As asserted earlier in this thesis, the initial idea for the writing of *AG* sprang from Gaiman’s thinking about the movie *Taxi Driver*. This is not, however, the only link this classic movie has with Gaiman’s novel. In Gaiman’s narrative, during one of the sections

of text that does not narrate Shadow's actions, the figure of a New York taxi driver who is as tired of his job as Robert De Niro's character in the film appears, and some similarities between the movie and the story told in novel may be easily perceived by readers.

The taxi driver in *AG* is depicted as a middle-eastern man who constantly wears dark sunglasses. The man gets involved with another middle-eastern man called Salim that takes the cab as a passenger, both men find solace in each other's presence and eventually it is revealed that the taxi driver is actually an ifrit, a powerful creature, sometimes described as a fire demon, that appears in *A Thousand and One Nights* and whose powers are close to that of a djinn – the ability of granting wishes.

During the dialogue between the ifrit and his passenger, he confesses to the hardships of being a taxi driver in New York City: "One of them shat of the backseat once. I had to clean it before I could take the cab back. How could he do that? I had to clean the wet shit from the seat. Is that right?" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 189). This dialogue line is very close in form and content to the monologue in *Taxi Driver* in which the protagonist, Travis Bickle, complains about a similar problem: "Each night when I return the cab to the garage, I have to clean the cum off the back seat. Some nights, I clean off the blood" (TAXI ..., 1976).

AG's narrative thus relies, once more, on a well-known American product of pop culture: Martin Scorsese's famous movie is projected in Gaiman's ifrit character through the similarities in the character's profession as well as his confession to his passenger. The filth in both texts exposes very similar images, and the overall plot of a cab driver attempting to escape his harsh reality in New York City is also echoed in the novel's narrative. Although this is clearly not a case of an obligatory intertext, it is nonetheless a text that, given the novel's context and setting, is sure to cause the reader to recall Scorsese's film upon reading this peculiar scene in *AG*.

The resolution of this section in the novel, however, is evidently completely different from that of the movie: Gaiman's character switches body with his passenger, thus escaping his own identity and being able to abandon his life as a taxi driver. In Scorsese's film, the protagonist goes on a murder-spree, attempting to kill an U.S. Senator and free a teenage prostitute with whom he became acquainted from her brothel by killing the pimp and the bouncers. He almost dies, is taken to the hospital, recovers from his

wounds and the movie ends with him driving his taxi again, thus hinting that the character has suffered some internal change, but that he has not abandoned his job.

Despite the difference between both stories' conclusions, the fact remains that *Taxi Driver* was used as a starting point for the whole narrative in Gaiman's mind, and the textual similarities between both taxi drivers' complaints regarding the filthy conditions under which they have to work obviously hint at an inherent link between the character of the ifrit in *AG* and Travis Bickle in Scorsese's movie. *Taxi Driver* is widely regarded as one of the best movies of all time, and also seen as a primary example of films that cause controversy due to its depiction of violence and revolt. It has come to occupy a central position in the minds of Americans due to that, as well as the theme of the misanthrope being regarded as the model citizen in America media, as the ending of the movie suggests. Likewise, *AG* deals with the theme of the image projected by the media and its repercussions regarding how society embraces mass-media's message and builds up its icons and enemies through that process. One may look no further than the scene where the new gods accuse Wednesday of being a terrorist and broadcast his death on TV while using a discourse of the need to protect the country in order to justify the assassination.

3.2.4 Printing the legend

Another intertext that relies on American movies may be found when Wednesday says "if the truth isn't big enough, you print the legend" (*AG*, p 360). The statement is said in reference to the American media and how some newspapers and news shows tend to rely more on exaggeration than on actual fact. The sentence, however, is likely derived from an American movie where a journalist states that "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend" (*THE MAN ...*, 1962). The line comes from the classic American western movie *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, and its meaning is exactly the same in the movie as it is the novel – which marks it as a case of paraphrase: mostly, that American press does not really serve the needs of the people by conveying true information. Instead, the press is a business like any other and it requires steady sales in order to survive, therefore, it prints "legends", illusions, in order to exaggerate the truth and attract more readers (or, in television's case, viewers).

This short intertext is punctually inserted in a passage where Wednesday and Shadow are discussing the news after Shadow points out the current date in a newspaper. Wednesday starts pointing out the “fakelore” of Johnny Chapman and the popular legendary figure in American folklore of Johnny Appleseed¹⁶. The American Odin ends his monologue with “This country needs its legends. And even the legends don’t believe it anymore” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 360), which encapsulates some of the novel’s most central themes: the changing nature of what constitutes a legend, the advent of the new “reality-show” culture in America and the general decay and oblivion to which the old gods and legends that inhabit the country are subject to in the novel’s phantasmatic depiction of America, as the entities that basically fed on faith and belief have no faith or belief of their own anymore.

3.2.5 Eating strawberries

Whilst hiding in the town of Lakeside under the name “Mike Ainsel”, an old acquaintance of Shadow whom the new gods had visited under the guise of government agents looking for a murderer sees him and immediately accuses him of being a criminal. Shadow is taken to jail shortly thereafter, but before he is escorted out of the place, his female friend Sam kisses him on the lips with the intent of demonstrating to Lakeside’s other citizens that she trusted Shadow and supported him.

The implied voice in the novel during this scene tells the reader that Shadow, while kissing Sam, remembers a story he read during his childhood. The tale is quickly narrated in the book:

“[...] the story of a traveler who had slipped down a cliff, with man-eating tigers above him and a lethal fall below him, who managed to stop his fall halfway down the side of the cliff, holding on for dear life. There was a clump of strawberries beside him, and certain death above him and below. *What should he do?* went the question.

And the replay was, *Eat the strawberries.*” (ibid, p. 398)

¹⁶ See chapter 1 for some background on this American fakelore

This short interruption in the narrative of the scene that's taking place in AG's story in order to explain Shadow's memories serves to illustrate how the character feels in the moment: he realizes that he should enjoy the moment, for his future does not seem pleasant at all. However, this is done so by retelling an old Buddhist parable, once more, without indicating where the text came from, merely resorting to letting the reader know that Shadow had read the story once, long ago. Although the antecedent text – in Genette's terminology, the hypotext – in this case cannot be traced back to a single work, the parable is well-known and retold in countless books dealing with Zen-Buddhism's teachings¹⁷. It seems clear that, since this intertext relies on an earlier text that has come to occupy a mystical yet popular unconscious place in the mind of the most esoteric or spiritualized Americans, it should be seen as an example of paraphrase – the narrator is merely retelling the story, with no alteration whatsoever – that fit the scene in the novel and that supplemented the plot's recurrent theme of myth and spiritual belief in legends and folktales.

3.2.6 The Wizard of Oz

The Technical Boy, a character whose appearances are not all that recurrent in the novel but who still manages to make an admirable amount of intertextual references whenever he is present, upon arriving at the agreed “center of America”, where the new gods deliver Wednesday's body to the old gods, paraphrases a popular sentence from the 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz*.

The eerie location where the gods agree to meet due to its quality of being “neutral ground” causes the Boy to say “Somehow, Toto, [...] I don't believe we're in Kansas anymore” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 431). This is a direct reference to the following famous line in the movie: “Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore” (THE WIZARD ..., 1939), an almost unaltered sentence which is clearly meant to evoke the movie in the minds of readers of the novel.

¹⁷ For instance, Arnie Kozak's *The Everything Essential Buddhism Book: A Guide to the Fundamental Beliefs and Traditions of Buddhism, Past and Present* as well as *Living this moment of purity* by Zhēn Fó Zōng master, Sheng-yen Lu, and Brendan Manning's *The Raggamuffin Gospel*.

This instance of intertextuality once more marks the new god's reliance on movies and pop culture phenomena in order to "read" America's reality. This is especially true in the case of the Technical Boy character, whose allusions are constant and often deal with American cultural products that have come to be well-known throughout the country and most of the Western world. Yet this intertext does require that the reader be familiar with the line, as there is no character named "Toto" in the story of *AG*. Despite the fact that, during the passage, the gods are clearly depicted as actually being inside the state of Kansas, there is no clue as to why the Technical Boy would state that it does not seem like they are in the state anymore. The reader that is unfamiliar with the movie would certainly spot this "ungrammaticality" and understand that the location is some sort of mystical place, but would not be able to completely determine the reason for the character's unusual dialogue line during the passage in the novel. Other than the fact that the Technical Boy seems to speak only in punctual intertexts related to American pop culture, there is no clear indication that the statement has been inserted in the novel's prose as a quotation of another work.

3.2.7 Casablanca

In another scene that is also connected to Shadow's relationship to Sam, once more an intertextual link is made in a sentence that bears a striking resemblance to a very well-known dialogue line from the movie *Casablanca*. Near the novel's end, when Shadow sees Sam walking down the street beside another girl, he thinks back of when they first met, in Peru, Illinois (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 163), as he realizes that she is not really attracted to him.

Shadow, upon seeing Sam with the other girl who is supposedly her girlfriend, mutters to himself "What the hell. We'll always have Peru" (*ibid*, p. 578) before rapidly handing her the flowers he intended to give her and then running back to his car to resume his journey. This is, of course, a slightly transformation version of the line "'We'll always have Paris" (*CASABLANCA*, 1943), which is said at a crucial point during *Casablanca's* plot with a similar meaning of a bittersweet farewell to a loved one.

Even phonetically the sentence recalls the antecedent text in Curtiz's movie, since "Paris" and "Peru" are both short words beginning with the same letter. Surely enough, the

effect is comical when the novel's protagonist mumbles the statement to himself, but the intertextual link is evidently inserted in his line, and most readers will identify this due to the fact that Casablanca's famous sentence has been parodied and reused in many other works of fiction with the same intent of alluding to the movie as well as to signal a situation where a undesirable goodbye is taking place.

3.2.8 Lady Liberty and the French Revolution

Early in the narrative, Wednesday quotes a statement that is widely attributed to French Revolutionary Comte de Mirabeau while discussing Lady Liberty's status as a symbol of America, a figure that, according to him, is, "like so many of the gods that Americans hold dear, a foreigner. In this case, a Frenchwoman" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 104). He details the irony in the French gift to America of clothed lady as the symbol for liberty, and proceeds to say "Liberty [...] is a bitch who must bedded on a mattress of corpses" (ibid, p. 105). When Shadow seems surprised at Wednesday's statement, the old god explains: "Quoting [...] Quoting someone French." (ibid). Indeed, in this case Wednesday is paraphrasing – although not necessarily quoting, as there are some changes to the sentence – Comte de Mirebeau's famous sentence "*la liberté n'a pour lit que des matelas de cadavres*" (MANUEL, 1792, p. xlij).

In fact, this appropriation of the earlier sentence in the novel marks the second time Gaiman has used this sentence in one of his works. It appears as well in Gaiman's "Thermidor" story (GAIMAN, 2011, p. 46) where Louis-Antoine de St. Just says the same sentence. Therefore, one could possibly argue that Wednesday might be referring to Mirabeau – in which case this would be another intertextual instance in the novel – or actually to Gaiman's fictional portrayal of Louis-Antoine de St. Just in the Sandman series, which would make this another case of intratextuality as well, as the author is referencing his own text along with the earlier know text attributed to Mirabeau.

Wednesday's use of the sentence in *AG* is obviously ironic, as he points out the fact that Lady Liberty's body was "censored" by the French in order to fit the Americans' more puritanical nature, thus not really matching the figure's connection to the concept of Liberty. However, the intertextual statement also carries a very gruesome and bloody

meaning, which fits Wednesday's secret plot in the novel, since his goal is to ultimately reach liberty through bloodshed and war between the old gods and the new. As the offensive remarks Wednesday offers to Lady Liberty continue in the punctual scene where the "quote" is made, readers can only understand fully how close the words that Wednesday borrows from Comte de Mirabeau once they realize what his true ambitions are.

3.2.9 Madonna and the Bible

As the new gods intensify their attacks against the old gods, Bilquis, the Queen of Sheba, is hunted down by the Technical Boy and murdered by him. During this scene, which is narrated in one of the novel's interludes, two songs from pop culture are clearly referenced and alluded to, but there is also a clear connection with an antecedent text from the Bible.

Bilquis walks down the street as the Technical Boy watches, preparing to approach her with his car and offer to hire her as a prostitute. The narrator tells the reader that the Queen of Sheba quietly whispers to herself as she walks: "*I will rise now and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek the one I love*" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 374). She continues whispering, saying: "*By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth. Let him kiss me with the kisses from his mouth. My beloved is mine and I am his*" (ibid). This is Bilquis' quoting directly the Song of Solomon from the Bible (Song of Solomon 3:2), although the narrator makes no reference to where these words came from. Once more, the only clue the text gives the reader regarding the foreign nature of the text to Gaiman's narrative is the fact that Bilquis' mumbling is in italics, which is frequently used in the novel to highlight text that has been inserted into the narrative from some other work – even if the antecedent text is not properly mentioned in Gaiman's prose, as in this case. Bilquis, after realizing that the Technical Boy has come for her life, she once more recites part of the Song of Solomon, "*I am black but comely, [...] I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love*" (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 378), in an attempt to save herself.

However, this is not the only intertextual connection the text in this section of the novel has. The Song of Solomon has been also used by pop singer Sinead O'Connor in a song entitled *Dark I Am Yet Lovely* (O'CONNOR, 2007) – the title of which is taken directly from the text in the Bible. Although the intertextual connection this passage has to O'Connor's song seems very fitting, it must be noted that the song was released after the book, so this is merely an example of an aleatory intertextual link that the reader might perceive during this scene. This fact, however, makes it even more ironic, then, that the Technical Boy speaks to Bilquis using slightly altered lines from Madonna's song *Material Girl*, hinting at his knowledge about her true identity as well as her inability to truly exist as a normal human being. Thus, he freely transforms Madonna's chorus or "we are living in a material world and I am a material girl" (BROWN; RANS, 1984) and says to her in dialogue lines that are marked, once again, in italics in the novel's text: "*You are an immaterial girl living in a material world*" (ibid, p. 376), then "*You are an analog girl, living in a digital world*" (ibid, p. 377) and finally, after murdering Bilquis by hitting her with his car, "*You were an analog girl, [...] living in a digital world.*" (ibid, p. 379). The alteration in the text is quite noticeable and striking, as is the suggestion that the newer "song" attempts to eliminate the very existence of the earlier one.

The fact that Bilquis quotes this particular Song from the Bible seems very fitting, as the personified deity in AG's universe requires both spiritual belief and carnal worship, which echoes the meaning of the Song in the Old Testament, which celebrates love and sex as sacred aspects of human life. Likewise, the Technical Boy's use of a sort of parody of the lyrics to *Material Girl* as taunts that aim to point out the goddess' obsolescence in modern-day America is put in contrast to Bilquis' paraphrase: as Bakhtin points out, paraphrase preserves the earlier text's meaning and message, attempting to not deviate from the content that's being intertextually referenced. In parody, however, the intent is subversion – which is exactly what the Technical Boy does with Madonna's song: he uses the pop singer's words but strips them of their original context and meaning, instead transforming them in order to serve his own intentions, which generates a sort of morbid humoristic effect given the scene's setting and the murderous drive that serves as motivation for the god of internet's actions during this passage in the novel.

3.3 APPROPRIATION ARCHETYPES

The notion of archetypes has been subject to many studies. The concept has been used to analyze works of prose through archetypal literary criticism, a critical theory that sparked from other academic fields, such as social anthropology and psychoanalysis. This theory has suffered many critiques in that it seemingly attempts to categorize works of literature according to their genres and thus analyzes the archetypes in each work based on their architexts. Although archetypal literary criticism focuses primarily in recurring images and myths, the need to apply these concepts to all characters and scene in literature renders this method self-referential and bound within its own pre-conceived notions.

Taking into account the fact that the concept of archetype may be understood differently according to the writer that is discussing the topic, this work will abide by the definition of Carl Jung, for whom archetypes are comprised of forms that inhabit the human unconscious predisposition of linking primordial images to “decipher” certain figures and ideas. In this way, “the archetype in itself is empty and purely formal, nothing but a *facultas praeformandi*, a possibility of representation which is given *a priori*. The representations themselves are not inherited, only the forms” (JUNG, 2005, p. 12-13).

As a final attempt of linking Gaiman’s recurrent use of myths and semi-familiar forms that seem to echo a preconceived, primordial element that inhabits the human unconscious, this work will establish some connections between two of the most well-known archetypes as detailed by Jung to Gaiman’s crystalized image of some of AG’s characters and mentioned myths. It must once more be explained, however, that the characters themselves, the figures, are not the archetypes: instead, the archetypes, according to Jung’s definition, only exist in the moment before they are concretely manifest, thus acquiring a specific appearance in the novel’s prose (ibid, p. 13). The fact that these immaterial forms are given shape through myth - or, in Gaiman’s case, prose - turns them into a recurrent text in many works of literature: thus, in this particular case, the term “appropriation archetypes” seems relevant, as the figures and images that have already been built upon the archetypes in earlier texts are appropriated by Gaiman - inserted into his own text, displaced, subverted and then renewed - and thus recreated -

once more by making use of their own archetypes, whose aspects and attributes are transformed, corrupted, and sometimes even erased in Gaiman's novel.

3.3.1 The Mother Archetype

Of this archetype, Jung postulates that "Many things arousing devotion or feelings of awe [...] can be mother-symbols" (ibid, p. 14-15) and that "the archetype is often associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness" (ibid). He also explains that, due the unconscious linking of the mother figure to the idea of protection, "the magic circle and mandala can be a form of mother archetype" (ibid).

If one associates the mother archetype to elements in the prose of *AG*, Shadow's interactions with female characters often spring from the mother archetype: Zorya Polunochnaya gives him a silver coin that serves as an amulet of protection, and Shadow's gift of Sweeneys's golden coin to his dead wife's grave causes her corpse to become animated once again, as she follows Shadow in his journey attempting to always help and protect him.

Jung's descriptions of the general formal aspects of the mother archetype subscribe to many – if not all - of *AG*'s female characters: the ambivalent aspect of the mother archetypes, according to the psychiatrist's text, may be observed in the mythological figure of the Norns¹⁸, Bilquis' ability to seduce men and consume them with her female parts during the act of sex likewise abides to the terrible side of the attributes of the mother archetype.

But perhaps the character in Gaiman's novel that is most closely related to the mother archetype as described by Jung is fairly obvious: Shadow's own mother. The character is very briefly mentioned, only appearing when the narrator tells of Shadow's memories or during the protagonist's self-sacrifice to Wednesday when he hangs from the World-Tree, during which he has visions of the past and sees his mother being seduced by Wednesday. Overall, it seems these memories are deeply hidden inside Shadow, who does not mention his mother in conversation with other characters during the novel's narrative and, as is made evident during the hallucinatory passage where he hangs from the tree, has

¹⁸ Whose appearance in Gaiman's novel has been discussed in chapter 2 of this work.

complex feelings of regret and guilt regarding his mother early death from lymphoma, since he remembers sitting next to her at the hospital reading a large novel while she slowly died (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 473).

The other character from the novel that seems to possess many attributes from the mother archetype is Easter, or Eostre. She is described by Gaiman as a curvaceous, attractive woman who embodies the concept of Easter: her very existence linked to the symbols that are associated with fertility: the egg, the hare (ibid, p. 307). It is her who manages to prevent Shadow's death when he hung from the tree, being able to resurrect him, in a ways – fittingly enough, given her name and the fact that the scene very easily evokes not only Odin's self-sacrifice, but also Jesus' crucifixion and return from the dead.

The novel's description of Easter instantly links her to the idea of lust – Shadow blushes when he sees her for the first time and is completely unable to form words when he attempts to speak to her - and yet is very close to that of a mother, in that this character's personality seems to exhale comfort and peace. Even the scene where she brings Shadow back from the dead is very reminiscent of the image of a loving mother awakening her child: "She kissed his cheek and his forehead. 'Come on', she said. 'Time to get up. It's all happening. You don't want to miss it.'" (ibid, p. 517) although the entire description of the scene also reminds one of more mature, sensual gestures and actions, as she presses her hand against Shadow's chest and kisses him on the mouth.

3.3.2 The Trickster Archetype

The character of Loki is usually seen as a crystallization of the concept of the trickster figure, so *AG*'s version of him in the character of Low-key – and Mr. World – seems to subscribe to the same archetype's attributes. The trickster motifs which can be clearly seen in the figure of Loki in the Eddas as well as in *AG* shares most of the same characteristics that Jung cites to describe Mercurius: "his fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as a shape-shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of tortures" (JUNG, 2005, p. 160).

However, *AG*'s prose ability of deviating from its earlier text seems to transform yet another character into one that sparks from the trickster figure: Wednesday himself is a

grafter, a con-man in Gaiman's novel, which leaves him much closer to the figure of the trickster than to that of the powerful god who rules over all others. The fact that the whole war between the titular American gods occurs simply due to Wednesday's and Loki's cunning markedly subverts the idea of Odin as the Eddas depict the All-father god, who in one of the ancient poems asks a soothsayer on the meaning of the bad dreams his son Baldr is having. This is nothing akin to Wednesday in *AG*, who plans to sacrifice Baldr – Shadow – in order to preserve his own life: he aims to tyrannically seize Baldr's rightful place as the surviving god who leads the remaining Aesir after Ragnarok. And his plan consists of tricking all other gods – old and new – in order to reach his ambitions.

In this way, Low-key in *AG* seems like a mere cheap imitation of Loki from Norse legend. In Gaiman's book, the American Loki wishes to stab Shadow with the mistletoe stick, much like in the Norse legends Loki causes Baldr to be hit by an arrow of mistletoe cast by a blind god. The major change in the character may be seen as merely the fact that he has allied himself to Odin, which is not the case at all in the legends, since Loki is one of the Aesir's antagonists during the events of Ragnarok.

But the trickster archetype is not limited to the Norse gods in Gaiman's book. Likewise, one of the most important allies to Wednesday, who helps him throughout the narrative but never knew of the secret plans the Norse gods had in mind, is Mister Nancy, the personification of the African folk figure of Anansi. This god is also generally seen as a trickster god, something which can be attested much further when one reads Gaiman's following novel, *Anansi Boys*, where the conflict between Anansi, the giant spider, and the Tiger are more thoroughly explained and developed. In *AG*, Anansi is seen as deceptive and sly, but seems honest at heart and very helpful, as well as benevolent. He does not seem to approve the chaotic conflict into which Wednesday and Loki had thrown all other gods, and instead fulfils the role of a friend and familiar face for Shadow in many scenes during the book.

However, regarding how easily Wednesday and Loki's manipulation of all other characters occur in *AG*'s story and Mister Nancy's lack of similarities with the general attributes one links to the trickster figure, this could partially be explained due to *AG*'s theme of god-like entities attempting to live as humans and eventually forgetting their own origins, personalities and identities. As Jung explains,

The so-called civilized man has forgotten the trickster. He remembers him only figuratively and metaphorically, when, irritated by his own ineptitude, he speaks of fate playing tricks on him or of things being bewitched. He never suspects that his own hidden and apparently harmless shadow had qualities whose dangerousness exceeds his wildest dreams. As soon as people get together in masses and submerge the individual, the shadow is mobilized, and, as history shows, may even be personified and incarnated.” (JUNG, 2005, p. 173)

These words also speak volumes on the need of others in order for the figure of the trickster to come into being. There can be no trickster if there are no others to trick. And Wednesday and Low-key seize the opportunity to trick all other gods, but to do so they must gather them, unite them against a common enemy. Thus the whole plot of *AG* depends very heavily on the trickster archetype, to the point where the nature of both Wednesday and Low-key as tricksters becomes a central and essential factor for Shadow to embark on his journey and ultimately serve the deceivers’ objectives even if unknowingly.

CONCLUSION

Now the war has been deterred, the storm that we all knew was coming has finally passed and the hidden truth has been exposed. What now? As humans, “We just keep going anyhow. It’s what we do” (GAIMAN, 2002, p. 539). But what of the displaced gods, what of the foreign voices with which Gaiman’s narrative so interacts?

All throughout its own journey, by creating its own path, this work has indicated possible connections and intertextual elements that are integrated and interweaved within the novel’s prose. Gaiman’s use of literary techniques and textual phenomena such as parody, appropriation, allegory, allusion, paraphrase, stylization and adaptation has been analyzed by means of an intertextual reading of the novel, and the workings of the most evident insertions of texts springing from works that antecede the novel’s publication have been exposed as clearly as it was found possible. I will now propose what this work’s intertextual reading approach indicates regarding the significance and importance of these phenomena in *AG*, how these aspects of the novel are essential to the book’s overall theme, plot and subtle critical analysis of America and its myths.

Intertextuality, as it has been discussed earlier in this work, is a topic that sparks countless debates and which has been defined as conflicting notions by various authors. The fact that this term has been freely used to mean texts from different authors and works which bear some kind of relation or connection to each other in these pages does not aim to embed the term with a final definition, and has instead served as an encapsulating umbrella under which one may place textual phenomena which very evidently populate Gaiman’s whole novel, if not his literary production in its entirety.

That being sufficiently clarified, the astounding amount of cases where such intertextual connections can be spotted in *AG* as well as the recurring motif of discussing what comprises “American” and what qualifies as foreign or belonging to the realm of outsiders – i.e. the “backstage” - therefore prove that this literary aspect is central to the novel’s prose. It also overlaps with the book’s very theme and plot: the fact that the

narrative questions not only the notion of “gods” but also the meaning of “America” clearly demonstrates that the work is preoccupied with issues of identity – or, more boldly put, what is usually perceived as identity. The story, when one takes into account the many dialogues which take place between characters, as well as Shadow’s own character development and even narrative sections, argues that identity is comprised of a multitude of “foreign” elements - as the novel’s prose constant reliance on exterior speeches and voices repeatedly shows - whose conflux generates an ever-changing, impossible to crystalize idea, although this concept is generally simplified and given the name “identity” when one attributes to it pre-selected attributes and personality traces. In this way, identity in *AG* is similar to Jung’s concept of an archetype – another notion with which the novel interacts constantly. The many possibilities of representation of what is commonly perceived as the “American” identity blur with the various specific forms under which this identity may appear. It is not by chance that emblematic figures which are deeply linked to American culture are turned into an amalgam: each representation of an incomplete idea may be read as something different depending on the reader’s own unique repertoire. An evident example is demonstrated in the novel’s famous scene where Wednesday’s raven is mockingly transformed into the titular raven from Poe’s famous poem¹⁹. Shadow’s quip showcases another possible reading and exemplifies how one’s own code may serve to decipher the same text in multiple ways – or at least in ways that differ from other people’s reading.

Likewise, the triumph of the aspects of movement and change in the novel – Shadow’s last action in the book is to keep on walking (p. 588) and the short-stories Gaiman has published after *AG* which feature this character as the protagonist are always based upon the idea that Shadow is still traveling outside of the United States, since one takes place in Scotland (2007, p. 369) and another in Wales (2015, p. 265) - therefore present a constant juxtaposition to the idea of place and a defined national identity. The attempt of explaining peoples and cultures by their countries is defied by the own peoples’ ability to navigate to other areas, bringing their identities – and their own gods - with them: “Nothing is set in stone and although this may appear frightening, it can also be empowering if we choose to believe--there is after all a real place, backstage, which we can briefly experience--and keep on walking” (BLOMQVIST, 2012, p. 26).

¹⁹ See p. 80 of this thesis.

While the novel's relation to the discussion of identity and its connection to myths have been analyzed in various academic studies, the fact that the novel achieves the ability to comment on these topics not only on a shallow, explicit textual base, but also via its own form, through its prose, has never been further analyzed. This is the main point to which this work subscribes, the main reason that it exists: to prove that the intertexts in the novel are the factor that allows Gaiman's narrative to debate how identity is shaped through a sort of illusion: identity is created from – and is therefore closer to the concept of – myths, and stands in contrast with reality itself – which, due to its constant mutability, is generally hard to grasp and define. As such, “Gaiman presents a melding of mythology, fictional fantasy and reality and explores the mythical underpinnings of story-making. In the process he devises a refreshing contemporary mythology of his own” (SLABBERT and VILJOEN, 2006, p. 153) while at the same time using texts from works other than his own to create the mythology that is presented in *AG*.

This, however, brings to the forefront many discussions that are still up to debate, and which have not been sufficiently explored: if place generates assumptions with regards to one's personality and identity, then how does national tropes come into existence, how are those particular traits “selected” as to form the illusion of one's belonging to a distinct country? And finally, if the notion of identity is always subject to change, and provided one understands this aspect and the failed common notion of what subscribes to the role of “American”, then why is it that the concept of the outsider is something that is so present in the narrative? In whole country populated by outsiders, why does one still feel the need to belong to a particular social sphere or identify oneself as “American” – or as a “god”, in Shadow's peculiar in-between case?

There are many possible answers to the questions asked above. Keeping in line with this works intertextual reading approach, one potential explanation for the position of the outsider in America lies in Shadow's – on Wednesday's - connection to the figure of the wanderer. Odin is seen as the figure of the wanderer in various instances in the old Eddas, and both Wednesday and Shadow subscribe to this archetypal aspect as they travel around America. It is one more instance where Gaiman's text feeds on recurrent literary figures and scenes in order to reinvent them: Shadow may be seen as the adapted *flâneur* of contemporary times, the postmodern wanderer in an age where a profound loss of faith has taken hold of mankind, where technology promises that the human species can solve all its

problems, but where this potential is constantly put to the test as we face the realities of our current limitations and are left to live on in an ambience of doubt and uncertainty. The new gods are emblematic of this newfound over-reliance on technology, which is rapidly evolving to the point where the worshipped deities of today are replaced by the newer gods of tomorrow, as hardware quickly becomes obsolete over the course of a few years. *AG*, although it already tackles this issue, was actually written at a time when the internet was nowhere as omnipresent as it is today, when smartphones enable people to access the web from virtually anywhere and Virtual Reality glasses are months away from being sold to the overall public. Were the novel written in 2015, the new gods would probably have increased in number and decreased in power, being as worried with their survival as the old gods in America.

While the point addressed above may be clearly identified by any reader who read the whole novel, since the theme of travel could not be made more explicit in the book's prose, this is markedly a discussion which deals with intertextuality and that may be further explored in the future. What this work has done, and which stands in opposition to the general style of analysis of Gaiman's novel, is to endeavor and pinpoint the specific scenes in the narrative where such intertextual phenomena occur, in order to study the relations between the novel's text and possible antecedent texts – hypotexts, as Genette would have called them. Intertextuality is generally accepted as one of Gaiman's most prized literary abilities, and yet, even though it is frequently mentioned by scholars, very rarely does one attempt to indicate how these textual connections come into being, instead merely asserting the plot's reliance of ideas and characters who have been previously featured in works by other authors. Intertextuality, according to its expansive notion that has been utilized for this work, is an aspect of literature that offers many possibilities for deep, substantial studies, but which is usually relegated to being cited as one of Gaiman's qualities as a writer – and nothing more than that. But if it is indeed such an important and omnipresent aspect of Gaiman's writing, and if that cannot be denied when one verifies his prose, as I did with *AG*, then where does its importance lie in regards with Gaiman's whole literary works? I have shown what appears to be the significance of intertextuality in *AG*, but when intratexts between *AG* and Gaiman's other works overlap with intertexts, as in the case of the intertextual and intratextual connections between Gaiman's *AG*, *Neverwhere* and William Gibson's *Neuromancer* or the case where the figure of the troll

under a bridge echoes in Gaiman's *AG* and in his short-story "Troll Bridge", but also resonates with Pratchett's short-story of the same name, one begins to wonder why intertextuality plays such a big role in Gaiman's literature to the point where the webs that the author weaves between his and other writer's texts are frequently clearly visible – or made visible by Gaiman's own comments.

Perhaps one should take into account Gaiman's own words on the need to read in order to understand this repeated aspect of palpable intertextuality in his work. He is well-known as an advocate for libraries and as someone who encourages people to read and write, having on various occasions confessed given lectures and speeches on the subject: "It is obviously in my interest for people to read, for them to read fiction, for libraries and librarians to exist and help foster a love of reading and places in which reading can occur. So I'm biased as a writer. But I am much, much more biased as a reader." (GAIMAN, 2013).

As such, Gaiman's intertextual writing may be seen as a natural result of his love for reading and his will that people read fiction and become acquainted with literature. His novels often use quotes and intertextual nuances that demand that the reader be familiar with previous works of literature – what Riffaterre coined as the obligatory intertext. That being so, at least as far as Gaiman novels are concerned, the reader's ability to fully comprehend the prose is entirely dependent on his familiarity with other works of fiction. If one reads a novel without the knowledge of the earlier text with which Gaiman's prose establish an intertextual link, one may still understand the text, but will also understand that a piece of the code is missing: that Gaiman's words are directed towards another voice. And, hopefully, that will spark enough curiosity in Gaiman's reader so as to make them seek out the works that are being alluded to. At least I know that was something that happened to me: *AG* made me want to read more, to explore the "immigrant" words – and, forgive the simplistic intertext with rock music here, immigrant songs - that the novel mixed in with Gaiman's prose.

In that way, fiction works as key to communication, as a necessary code in order to comprehend not only literature. It also serves as an instrument in order to make sense of reality. On that subject, Gaiman has said:

Fiction has two uses. Firstly, it's a gateway drug to reading. [Reading] forces you

to learn new words, to think new thoughts, to keep going. To discover that reading per se is pleasurable. Once you learn that, you're on the road to reading everything. And reading is key. [...] words are more important than they ever were: we navigate the world with words, and as the world slips onto the web, we need to follow, to communicate and to comprehend what we are reading. People who cannot understand each other cannot exchange ideas, cannot communicate.”
(ibid)

Although Gaiman’s writing style is very distinct and unique, being generally very simple in itself, but occasionally switching into a very whimsical, often deemed “magical” style of prose, it is undoubtedly possible to notice when this language changes and emulates different styles of narrative. *AG* presents this variation on many occasions, as different genres clash within the narrative while transporting the reader from a determine type of speech into another. An example of this are the sections of the book where Mr. Ibis’ voice is used to “write” the story in the book, which are marked not only by a change in the novel’s general speech style, but also highlight this change through the insertion of closed-off sections of the book, which stand separate to the main core of the narrative. The multitude of voices that inhabit Gaiman’s novel thus presents another question: in a work of literature where so many factors are merged and transformed, thrown inside a sort of intertextual whirlpool, is there a place for the individual, for separate validation of existence, or is the instrumentalization of all an unstoppable phenomenon?

I would argue that despite Gaiman’s ability of bringing “immigrant” ideas and figures into his text and creating a sort of merged version of his own, individuality still plays a big role in *AG*: in fact, Shadow achieves “his own self” by the end of the narrative, and his attitude is that of not belonging to any particular group, allowing himself to roam free without denying his roots – as he confesses to all the gods that Wednesday was his father and later states that even though the old man had fooled him all along, he would still miss his company at times. In fact, there is an overall theme of validation of oneself in *AG*: not only Shadow acquires his autonomy, but the narrative, through its intertextuality and plot, reveals a deep concern with the validation of the others, as both new gods and old gods want to have their existence recognized. Shadow acts as the “in-between” persona that allows this validation of existence for both sides.

During the introduction to his short-story collection *Fragile Things*, Gaiman refers to a panel from a *Little Nemo* Sunday page where a speech balloon reads “These people ought to know who we are and tell them that we are here”. The writer liked the sentence and wanted for it to be the title of his short-story collection, in which he would compile stories written in first person with unreliable narrators telling of who they were. Although this idea never came to fruition, the sentence in the speech balloon echoes the intertextual nature of *AG*: many gods need to be acknowledged and worshipped in order to exist. Likewise, the intertexts in Gaiman’s prose acknowledge and reinvent earlier texts that gain “new worshippers” through the telling of the story in the novel. Nye, Shakespeare, Herodotus and Poe are only some of the names whose work is intertextually inserted into Gaiman’s narrative: and this fact does not nullify the antecedent text’s existence or importance: it reasserts their influence on literature and spreads an appropriated version of their words to new readers, who might later get to “know who they are and tell others that they are there”.

However, these apparently contradicting aspects of Gaiman’s novel – that its narrative is interspersed with many borrowed texts from other works but still manages to remain autonomous and validates these other texts’ existence – at times generate simplistic answers for readers who presume to understand *AG* only according to its genre. For that reason, Gaiman’s novel is often simply branded as a “fantasy novel”: a simplistic way of describing a book that, unlike many other works which abide to fantasy tropes and characteristics of fantasy prose, transcends the border between fantasy narratives, switching genres as its story unfolds, and ultimately deals with the conflict between what is deemed a fictional place and what could be called a nonfictional place. After all it’s been said and done, what space does Gaiman’s America occupy in the novel? Some locations are obviously fictitious, such as Lakeside, but in a book where the obscuring of the truth through illusion is a theme that is constantly debated and illustrated, one could argue that these spaces represent many American cities and that only some names have changed and minor aspects have been changed. However, this very question, I would argue, fails to understand what appears to be one of *AG* main points: to question the frontiers between reality and fiction: for what is “America” if not a concept that has been imagined and later projected onto a land and its inhabitants?

It is, thus, upon this question that much of *AG*'s has been built upon. The titular America is, in other words, constructed into a sort of god: the title of the novel, which generates some sort of defamiliarization due to the fact that America is generally either seen as a Christian/Semitic country, and thus would be a country where only one God would be recognized as such – as the national motto is “in God we trust”; or – most unusually - perceived as a secular country, where the notion of gods would not really fit the land. A third, and perhaps the most understandable reaction to the title would be assuming that it refers to the Native Americans' Gods – and some figures from Native American folklore are prominently featured in the novel, such as thunderbirds and Whiskey Jack. But regarding the titles, the contents of the novel seem to indicate that there is a sort of parallelism between the notion of “American” and “Gods”: and Gaiman's critical depiction of America as the setting of the book further reinforces this point. Wednesday is constantly alluding to the fact that the country has been built due to imagination, and that the definitiveness of the palpable space of America is often confused with the concept that is engrained in the mind of its inhabitants regarding what is and what is not “American”.

In tandem with this explanation of the land and how it is perceived, the many deities and mythic figures from various cultures which Gaiman inserts inside America in his novel contribute to the modern view of America as a multicultural, international point of conflux of many peoples and beliefs. The fact that the whole story is based on the idea of traveling throughout America's roads also brings to the forefront another conflicting notion when it comes to America and Americanism: the country is large, and its many highways and airports connect the various States which make up the whole. America, then, is a country of travelers, a place marked by many frontiers but which allows free movement from one location to another. How, then, can one be displaced in a country of people that encouraged to move from one place to another? How can a country of travelers whose population is largely made up of migrants define others as “outsiders”? This is yet another question which allows for many possibilities of analysis, as Gaiman's mythical “reinvention” of America as the center point of a huge conflux of cultures and beliefs from around the globe does not offer clear answers toward this. One could say that the subtle critical view of America as a country that encourages this concept of national belonging and patriotism in the novel is contrasted in the narrative with the final conclusion that one

needs merely to be oneself, acquire one's autonomy while recognizing and validating others' existence in order to be at peace with oneself.

To finally arrive at this state of autonomy, however, the novel utilizes many preconceived notions of other peoples and cultures. Mad Sweeney is a clear example of this: an Irishman depicted as a drunken violent leprechaun, he is the very personification of how Americans assume Irish people are. Gaiman's writing thus feeds on the American stereotypical image of the Irish in order to create a character that links these presuppositions with a mythical figure Irish folklore.

It is also by placing various figures containing archetypal aspects throughout Shadow's journey that Gaiman creates a panorama of how America absorbs facets and even works from other countries and adapts them to create its own "Americanized" version of the figures that sprang from archetypes. In real life, this phenomenon is very easy to verify, as basically all foreign movies that achieve success always end getting an American version: that has been the case with the Spanish horror movie "R.E.C"., which had an American version called "Quarantine"; the Japanese horror film "Ringu", that has an American version called "The Ring"; and Swedish movie "Let the Right One In", that has an US version named "Let Me In", just to name a few.

This Hollywood behavior is clearly mimicked in that *AG* produces a similar effect in the myths and figures that it borrows from other various works. The American leprechaun is tall and has a coin of gold which he loses in his first encounter with Shadow; the American Egyptian god of death is working as a mortician in a tiny town, embalming the corpses of the deceased; Odin wanders from town to town playing the altruist old man while secretly planning to murder all of the gods as a sacrifice to himself: the deviation to which all of these mythic figures have been subjected to is immense, and yet they are still perceived according to their original selves – they have simply been *adapted* in order to fit the American context.

These archetypes that have been repeatedly given form in various works of fiction - the trickster, the old wise man, the three women, etc – are thus plentiful in Gaiman's novel, but each one is featured with increased changes from its antecedent texts and molded accordingly to the current American reality. It is the level of deviation, as Sant'Anna put it, that makes these recurrent figures gain new life in the prose of *AG*, as each of them is

made unique, different - more American, in a way. Although the personalities and appearances of each of these characters mark them as unique, distinct versions from their earlier counterparts, they still appear to be dependent on their perceived identities as the entities they represent. Shadow is ultimately freed from his antecedent text, as he occupies the space between the gods and the human, although he achieves this freedom by reenacting, in a way, the same story as his corresponding figure in the Norse pantheon – Baldr.

In this way, *AG*'s intertextual nature acquires its allegoric aspect: the war that takes place between the new gods and the old is obviously reminiscent of the Norse Ragnarok, with the only "Norse" survivor being Shadow – just like in the Eddas Baldr is said to be reborn after the battle – like Shadow was reborn in the World Tree - and lead the gods. Likewise, near the end of the novel Shadow rescues the corpse of a dead girl from the trunk of a car that has fallen through the ice in a frozen lake. An allegoric reading of this scene could trace parallels between Hermod riding to Hel to save Baldr as narrated in the Prose Edda (STURLUSON, 2003, p. 50) with Shadow's risking his own life to attempt to save an innocent girl in Lakeside. Both heroes fail in their attempt: Hermod does not manage to convince Hel to free Baldr, as Loki, under the disguise of Thok the giantess, does not weep for the death of the beloved Aesir god; and Shadow manages to expose the bodies of the children that Hinzelmännchen had been secretly murdering each year in the town, as a sacrifice to himself which allowed the economy of the location to remain unaffected by the harsh realities of the early 2000's in America.

What I propose above is, of course, one of many analytical readings of a section of the novel which is aided by intertextuality and allegory. The projection of mythic recurrence is constant in *AG*, and what I aim to present with these words are the most evident intertextual readings that one may observe in Gaiman's prose. There are still many unexplored passages in the novel that offer a multitude of possibilities for further examination and intertextual investigations. It still seems to me that Gaiman's novel is usually studied through the lens of Campbell's theory of the journey of the hero: Gaiman's narrative is thus observed according to how much it subscribes to one formula, each section of the narrative demonstrating that Shadow fits the role of Campbell's figure of the epic hero. However, intertextual theory allows for more analytical possibilities, some of which are largely unexplored. Sant'Anna, Edmunds, Riffaterre, Bakhtin, Owens and

Kristeva all provide a solid theoretical ground upon which many academic examinations could spark from the reading of Gaiman's novel. It is my sincere hope that my work provides an example of how such an analysis focused upon their texts may take place.

For *AG* is brimming with content contained in Gaiman's prose – content that begs to be studied and analyzed in accordance to its connection to other texts. The fact that most of these intertextual links are not self-evident brings us to another facet of the novel's text: the obscuring of important information with secret intents, and the overall theme of misdirection of attention.

The cryptic in *AG*'s text is a key part of the narrative. To many degrees, one could ask “who are the true American Gods?” and no definite answer would be found. Likewise, the intertexts in the novel further reiterate the recurrence of cryptic messages and of the hidden nature of things. The shortcut Shadow takes with Wednesday through the “backstage” of America is iconic of this aspect: nothing is exactly what it seems, and many scenes are being enacted as if in a theater play, as the gods attempt to survive by utilizing the same means of illusion that created them in the first place.

When analyzed whilst taking into account Wednesday's final goal in the narrative, Shadow's journey through America thus subscribes to a task of mindless recruiting of supporters for a cause which ultimately segregates and generates further distinction between peoples and various social spheres in America. Under the guise of a wake-up call on the need for the old gods to know their enemies and be ready to protect themselves, Wednesday paints a picture of an unstoppable menace which must be confronted head on, and can only be defeated through war – and the way in which he manages to paint that picture is by shedding his own blood. He uses his own planned murder as a way to fuel the conflict that will strengthen him and leave him closer in power to the Odin of old.

Politically and culturally speaking, America as a country has been known to engage in various wars against other countries, and one could argue that the way in which this is justified in the international community operates through means similar to the ones Wednesday employs in *AG*. That is, America brands foreign powers whose political ideologies clash with America's as the enemy that presents a menace to American's way of life and survival as the ruling global economy, and proceeds to engage in open confrontations with those countries. These battles would then fuel America's war

economy, and the allegations of the threat that the foreign nation presents would justify the war for the populace as well as international allies to the USA.

This supposed phenomenon of the “building of the enemy” in America through projection of danger and the notion of a menace to the country’s harmony also highlights another aspect that permeates the narrative of *AG*: throughout the novel, the theme of imposed preconceptions regarding other peoples’ true nature and personality constantly misguides characters and, at times, the reader. It is not by mere coincidence that aliases are so prevalent in the narrative: Loki hides under the guise of Mr. World, Wednesday uses the name Emerson Borson while in Lakeside and Shadow assumes the identity of Mike Ainsel. In fact, even the name “Shadow” is not the character’s “real” name, instead being merely a nickname that had become so recurrent that the character’s own name is obscured. Likewise, Wednesday is a mere pseudonym for Odin, whose aliases are prominent not only in *AG* but also in the old prose texts by Snorri Sturluson and in the manuscripts detailing the ancient Norse verses on the deity.

It must be said that this masquerade, although it reinforces the novel’s recurrent topic of misdirection and cryptic text, still manages to convey hints at who each person truly is. Wednesday’s etymology comes from Odin’s day; Emerson Borson details the mythic creatures who served as fathers to Odin; Shadow hints at the character’s complex origin and role, and also illustrates the novel’s *bildungsroman* aspects, as the protagonist acquires his true sense of autonomy and identity by the end of the narrative; Mike Ainsel, likewise, reflects Shadow’s becoming his own self, finding his own place in the world; and Mr. World indicates a complete control of all the players in the game, as Loki has been secretly controlling the strings that allowed him and Wednesday to cause the incomplete reenactment of Ragnarok in the novel’s climatic moment.

As a final note on the topic of the parallels between *AG*’s plot and America’s own political postures regarding conflicts in an international setting, I must once more clarify that this is one of the possible readings that the novel offers through its prose. For, like Gaiman living in Britain when he first started writing comic book stories that took place in the USA, I remain, after all the journey that has just taken place, someone who has never visited the real, corporeal land that the novel so deeply focuses on. Gaiman used America as the setting for many of his stories when he began to write, and the place that he built in his fiction was made up of mere ideas and images that had been absorbed by him as a

reader. Likewise, my idea of America is still comprised of all the material that I have been subjected to as a reader, even though I have never set foot on the United States' soil. *AG* is one of the many texts that have added to what I mentally see and understand as America, even when it deals with the country not only as a geopolitical state, but also as a mystical gathering place for various cultures, folklores and beliefs.

AG allows for tons of different readings when it comes to its intertexts. And, while a novel published over a decade ago could have been simply forgotten with time, it appears that the future holds many possibilities of expansion when it comes to the novel's universe and characters. Not only has Gaiman hinted at the possibility of a second novel – and has written two short-stories featuring Shadow as the protagonist – but a TV series adaptation is scheduled to be shot. As of the time of me writing this, the casting decision on who will play the role of Shadow has already been made, which causes many fans of the book to be excited on how the series will attempt to perform a semiotic translation of the novel to the medium of television. There are many people who are worried that bad decisions regarding this during the forthcoming adaptation may turn a beautifully written literary work into a disastrous fantasy TV series that will not please those who read the book and cause new “readers” to regard Gaiman's work as inferior to what it really is.

These prospects, however, will offer even more possibilities of study when one takes into account a novel like *AG*, which deals with themes of adaptation - the foreign gods changing their ways in order to fit into American society – and which contains in itself many literary connections to other works – or, at the very least, offers the possibility of intertextual readings for many passages. Will the director of the *American Gods* TV series be able to mirror the novel's complexities when it comes to the intertextual links Gaiman is able to conjure with his prose? Only time will tell. For now, readers of the novel can only hope for the best. The fact that Gaiman himself is overseeing the production seems to indicate that great effort is being put into it in order to prevent a great disappointment, but the limitations of the medium to which the novel is migrating might make it impossible for some scenes to be presented to the viewers in a way that would cause them to be perceived exactly as they were in the novel. One may read the scene where Bilquis “swallows” a man during intercourse as a major example of something that will be very harsh to “translate” for the TV medium without turning the passage into

something comical or simply silly – Gaiman’s words beautifully and slowly paint this image, but television usually does not allow for such subtlety.

There appears to be some kind of mystical nature to Gaiman’s literature that a TV series might not be able to mimic. Writing in itself is still a sort of ritualistic activity, as the words that are put together to form sentences manage to conjure a vast diversity of unique images. In *AG*’s prose, this aspect of literature is doubly mystical, in that the words not only conjure images in the minds of the readers, but do so in more than one way: the war between the gods in the novel has its own unique mental landscape in the reader’s minds, but also summons the image of the ancient Norse Ragnarok for those are familiar with the Eddas or the olden Norse myths. As such, the written text – working as a code – allows for infinite invention and reinvention, and the concept of intertextuality helps us understand this.

And, in a work that deals with a concept as tricky as intertextuality, I must ask: can it be ascertained that the intertexts in *AG* are vital to the reading of the novel? Riffaterre argued that there were obligatory intertexts and aleatory intertexts, but that even the obligatory intertexts - which require that the reader takes into account the antecedent text to which a text is alluding - would not interfere on the experience of the reader since there would be a presupposition that there is an intertextual link in the passage. However, I would argue that there are some cases where the reader would not be made aware at all of the existence of this intertextual link, and might thus perform an incomplete, superficial reading of several passages of *AG*. Reading Gaiman’s novel without the previous knowledge on the many antecedent text that he prose alludes to is like visiting a historical location without knowing its history and with no guide to explain what has taken place in each location - one might assume that it is a historical place, but will still have no idea what has transpired there in the past. Therefore, I would say that there are, yes, some undeniable textual links in Gaiman’s novel, some intertexts that, if not recognized, would hinder the reader's experience with the prose in the book. *AG* offers many cases where one may identify instances like this. However, it equally showcases many texts springing from other works to its reader, providing hints as to the “foreign” nature of many texts and offering the opportunity for the most interested in understanding the novel's full meaning to seek these texts and read them according to their own contexts and boundaries.

Perhaps it's a stigma of the internet age – or the Technical Kid's age - gaining so much power over the last decades, but *AG* might alternatively be read as one the clearest examples of how we live in a hyper-connected society. As humanity continues to live with the tendency to rely more and more on the world wide web, where one website features countless links to many others, Gaiman's book demonstrated this markedly post-2000's behaviour ahead of its time - and perhaps that's the very reason the novel still reads as contemporary as it does, even when read during the latter half of the 2010's, after the events of 9/11 that changed so much about how the world perceives America and how America sees itself.

Gaiman's America might be a bad land for gods, but I hope to have made it better by examining this fantastical country from up close and attempting to explain the picture that Gaiman has so carefully painted. The windings road of this novel's America lead to many places, and some of these destinations have been elucidated with this work. I have done my best to guide readers of these words through the novel that has fascinated me for so many years now. Although we have traveled quite a bit, it's important to say that one always keeps journeying on, whether by following different paths or discovering new paths where one thought there was only one route to follow. The landscape of Gaiman's novel has certainly taught me that, and I intend to take the road with *Shadow* again and again, for as long as the novel's spell binds me, and hopefully keep finding new ways to read it as well as being led to new texts by Gaiman's prose.

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ANNEX 1

Ljothatal [List of charms] – Poetic Edda’s “Hovamol”

1. The songs I know that king’s wives know not, Nor men that are sons of men; The first is called help, and help it can bring thee, In sorrow and pain and sickness.
2. A second I know, that men shall need, Who leechcraft long to use;
3. A third I know, if great is my need, Of fetters to hold my foe; Blunt do I make mine enemy’s blade, Nor bites his sword or staff.
4. A fourth I know, if men shall fasten, Bonds on my bended legs; So great is the charm that forth I may go, The fetters spring from my feet, Broken the bonds from my hands.
5. A fifth I know, if I see from afar, An arrow fly ‘gainst the folk; It flies not so swift that I stop it not, If ever my eyes behold it.
6. A sixth I know, if harm one seeks, With a sapling’s roots to send me; The hero himself who wreaks his hate, Shall taste the ill ere I.
7. A seventh I know, If I see in flames, The hall o’er my comrades’ heads; It burns not so wide that I will not quench it, I know that song to sing.
8. An eighth I know, that is to all, Of greatest good to learn; When hatred grows among heroes’ sons, I soon can set it right.
9. A ninth I know, if need there comes, To shelter my ship on the flood; The wind I calm upon the waves, And the sea I put to sleep.
10. A tenth I know, when time I see, House-riders flying on high; So can I work that wildly they go, Showing their true shapes, Hence to their own homes.
11. An eleventh I know, if needs I must lead, To the fight my long-loved friends; I sing in the shields and in strength they go, Whole to the field of fight, Whole from the field of fight, And whole they come thence home.
12. A twelfth I know, if high on a tree, I see a hanged man swing; So do I write and color the runes, That forth he fares, And to me talks.
13. A thirteenth I know, if a thane full young, With water I sprinkle well; He shall not fall, though he fares mid the host, Nor sinks beneath the swords.
14. A fourteenth I know, if fain I would name, To men the mighty gods; All know I well of the gods and elves, Few be the fools know this.
15. A fifteenth I know, that before the doors, Of Delling sang Thjothrörir the dwarf; Might he sang for the gods, and glory for elves, And wisdom for Hroptatyr wise.
16. A sixteenth I know, if I seek delight, To win from a maiden wise; The mind I turn of the white-armed maid, And thus change all her thoughts.
17. A seventeenth I know, so that seldom shall go, A maiden young from me; Long these songs thou shalt, Loddafafir, Seek in vain to sing; Yet good it were if thou mightest get them, Well, if thou wouldst them learn, Help, if thou hadst them.
18. An eighteenth I know, that ne’er will I tell, To maiden or wife of man, The best is what none but one’s self doth know, So comes the end of songs, Save only to her in whose arms I lie, Or who else my sister is.

ANNEX 2

Mr. Wednesday's Monologue – Neil Gaiman's American Gods

Wednesday said nothing for long enough that Shadow started to wonder if he had heard the question, or if he had, possibly, fallen asleep with his eyes open. Then he said, staring ahead of him as he talked:

1. "I know a charm that can cure pain and sickness, and lift the grief from the heart of the grieving.

2. "I know a charm that will heal with a touch.

3. "I know a charm that will turn aside the weapons of an enemy.

4. "I know another charm to free myself from all bonds and locks.

5. "A fifth charm: I can catch an arrow in flight and take no harm from it."

His words were quiet, urgent. Gone was the hectoring tone, gone was the grin.

Wednesday spoke as if he were reciting the words of a religious ritual, or remembering something dark and painful.

6. "A sixth: spells sent to hurt me will hurt only the sender.

7. "A seventh charm I know: I can quench a fire simply by looking at it.

8. "An eighth: if any man hates me, I can win his friendship.

9. "A ninth: I can sing the wind to sleep and calm a storm for long enough to bring a ship to shore.

"Those were the first nine charms I learned. Nine nights I hung on the bare tree, my side pierced with a spear's point. I swayed and blew in the cold winds and the hot winds, without food, without water, a sacrifice of myself to myself, and the worlds opened to me.

10. "For a tenth charm, I learned to dispel witches, to spin them around in the skies so that they will never find their way back to their own doors again.

11. "An eleventh: if I sing it when a battle rages it can take warriors through the tumult unscathed and unhurt, and bring them safely back to their hearths and their homes.

12. "A twelfth charm I know: if I see a hanged man I can bring him down from the gallows to whisper to us all he remembers.

13. "A thirteenth: if I sprinkle water on a child's head, that child will not fall in battle.

14. "A fourteenth: I know the names of all the gods. Every damned one of them.

15. "A fifteenth: I have a dream of power, of glory, and of wisdom, and I can make people believe my dreams."

His voice was so low now that Shadow had to strain to hear it over the plane's engine noise.

16. "A sixteenth charm I know: if I need love I can turn the mind and heart of any woman.

17. "A seventeenth, that no woman I want will ever want another.

18. "And I know an eighteenth charm, and that charm is the greatest of all, and that charm I can tell to no man, for a secret that no one knows but you is the most powerful secret there can ever be."

He sighed, and then stopped talking.

Shadow could feel his skin crawl. It was as if he had just seen a door open to another place, somewhere worlds away where hanged men blew in the wind at every crossroads, where witches shrieked overhead in the night.

ANNEX 3



Picture of Delirium , taken from Sandman, Brief Lives.

ANNEX 4

Glossary of Gods in *AG* and their intertextual connections

Character in American Gods	Intertextual God / Deity / Figure	Mythology
Shadow	Baldr	Norse
Mr. Wednesday	Odin	Norse
Low Key	Loki	Norse
Mr. Nancy	Anansi	West-African Folk-tales
Czernobog // Bielebog	Czernobog // Bielebog	Slav
The Zoryas	The Zoryas	Slav
Mr. Ibis	Thoth	Egyptian
Mr. Jacquel	Anubis	Egyptian
Horus	Horus	Egyptian
Bast	Bast	Egyptian
Bilquis	Queen of Sheba / Bilkis	Arabian
Nameless Taxi Driver	Ifrit	Arabian
Mad Sweeney	Buile Shuibhne	Irish
Easter	Eostre	German
Whiskey Jack	Wisakedjak	Native-American
John Chapman	John Appleseed	American Folk-tale
Unnamed girl in San Francisco	Delirium	Gaiman's <i>The Sandman</i>
Hinzelmann	Kobold	German