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Neil Gaiman's The Sandman : From interpretive narrative to postmodern myth

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the proposal that Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* is, as Gaiman describes it in its epilogue, a "story about stories" (*The Wake*, epilogue). Its particular focus will be on Gaiman's conception of humans as essentially narrative beings, who use narratives to interact with the world around them, to impose order on information, to provide interpretive paradigms, and as models for their behaviour.

Gaiman has not only explored this idea, but used the fantastic mode to create a universe in which these types of 'interpretive narratives' directly affect physical reality.

Gaiman's ideas about the way narratives work have been heavily influenced by both postmodern and Jungian legacies. The thesis will propose that the dynamic between postmodern intertextuality and the Jungian idea of the archetypes is a driving force in *The Sandman*. While Gaiman embraces a playful, *bricoleur* intertextuality, he also retains a belief that humans can invoke the archetypes to access profound meanings, which transcend the particularities of their expression in any individual instances. Under these influences, Gaiman concieves of a postmodern, Jungian approach to mythology.

We will see that Gaiman's interactions with narrative, postmodernism and Jungianism eventually lead him to formulate an ethic for the contemporary world, and that he encodes it in his own mythology. This ethic both empowers individuals and demands that they take responsibility for their power. It also focuses on how the individual can productively and tolerantly interact with a heteroglossic world. Instead of a fact to be sought out, meaning becomes a process of active creation.