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

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Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*: Narrating the Contemporary World

By

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DECLARATION STATEMENT

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work and that all sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged. It is being submitted for the Master of Arts degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg and it has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university in order to obtain an academic qualification.

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Taryn Sara Skikne

February 2007

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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.

Introduction

At the time of its publication between 1988 and 1996, Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* sequence was one of a new breed of comic book. Following in the pioneering footsteps of Alan Moore's *Watchmen* and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*,[1] *The Sandman* continued to expand the range of the graphic narrative format beyond pulp serials. While Moore and Miller's work had re-imagined the superhero genre, *The Sandman* proved that 'graphic novels' could encompass serious, imaginatively expansive and innovative works of more flexible, far-ranging and intellectual fantasy.

As serious critical interest in the meaning and poetics of both popular cultural forms and the fantastic expands, the graphic novel gains importance as a format vigorously producing works ranging from the archetypical to the iconoclastic. *The Sandman* sequence itself can be characterised by its iconoclastic transformation of mythic and generic archetypes: Gaiman has produced a work simultaneously erudite, allusive and creatively original.

Gaiman's progress towards writing *The Sandman* began in 1987, when he was hired by comic corporation DC. At the time, DC were recruiting artists and writers to base new serials around characters that had been popular earlier in the century. Though Gaiman had some sense of the kind of serial he wanted to write – multi-facted, open-ended and flexible, a showcase for a range of stories rather than a sequence of episodes featuring the same

[1] This contextual information is from "The Sandman Companion" by Hy Bender. A note on this reference: In 1999, Hy Bender wrote and published *The Sandman Companion*, which alternates between overviews and analyses of the text, interviews with various contributors, and an extended interview with Gaiman himself, which each story in the cycle as well as an assortment of background information. In this thesis, all of Gaiman's direct quotes are drawn from this very informative guide.

character and topic – it was to take some time before he found the right project with which to achieve this.

Gaiman's initial proposal was centred around a mysterious and nomadic hero called the Phantom Stranger, but DC had already assigned the character to a different writer. However, his work on the subsequent, more traditionally 'super-heroic' *Black Orchid* only reinforced his desire for flexibility. In the process of choosing a project to follow *Black Orchid*, Gaiman's editor revisted his earlier, casual suggestion that he create a new incarnation of the Sandman – the third, reinventing a superhero of the 1970s who chased criminals into dreams, and who in turn had reincarnated a masked detective armed with sleep gas out of the 1930s. Attracted by the possibilities a serial about dreaming offered, Gaiman accepted.[2]

Characteristically, Gaiman completely reinvented the character, removing the superheroic aspect completely and casting his Sandman as a god-like being, the anthropomorphic personification of dreams. Notably, too, Gaiman expanded both the role and scope of the series' trope of 'dreams'. Under the banner of 'dream' Gaiman's *Sandman* explores the nature and potential not only of sleeper's dreams, but of myths, symbols, traditions, folktales, literature, history and even the 'narratives' of subjective opinion, all mediated by, or contextualised against, the trope of storytelling. For example, when sleeper's dreams do arise in the text Gaiman prefers to have characters or narrators recount them on waking, and by imposing a narrative order on the experience present, rather than a dream, a story about a dream. While dreaming had simply functioned as a plot device for previous incarnations of the Sandman, Gaiman transformed story-telling into the

[2] This paragraph collates historical material found in "The Sandman Companion" by Hy Bender.

core of his series, a core theme replacing the main character as the centre about which, in comic books, all other elements traditionally coalesce.

The issue at hand is the history, nature and potential of the non-rational, the subconscious and the imaginative, as these are unified, clarified and explored through narrative: The Sandman is "prince of all those symbols and shapes that mean other than they seem" (*BL,* 7:9)[3], but he is more specifically 'Lord Shaper', with that title's connotations of both creativity and ordering, and he refers to himself as "Prince of Stories" (*WE,* 6:36). Ultimately, story-telling as theme supersedes the idea of story as character, allowing Gaiman to incorporate episodes into the cycle in which the Sandman does not appear at all.

Primarily, then, *The Sandman* sequence is, as Gaiman summarises it in his endnote to the series, "a story about stories" (*Wake,* epilogue). Not only is this trope explicitly thematised, but Gaiman draws on both a diverse heritage of story-telling and, I will argue, his own implicit theories about the nature of story to determine details of plot, setting and character.

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[3] Referencing quotations from *The Sandman* is problematic, since the text comprises about two thousand pages in ten volumes, with no regular numbering system. Originally published in serial form, what were originally numbered issues of the comic have become chapters in each volume, but the original issue numbers are not indicated. To complicate things further, some material was originally presented as a 'special' ('Song of Orpheus') or anthologised material ('Fear of Flying') outside the regular procession of numbered issues. Predominantly, no indication of page number within the volume is given. However, the page numbers within each issue have sometimes been retained as part of the original graphics.

Therefore, to make it as easy as possible to trace the quotes I use, I find it best to indicate the abridged volume name, followed by the chapter number in terms of where it appears in the volume (*not* the original number of the issue) and page within the chapter (typically between 1 and 24, since each regular issue was 24 pages long. Some issues were of irregular length). Thus, by '*BL*, 8:16', I mean the sixteenth page of the eighth chapter of the volume *Brief Lives*.

Volume names, in numerical order, are abridged as follows: *Preludes and Nocturnes*: *P&N*. *The Doll's House*: *DH*. *Dream Country*: *DC*. *Season of Mists*: *S of M*. *A Game Of You*: *GY*. *Fables and Reflections*: *F&R*. *Brief Lives*: *BL*. *World's End*: *WE*. *The Kindly Ones*: *KO*. and *The Wake*: *Wake*.

Additionally, in order to preserve the rhythms of Gaiman's writing, determined and emphasised as they are by the speech-bubble and text-box format, I have indicated the transition between separate bubbles or boxes by forward slashes.

*

The most important aspect of *The Sandman* is that it is a fantasy. This is important because of the amount of control that it gives Gaiman over his work. He can fine-tune every aspect of his plots, settings and characters, because he can control the rules of the possible and impossible. Though this gives full range to Gaiman's playfulness, it also implies that all of the choices he does make are marked, because other options were always available. He is, however, obliged to create a cogent set of rules for his universe. Thus, not only has Gaiman created a universe in which he can take full advantage of the flexibility of fantasy, by allowing paradigms to change between stories, he has had to create a cosmology which provides a coherent rationale for these changes – that *The Sandman's* reality is determined by narratives.

This turned out to be paramount. Originally, this thesis had its beginnings in my attraction to Gaiman's love of story as he both drew on and experimented with a range of genres, and re-imagined intertexts drawn from sources ranging from popular culture to history to mythology. The idea of a fantasy world in which reality is determined by story is the foundation which enables this celebration, and steers the course of Gaiman's reinventions. In due course, it also became apparent that, in creating this world in which reality is determined by story, Gaiman's work was intersecting with certain postmodern, post-structuralist theories about the way that humans relate to the world around them – essentially, that they create systems of meaning, resembling narratives, and impose them over reality in order to interpret it.

These theories are a response to a modern crisis, hinging on the multiplicity and instability of meaning, and the problems of creating a valid meaning system, or indeed of even determining the criteria for validity. To put the problems and premises of these theories briefly (and terribly simplistically), though these ‘ interpretive narratives’ may be treated as if they are identical with the reality observed, they are in fact constructs with a separate, synthetic existence. Thus all is subjective, and objectivity is an illusion if not an impossibility. I realised that, in his design of *The Sandman’s* universe, not only is Gaiman confronting the same issues and crises with which these theories engage, he is putting the theories themselves into practice. His work provides an anatomy of these issues at play, and is simultaneously offering commentary and critique.

We shall see, too, that *The Sandman* puts the postmodern approach to these issues into a dialogue with an alternative tradition: Gaiman’s interest in mythology and religion introduces an entirely different model, which premises at least some sort of stable, universal meaning. It is the dialogue between these two traditions that drives *The Sandman’s* contemplations: the postmodern crisis has already destabilised traditional conceptions of the mythic, but in *The Sandman* Gaiman has used the mythic tradition to address the postmodern crisis.

Whether or not this endeavour proves successful, the aim of this thesis is to track Gaiman’s engagement with the postmodern crisis. It will explore the strategies he proposes for addressing it, and look at how these strategies have been developed. Ultimately, I would like to demonstrate that *The Sandman* offers a distinctive and penetrating perspective on the modern world, and that the fresh insights it offers on this world may help us to navigate it.

Primarily, I will argue that Gaiman's achieves this through the creation of an anthropocentric world: by putting everything in *The Sandman* universe under the influence of human perception – that is, the narratives humans impose over reality – Gaiman is giving us a literal depiction of postmodernism's theoretical model, which locates meaning within human minds, rather than the external world. Thus, Gaiman's perspective is internal before it is external, tracking the way in which our minds work before trying to model our interactions with the outside world. Ultimately, Gaiman's primary concern is how this changes the status of the individual, and redefines their context within a community.

Chapter One: Theory and Practice

At the climax of *Brief Lives*, as the climactic events of *The Sandman* cycle are set in motion, Gaiman has the retired personification of Destruction advance a particular theory, the 'rule of the two-sided coin': that each of the Endless, *The Sandman's* immortal arch-pantheon, has a dual portfolio, not only representing a domain like death or dream, but establishing its opposite by contrast. When Morpheus[4] asks Destruction "And what do I define, by this theory of yours?", the answer is "Reality, perhaps?" (*BL*, 8:16).

This is pure Gaiman: the core hypothesis of his ten-volume fantasy epic is given out as a throw-away speculation: concepts define other concepts, ideas define other ideas, until, ultimately, the world around us is defined by our ideas. Nothing is concrete or objective; everything is the product of our psychological processes. That reality is defined by dreams – or rather, to give a clearer picture of Morpheus's domain as Gaiman represents it, consciousness – is revealing, a commitment to an interest in human interaction with reality rather than physical facts themselves.

Humans perpetually try to understand the world around them, and their relationship to it. They are constantly engaging with it, even as they try to decide how they should engage with it. Significantly, however, most of the central dynamics in *The Sandman* are not between humans and the world, but between humans and the ideas and ideologies they use to mediate their interaction with the world. It is both stated and implied in *The Sandman*

[4] *The Sandman's* main character has several names, and is most commonly known as the Sandman, Dream or Morpheus. To distinguish Dream the character from the concept and theme of dreaming, and since another character, Daniel Hall, ultimately takes over the role of Sandman, I have settled on calling him Morpheus.

that humans mediate our interaction with the world around us through narrative, projecting patterns and imposing roles on events, objects and other people.

Gaiman is not particularly concerned with so-called objective reality, but with the processes of assessing reality: the creation, essentially, of subjective, synthetic and ideologically loaded models of reality. His interest lies in how humans create ideas and conceptions, and how they interact with a heritage of existant ones.

The most central premise of Gaiman's approach is that the way we do these things is qualitatively similar to the way in which we tell stories. The common principle is the organisation of information – 'organising', that is, not just in the sense of 'arranging', but in the sense of evaluating, prioritising and classifying as valid or invalid, positive or negative. Out of a deluge of information, creating a coherent system of facts or beliefs is parallel to arranging the events of a story into a coherent plot.

Importantly, this does not occur in a conceptual vacuum: the way in which we organise new information is determined by patterns of information already in place. These are metanarratives, proto-patterns that tell us how to arrange facts, especially where we should attribute values like right/wrong and true/false. The paradigms against which we classify and evaluate events can be likened to literary genres: our mystical or empiricist or shamanistic world view may not actually shape the events around us, but they shape our experience of them as pervasively as the mores of the Beat novel glorify the sexual promiscuity that would be unconscionable in a Victorian serial.

Thus, the core of this thesis will be the idea that we interact with the world in the same way that we tell stories, and that ultimately we interact, not with only with facts, but with the narratives into which we arrange facts. Its central proposition will be that Gaiman

encodes this idea into *The Sandman* as a principal of the way his fantasy universe works. The primary corollary of this idea is an intrinsic emphasis on the psychological: from this perspective, everything we say about the external world is a reflection of our own minds.

Gaiman has created a fantasy world, closely resembling our own, in which the correspondence between reality and our narratives about reality is a law of nature. What began as a conceptual abstract has been expanded into a physical principle. As Gaiman tells the various stories that comprise *The Sandman*, the idea is contemplated as it is enacted – essentially, Gaiman is formulating and demonstrating his theories by putting them into practice.

*

The purpose of this chapter will be to establish the theoretical ideas that underlie Gaiman's treatment of the narrative/reality relationship. Above, I emphasised that this theory emphasises the psychological: throughout this thesis, we will see that Gaiman works from the premises of Jungian psychological theory, and we will therefore establish its important rudiments here.

Yet, even more pervasively, *The Sandman* has also internalised a heritage of postmodern theory: this begins with the basic postmodern conception of meaning as located in our minds, open to play and essentially relative and arbitrary. This postmodern conception of meaning also implies a plethora of heterogenous ideas.

This postmodern semiotic model is of particular interest because it is the basis of the theory of the narratisation of reality. To better understand the specifics and implications of

this theory, we will look at Jean-Francois Lyotard's theory of the metanarrative, and Hayden White's proposals about the narrative nature of historical writing.

As prominent as both Jungianism and postmodernism are in *The Sandman*, I propose that it is the dynamic that Gaiman arranges between them that is the impetus of the work's philosophy.

This interaction is accommodated by *The Sandman's* broader engagement with the idea of heteroglossia and intertextuality. To really understand *The Sandman*, we must return to the idea that meaning occurs in the context of other meanings, a community in which contradictory ideas co-exist without being able to definitively disprove each other. Interactions with this inescapable context raise the principles of *bricolage* and defamiliarisation. We will later see that this context has profound consequences when Gaiman takes his exploration of narration beyond individual instances: he takes his readers beyond an immersion in any one narrative and into an engagement with relativism, casting this heteroglossic context as both a challenge to our preconceptions and as a potential resource. Much of Giaman's work addresses the new obligations this heteroglossia places on us, if we are to formulate a narrative that ensures a cogent interaction with the modern world.

At the same time, this chapter will not be devoted to pure theory. Along with a historical perspective on the ideas Gaiman draws on, I would like to give some idea of how he encodes these ideas in his writing. Especially in the case of *bricolage*, defamiliarisation and memetic[5] theory, these are not just ideas he talks about but ones which he puts into

[5] For now, let us briefly define a meme as a unit of information that, insofar as it can be exported whole from one source and imported into another, can be thought of as having an existence in its own right. I will address this theory in more detail later, when its implications can be better understood in the context of *The Sandman*.

practice in his own writing and thinking. Concordently, just as it will be central to the rest of this thesis to have a grasp of the theories underlying Gaiman's work, it will be equally important to grasp the way in which he works, and to have an idea of how he treats the ideas at hand. Centrally, it must be kept in mind that, for all Gaiman's complex enagement with theories of story, his priority is telling stories of his own.

*

As we explore the proposal that we use narratives to interact with the world around us, we will see that this constantly brings us back to psychological concerns. As discussed above, this is a theory which locates all of our most important interactions on a mental level, and as we progress we will see that the exchange is two-way: our mentality determines our model of reality, and in turn the way our models work tells us something about the way our minds work.

Thus, with its emphasis on the interaction between mind and world, Gaiman's cycle is primarily psychological, and I would argue that the theoretical model of its psychology is Jungian. Like the psychologist Carl Gustav Jung, Gaiman posits the urge to create meaning as an essential, inescapable human drive. Jung located this drive at the level of sub-conscious, universal phenomena called archetypes. The archetypes are templates, pre-meanings that create a need for the mind to seek out certain values ('moral rightness', 'threat', etc.). It 'finds' these values by generating them, attaching them to exterior facts and stimuli. On the other hand, archetypes are so abstract that they can only be indirectly formulated.

Coining an accurate definition of an archetype is thus problematic. Jolande Jacobi, author of *Complex/Archetype/Symbol in the Psychology of C.G. Jung*: finds the archetype's best definition in Jung's *A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity*:

> Archetypes are, by definition, factors and motifs that arrange the psychic elements into certain images, characterised as archetypal, but in such a way that *they can be recognized only from the effects they produce*. They exist preconsciously, and presumably they form the structural dominants of the psyche in general…As *a priori* conditioning factors they represent a special psychological instance of the biological 'pattern of behaviour', which gives things their specific qualities
>
> - Jacobi, 31.

The expression of the archetypes is problematic. According to Jung's *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, (in which seperate sections are contributed by C. Kerenyi) any attempt to express the archetype is:

> A *figure of speech*. If it speaks of the sun and identifies it with…the force that makes the life and health of a man, [the archetype itself] is neither the one thing nor the other, but an unknown third thing that finds more or less adequate

> expression in all these similes, yet – to the perpetual vexation of the intellect – remains unknown and not to be fitted to a formula.
>
> – Jung, 105, his italics.

To paraphrase, the archetypes can be understood as blueprints of potential meaning. Though they determine the most profound needs and drives of the human mind, they are not themselves accessible on a conscious level. Not only are they unconscious, but they constitute a collective unconscious: they underlie all human minds, though because they are so abstract their expressions vary.

When expressed, archetypes produce an extra dimension of meaning which attaches to conscious memes like images and figures. In these cases, these memes acquire an aura of significance beyond their literal implications, becoming metaphorical expressions of meanings both more ineffable and more numinous. Above signs, they become symbols.

Though the archetypes can be obliquely described – 'the archetypical drive to act in a way that is good' – it is through symbols that the archetypes can be experienced. However, there is no automatic assurance that any particular sign will acquire symbolic resonance, and symbols are not neccessarily transferable: the actual sign that acquires symbolic resonance can vary between individuals (figures resonating as 'hero' can range from Superman to Harry Potter to Ché Guevara) or cultures (crucifix/star of David), and it is possible for symbols to 'die', losing their extra, ineffable resonance and reverting to their literal implications. In *The Sandman* we will see this again and again, as formerly sacred

mythical figures appear as mere characters or even, in the case of, say, Thor, caricatures; but we will also see that these figures retain traces of their mythical power.

As much as the universality of archetypes, it is the mutability of symbols which attracts Gaiman's interest. Especially in his references to mythologies, he chronicles the different symbols created by various people at various times, according to various paradigms. Underlying this diversity, however, is a sense of equality: none of these symbols are 'more valid' than others, because all have been created according to the same archetypical drives.

In *The Sandman*, the prominence of particular theologies is thus temporary. In *Season of Mists* we see that a Judeo-Christian conception is currently powerful, but there and in *Brief Lives* we also meet the gods who were once ultimate powers, and who have lost their power as belief in them waned. Gaiman's Jungianism reverses the traditional polarities of religion: when we see the gods as symbols expressing archetypical meanings, it is not we who are subject to them, but they who are only expressions of the powers we sense in ourselves.

The search for meaning in *The Sandman* will involve Jungian epiphanies. Floundering characters must connect with the truly meaningful within themselves, realising the archetypical either through the creation of symbols or through the rediscovery of the existing ones. We will see that the cycle equates the metafictional and the metaphysical: gods originate as dreams; dreams walk the world as supernatural beings. In *The Sandman* psychology determines reality.

*

Yet at the same time Gaiman is arriving at his awareness of the instability of symbols, and of their relativism, via postmodern semiotics. Engaging with the fact that expressions of meaning are mutable and multiple, postmodern theories have found the universals that Jung hypothesises consistently elusive. Earlier in the Twentieth Century, the structuralist movement had placed an unprecedented emphasis on semiotics, the dynamics of the expression of meaning. In effect this reversed the focus of more traditional criticism: rather than viewing texts as expressions of pre-existing meaning (social, political, etc.), by the advent of post-structuralism, meaning had come to be seen as a product of textuality. Attempts to reach backward through the text to an objective, existing meaning are sabotaged by the intrinsic subjectivity of any expression.

Ferdinand de Saussure laid the goundwork for structuralist semiotics, when he questioned the conception of language as "a naming process only – a list of words, each *corresponding* to the thing it names" (de Saussure, 'Course in General Linguistics', 77, my italics). This correspondence is an illusion: in structuralist semiotics, the relationship of language to its referents is arbitrary. There is no intrinsic reason why the same referent should be denoted by the terms 'woman', 'femme' and 'frau', and not by the terms 'boot', 'eloquent' or 'quickly'.

In turn, if an objective corellation is not determining our signifying systems, they become context-bound, determined by ideological and cultural specifics. Every utterance becomes a microcosm of an ideational climate, encoding the ideology of the utterer, and interpreted according to the ideology of the receiver.

However, this conception of the relationship between language and culture is an ouroboros: if our utterances are shaped by our culture, then it is our utterances which enact our culture. We tell our identities into being, assessing, legitimising and exploring our ideas by formulating valid utterances and separating them from invalid ones. Language and ideology are engaged in the act of creating each other.

In concert, they synthesise a framework for interpreting the world, but it must be remembered that that framework is an imposure. When we claim to be making deductions about objective reality, we are in fact inducting, perpetuating our expectations, preconceptions and a ranking system that attributes validity in different degrees, and prioritises certain types of thinking (religious, scientific, etc.) over others.

Thus, language is our point of contact with the world around us, allowing us to find order in our environment while informing our perceptions about it. From here it is a small step to the idea that, in order to make coherent sense, human subjective experience must be ordered by the imposition of narratives. Between them, several theorists have formalised this hypothesis into a coherent theory.

In *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Hayden White sets out to formulate a 'poetics of history', a formulation of history as rhetoric, with a strong narrative element. He does so in the footsteps of "continental European thinkers – from Valéry and Heidegger to Sarte, Lévi-Strauss and Michel Foucault" who have "cast serious doubts" on the idea of history as "a specific mode of existence…[or] an autonomous domain in the spectrum of human and physical sciences" (White, 1). In effect, White sets out to disprove the notion that History can present ideas and events objectively. Histories – plural – are themselves ideas and events, and subject to the same restrictions

and weaknesses as their subject matter. History is a construction with an essentially "fictive character" (White,1).

White's book is a deconstruction of history in rhetorical terms, and he engages with the idea of history as story-telling:

> Historical *stories* trace the sequences of events that lead from inaugurations to (provisional) terminations of social and cultural practices in a way that chronicles are not required to do…In the chronicle [an] event is simply 'there' as an element in a series; it does not function as a story element. The historian arranges the events in a chronicle into a hierarchy of significance by assigning different functions as story elements in such a way as to disclose the formal coherence of a whole set of events considered as a comprehensible process
>
> – White, 2-3.

One can attempt to capture facts, but any attempt to order or interpret them sabotages any attempt at objectivity, and takes one into story-telling. 'Arranging events into a hierarchy of significance' necessarily implies that the arranger has a value-system already in place.

In effect, White is dissolving the strict distinction between 'story' and 'fact'. His motivation is recognition that history, though treated as factual, uses the same rhetorical devices that fictional narratives do. Jean-Francois Lyotard took the idea of this similarity even further, and onto a more abstract level. The basis of White's comparison of histories to narratives was the rhetorical writing used to encode both. For Lyotard, this is a superficial manifestation of a deeper and more predominant similarity. The affinity

between factual and non-factual thinking is not just a resemblance based on similarity of expression; they are in fact the same kind of thinking. The difference is a product of interpretation, with judgements made according to imposed criteria of validity and non-truth.

Lyotard surveys human efforts to impose order on the universe by imposing patterns of priority, and analogises these patterns to narratives. He proposes that not only history, but all knowledge, is prioritised according to these subjective, imposed structures. For him, the legitimation of knowledge begins as a narrative act. This is exemplified for Lyotard in oral cultures, where the transmission of knowledge is an act resembling, sometimes encoding itself within, story-telling. It is enabled and disciplined by a framework of behaviours and expectations, distinguishing speaker from hearer, sage from initiate.

White equates the knowledge formulation itself with a narrative, and discusses the value judgements historians make in terms of fictional modes – so that we get 'a tragedy written about this event', not just 'this event'. Lyotard looks further, and asks what underlies our notions of the suitability of mode to material: on what basis are we labelling these events tragic in the first place? Lyotard's answer is another level of narrative, what he calls the 'metanarrative', proto-narratives defining the values which other narratives express, and which they use to determine their own legitimacy. In his own words:

> What is a 'good' prescriptive or evaluative utterance, a 'good' performance in denotative or technical matters? They are all judged to be 'good' because they conform to the relevant criteria (of justice, beauty, truth, and efficiency respectively) accepted in the social circle of the 'knower's' interlocutors.

– Lyotard, 19.

The purpose of metanarratives is to validate knowledge. They are labelled 'metanarratives' because:

> the story's narrator must not be a people mired in the particular positivity of its traditional knowledge…the narrator must be a metasubject in the process of formulating…the legitimacy of the discourses.
>
> – Lyotard, 34

Metanarratives provide an interpretive framework, to be applied to other narratives as a way to gauge their validity. They must be percieved as (though in fact they never can be) transcending 'particular positivity' – not as subjective products of a social context, but as absolute standards. They operate implicitly.

Both White and Lyotard know that narratives provide paradigms of interpretation; Lyotard, in addition, takes into account their provision of paradigms of prescription – that is, not only criteria against which incoming information can be interpreted, but criteria which guide the individual as to what action to take.

When we consider *The Sandman's* characters – supernatural entities like Morpheus as well as mortals like Lyta Hall – we shall see Lyotard's theory of metanarrative interpretation in play, as they try to make sense of the world around them according to what they already 'know'. Most importantly, however, we shall see that characters' narratives actually determine their actions, both epic and mundane. Moreover, in the

struggles of characters like Rose Walker to synthesise viable behavioural and interpretative narratives, we will see the idea of the metanarrative critiqued.

*

In effect, Gaiman takes White and Lyotard's theories about the narratives humans use to interact with reality, and hypothesises about what would happen if such narratives could actually subvert, or even usurp, the reality under scrutiny. What Gaiman is doing here corresponds with what Tzvetan Todorov identifies as a basic fantastic device, the translation of a rhetorical device into a literal event. In the gothic novel *Vathek*, for example:

> The expression 'huddled into a ball' leads to a veritable metamorphosis (how else are we to concieve of this [character] rolling from room to room?)…This example introduces us to a second relation of rhetorical figures with the fantastic: here the fantastic realizes the literal sense of a *figurative* expression
>
> – Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, 78-9.

In the 'world' of the *The Sandman*, (the "sub-creation", to use J.R.R. Tolkien's term [Tolkien, 'On Fairy Stories', 112]) Gaiman has taken a theoretical formulation and applied it as a physical law. On the one hand, metanarratives in *The Sandman* sub-creation have the theoretical existence they have for Lyotard – they are philosophical abstractions, cognitive constructions used to understand the world around us. At the same time, Gaiman

reifies these theoretical metanarratives, giving them a literal existence in their own right. The imagination becomes an actual place, the Dreaming. Myths, symbols and fictional beings exist with such integrity that they can cross over into the real world perfectly comfortably. The dynamic between the real and imaginary is reciprocal. Just as history can become myth or fiction, in *The Sandman* sub-creation myths become reigning, powerful gods, and imaginary beings like Gilbert/Fiddler's Green and the Corinthian can act with real consequences in the physical world.

White and Lyotard are philosophers, but Gaiman is a storyteller, and for him the idea of narrative is inseperable from the idea of storytelling. Thus, for Gaiman, the concept of the metanarrative has two aspects, two directions in which it projects itself: as metaknowledge, yes, but also as metafiction. On the one hand, a metanarrative is a way of knowing, a formulation of criteria for the assessment of encountered facts. Its relationship to regular narratives is metaphorical: just as a storyteller organises story elements into a coherent and nuanced whole, so does the human mind organise the world around it according to an interpretative model.

Yet at the same time, an implicit corrollory of Gaiman's treatment of metanarratives, but one that must be understood, is that Gaiman is conflating metanarratives with regular stories. Technically, we might say that the subject of metanarratives is the real, while fictional narratives deal with the unreal; however, in a postmodern, subjective world, Gaiman is aware that the difference between the real and fictional can be slippery. One of *The Sandman's* most prominent themes is the changing status of mythical cosmologies, as what was accepted as truth, even as ultimate truth, passes into story. In addition, not only is

Gaiman drawing a fundamental analogy between factual thinking and story-telling, he is exploring this hypothesis by telling stories.

Thus, Gaiman's conception of narrative is much broader than Lyotard's metanarrative. Though it covers the implicit interpretative paradigms that Lyotard calls metanarratives, it is rooted in the act of storytelling, and expands outward through the act of story-telling, along the way exploring the idea of stories as memes and thus as having an existence in their own right, and from there going into the interaction between these independent fictions and the real. Finally, it reaches a conception of narrating as a way of daily life.

Our interpretative behaviours are not only determined according to abstract formulations, but taught to us by all the kinds of narratives we encounter. Thus, a tribal elder recites the legend of Nada to a young initiate, representing the way that myths teach us our cosmologies. At the same time, we see other characters equally influened by less epistemological, more fictive narrative modes: Chantal and Zelda consciously model their behaviour on Gothic tropes, while Richard Madoc unconsciously acts out the behaviours, and ultimately the consequences, suitable to the Gothic fiction he writes.

Put simply, Lyotard's metanarratives are 'meta'-narratives because they are models against which narratives can be formulated and evaluated; *The Sandman* is 'meta'-narrative because it is a meditation on all the aspects of narratives, including the Lyotardian dynamic between specific ontological narratives and interpretative models, but also exploring acts and practices of narrative transmission, memetic heritages, genre and paradigm, the dynamic between the real and the fictional, mythology as a storification of

physical and psychological phenomena, the dynamic between archetypes and symbols, and much more.

It is a recurring idea in *The Sandman* that narratives are necessary if only to make our lives intelligible to us. On a practical level, they are necessary to organise and prioritise facts and stimuli, but Gaiman also premises an essential human drive to create meaning. The cycle emphasises mythology, cosmology and the difficulties and pitfalls of formulating a valid ethical system, indicating that the two primary goals of this semiosis are a conception of our place in a cosmology on the one hand, and on the other a system of moral values, stipulating and validating virtues and anathemas.

It is a premise of *The Sandman* that the primary pitfall of this organising process is its necessary tendency to exclude and rank: to differentiate information naturally involves prioritising it, deciding which information is important enough to merit the most attention; our most dearly held beliefs then become measuring sticks, validating and invalidating information according to how it corresponds with our preconcieved ideas. Hence, a recurring theme in *The Sandman* is the person, usually mortal, who confronts events, usually supernatural, that their metanarrative cannot accommodate. The contact can result in epiphany, denial, or misunderstanding. Sometimes an inability to cope with the unclassifiable event can bring about tragic results.

Thus, the major pitfall of this type of narrative is that it can fail to equip us for all eventualities. Since our systems of priority are synthetic, they are fallible, and since it is their function to prioritise information they are likely to exclude some. Thus, in *Brief Lives*, Delirium can claim to know “things not in [Destiny’s] book” – that is, things which the primary metanarrative has not accomodated. However, Delirium, of course, is mad –

though our narratives are fallible, it is a premise of the cycle that the mind is incapable of dealing with too much undifferentiated information in any coherent way (*BL*, 7:11). Without a template against which to appraise, prioritise, and morally assess information, the result is indeed Delirium.

In due course, later in the same volume we find Destruction recounting a conversation with Death. Death is a character who has been shown to have equilibrium and common sense, and who is repeatedly cast in the role of Morpheus's councillor. In Gaiman's cosmology, her role as ender of human lives is balanced and vindicated by her insight into them, and thus her words have authority: "[Death] said we all not only could know everything. / We do. / We just tell ourselves we don't to make it all bearable" (*BL*, 8:15). We do hamper ourselves by selecting our information, but without a hierarchy of relevance, we cannot function.

Too much information can be 'unbearable' because it sabotages the human drive to make meaning by subverting classification systems. We cannot classify according to one criteria if we are simultaneously aware of every feature of an object. Consequently, in order to make value judgements we may have to resort to reviling or ameliorating certain things or actions, turning a blind eye to certain flaws or virtues because they over-complicate our decisions.

However, the price we pay is that, as Destruction observes, "none of us – Endless or mortal, ghost or god – knows what we're doing" (*BL*, 8:15). Not only are we incapable of grasping a holistic picture, but the sense that we are engaged in a constant process of information exclusion and synthesis is disconcerting, undermining the possibility of total confidence. In *The Sandman*, certainty is almost symptomatic of folly, from the way that

Wanda's bigoted family reject her to the way that Lyta Hall's pursuit of a misapprehension about Morpheus and Daniel leads to large-scale tragedy. Certainty is seen almost as a premise for wrong-doing: it is too easy to formulate a justification for almost any behaviour, based on strategic interpretation and the art of ignoring anything contradictory.

Thus, in 'Thermidor', we see St. Just's cunning grin as he recites back to Paine a perverted interpretation of Paine's own writings on liberty, and Robespierre's fervour as he works to exclude "superstition" from "an age of pure reason" (*F&R*, 2:14-15). Yet Robespierre is denying power to the mythic even as he searches for a real myth, the severed head of Orpheus. Even as he bases his entire ontology on this claim, Robespierre is searching for Orpheus's head precisely because he does accord it power. The dynamics of interpretation have inverted: instead of using his metanarrative to understand the world, Robespierre is trying to conform the world to his metanarrative. Thus, the object of his vaunted certainty can only be his own ideas – he 'knows' the system he envisions, not actual circumstances.

We see failures of interpretation caused by an imperfect relationship with the interpretative model required: receiving superhuman powers in a DC comic should open up a world of superheroic adventure for Urania Blackwell, but in 'Facades' she becomes stuck mourning the ordinary life that is no longer hers to have. Perceiving herself as trapped, unable to perceive the options that are open to her, she insists on suicide even when Death attempts to correct her perspective. Urania's tragedy is not that she has no choice, but that she cannot see her choices. At the other end of the spectrum, *Three Septembers and a January* sees Joshua Norton saved from madness and despair by his

insistence, in the face of a consensus of disbelief, that he is the Emperor of the United States.

The Sandman's universe is not solipsistic, in the sense that would automatically convert individual perceptions into facts. However, characters' opinions do determine their options, with results that can be either tragic or triumphant. In Urania's case, ignorance bars her from the options she does have; in Norton's, it actually creates opportunities – to live a dignified, contented life – that technically should not exist.

In many ways *The Sandman* is a chronicle of people at the mercy of their opinions, perceptions, and subjectivity – their habitual ways of narrating, and the narratives they tell themselves. Some are saved or damned, as Joshua and Urania are, because they do not fully understand their situation. Others have to cope with knowing too much, or rather, with knowing more than can be comfortably reconciled with their metanarratives. In *The Doll's House*, Rose Walker struggles to re-validate her mundane life after she encounters the vast, supernatural powers underlying her world. Again and again, characters are subject to the vagaries of powers they do not understand, mystical and supernatural dimensions of the world that their day-to-day life cannot prepare them for. Many characters struggle to overcome the limitations of their knowledge, and achieve understanding. This is portrayed as a condition of life.

Encounters with alternate narratives are always powerful. In *Season of Mists*, narratives even array to compete against each other, when various personifications fight for the key to Hell. On a personal level, wisdom can only come from transcending one's own limited perceptions, but for many of the characters in *The Sandman*, this is a twofold challenge: not only must they overcome their own prejudices, but they live in a world in

which perceptions have a life of their own. Lyta has discarded her superheroic identity 'The Fury', but the trope of Furies has not finished with her – while she seeks a normal life as a mother, the Kindly Ones use her for their own purposes by validating her identity as an avenging fury. Ultimately, she cannot even attack Morpheus on her own behalf: as she tries to avenge the 'murders' of her husband and son, she is told that her actions must instead be a response to Morpheus's killing his own son, Orpheus.

Where, according to the Lyotardian model, characters' metanarratives would typically be implicit, Gaiman forefronts them and their effects. Characters behave as their conceptual frameworks tell them is appropriate. We are shown Morpheus actively creating a metanarrative for Norton; thereafter, Norton evades Desire's sexual temptations because submission would be unbecoming to the dignity of an emperor. We see Lyta's false conviction that Morpheus has killed her son Daniel germinate out of another misguided notion, that he is responsible for the death of her husband Hector.

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On a more explicitly literary level, we might say that the laws of *The Sandman* universe are being determined by the genre of story being told – as with Lyotard's metanarratives, the rules of the genre determine what is possible or impossible, and guides the interpretation of events. Thus, a paradigm is being established.

However, *The Sandman* presents stories from a range of genres. The laws of its universe are in constant flux, and what is possible or likely at one time or place will be

impossible or bizarre at another. If our ideas determine our interaction with facts, then according to Gaiman, facts are altered by the way we approach them.

White reached similar conclusions when examining historical rhetoric. He observes that the recitation of historical information is strongly determined by the choice of the mode in which the story is to be told:

> Providing the 'meaning' of a story by identifying the *kind of story* that has been told is called explanation by emplotment. If…the historian provides [his story] with the plot structure of a Tragedy [sic], he has 'explained' it one way; if he has structured it as a Comedy [sic] he has 'explained' it another way. Emplotment is the way by which a sequence of events fashioned into a story is gradually revealed to be a story of a particular kind.
>
> – White, 3, White's italics

When Gaiman literalises the idea of the metanarrative he reverses this assessment. According to White's model, the events are interpreted to different effects, determining the type of story being told. In the world of *The Sandman*, the stories told will determine the events.

In these circumstances, some characters are left vulnerable because they do not understand, or defy, the patterns their stories set for them. For example, it is shown that Urania sought out her powers in a deliberate attempt to become a superhero, but she cannot or will not continue in that narrative mode, and no other is open to her. Even storytellers do not always make the connection between narrative patterns and real life. Though Richard

Madoc is a horror writer, he fails to realise that story conventions will also apply to his own life: when he imprisons Calliope, he is guilty in the best Gothic tradition both of violating sexual taboos and of attempting to exploit the supernatural for his own gain. He must, and will, be punished.

In these cases, Gaiman is actually reifying fictional genres, making the action of the characters 'real' lives subject to the rules of fictional paradigms. Stories in *The Sandman* are not only means of interpreting reality – they determine reality. *The Sandman* universe is one in which metanarratives can literally exist externally to any subject; they are not merely interpretive constructions, imposed by an interpreter. As with Lyotard's metanarratives, they are abstracts existing *in potentia*. They manifest when events occur according to their patterns.

Thus, above a semiotic crisis, subjectivity becomes a condition not only of thinking, but of existing: we watch paradigms change over time and in different places. From one story to another, the parameters of possibility can change drastically. Things that exist at one time can be impossible at another – thus Aristaeus the satyr can occupy the ancient Greece of 'Song of Orpheus', though no satyrs exist in modern day Los Angeles. Paradigm shifts can even redefine the same characters at different times: in 'The Hunt', the werewolf Vassily begins life as a character in a fairy tale, and ends up as an immigrant in modern New Jersey who Gaiman admits to modelling on his Jewish grandparents. Since paradigms are subjective, however, other characters can carry their paradigms with them, determining the rules of their existence by their own beliefs: note Thessaly, perpetuating her prehistoric magic into the present day. Thessaly's case demonstrates that paradigms are not simply products of the passage of time, but mental constructions.

We find that while these paradigms lose prominence, they leave behind a heritage of memes, which can continue on and retain their power. In some cases, as with the ancient gods Pharamond and Ishtar, this may involve adapting to a new paradigm. In contrast, the Kindly Ones continue to stubbornly exult their ancient, primordial morality and power thousands of years after the cosmology that framed them has lost its influence. No paradigm is so established that it is not open to the intrusion of previous ones. Thus, modern day Urania Blackwell can have an epiphanic encounter with the ancient Egyptian sun god Ra.

Thus characters in *The Sandman* must deal with a context of living, powerful and above all independent memes and figures, with agendas of their own. The dream-being Fiddler's Green's existence is completely independent of the humans who imagine it as a place, to the extent that it can incarnate itself as a person, Gilbert, whom it has modelled on G.K. Chesterton. Approaching Lyotardian metanarrative from the other side, humans who use narratives to define their own identities have created a fiction which refers to a human to create an identity of its own.

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Thus, in *The Sandman*, reality responds to narration. In practice, the dissolution of the distinction between the factual and the fictional works both ways. One of Gaiman's premises is that "things need not have happened to be true" (*DC*, 3:21). The dichotomy of factual/true versus fictional/untrue is derailed: neither type of statement is inevitably true,

but both can have elements of truth: if supposedly factual statements are inevitably tainted with the subjective, supposedly fictive statements reflect aspects of the real world.

This requires an expansion of the definition of 'truth', so that the concept is no longer a referance only to physical facts. In *The Sandman*, fantasy and non-fact can communicate symbolic truths. They can also encode typical truths, so that, for example, the tyranny of Carnifex Mairon has aspects in common with real tyrannies. At the extreme, *The Sandman* even reverses the truth/untruth values of the 'objective' and the 'subjective': characters in *The Sandman* are not interacting with objective reality, but with their conceptions of it. The real world can fall away entirely, giving way to the Dreaming, for example, or Barbie's dream of the Land, or Lyta Hall's madness, but characters will continue to act in accordance with their conceptual narratives, their personal 'truths'.

Ultimately, however, these attempts to redefine 'truth' introduce new problems and complications. Unable to always accept information couched as 'fact', or always dismiss information couched as 'fiction', characters in *The Sandman* struggle to find dependable ways to establish truth.

Thus the search for a reliable ontology in *The Sandman* is a constant struggle. Gaiman, in turn, declines to prescribe one: though the Sandman himself evolves ideologically, and though certain possible answers recur throughout the cycle, *The Sandman* is not the chronicle of the evolution of any one ideology. Though it does insist on certain premises, its main concern is to explore, using the fantastic mode, the ways in which ideologies develop and operate. In *The Sandman*, this is a process inextricably linked with story-telling. The dynamics between story-telling and reality, between human

psychologies and the world around them, is the cycle's primary theme, and Gaiman seeks to explore it as comprehensively as he can.

To summarise, *The Sandman* is strongly concerned with metafiction, with the dynamics and operations of memes, modes and stories. However, it also posits an inextricable link between fiction and the ideologies through which we approach the real world. Not only are the two products of the same narrative mode of thought, but the fictions we tell cannot help but enact our ideologies, and our ideologies are influenced by the fictions we tell. Our fictions, like our ideological metanarratives, are mediators between our minds and the world around us, helping us to determine our interactions with facts and stimuli in a way that fulfils our innate psychological needs.

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So far, we have discussed the processes of narration, the creation of individual stories, and metanarratives; but, even as we do so, we see that we are working within a heritage: presented with facts and fragments, we arrange them according to existant patterns, and equate them with, use them as, or even transform them into, existant types or objects. To fully understand how our narratives are developed and how they function, we must place them in the context of this intertextuality.

Julia Kristeva explored the proposal that ideas, and the texts which encode them, do not merely co-exist, but actively interact. Texts do not exist separately, or even in organised hierarchies, but in the context of a totality of other texts and memes to which

they refer, from which they inherit, to which they bequeath, and with which they inevitably interfuse. Even using words from the same language constitutes a relationship. In texts:

> Terms are linked together, but, as a consequence of non-recoverable deletion, they are linked *ad infinitum*. The sentence is not suppressed, it is infinitized. Similarly, the denoted object does not disappear, it proliferates in mimetic, fictional and connoted objects.
>
> – Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', 109.

Thus texts can be thought of as existing on their own plane. Their existence is independent of the transiences of real, denoted world – whatever becomes of the actual "object" denoted, the reference will continue to exist. In Saussrean terms, a reference becomes a floating signifier, attaching to different referents – "mimetic, fictional and connoted" – and, thus, to a certain extent, all signifiers are floating.

This idea is the basis of one of the primary features of postmodern textuality, heteroglossia, the idea that various, perhaps limitless meanings co-exist and interact. John Docker gives us an overview:

> Postmodernism…does not ascribe to…any single meaning or purpose….Rather it is interested in a plurality of forms and genres, a pluralising of aesthetic criteria, where such forms and genres may have long and fascinating histories, not as static and separate but entwined, interacting, conflicting, contesting, playing off against each other, mixing in unpredictable

> combinations, protean in energy, moving quickly between extermes, from pathos to farce, intensity to burlesque, endlessly fertile[.]
>
> – Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History,* xviii

There is a corollary of this heteroglossia that is, though implicit, nevertheless fundamental to *The Sandman* and which should therefore be stated clearly. We have seen that, since we cannot attain an objective perspective on the information presented to us, the heteroglossic conception of meaning advises against any exclusive standards of validity: our perceptions are simply not reliable enough to allow us to definitively prove the invalidity of any semiosis, even one which flagrantly contradicts our preferences. Now we must note that the postmodern attitude to heteroglossia also excludes standards of hierarchy. In postmodernism, there is no elevation of 'high' over popular culture. Not only are all traditions equal, but so are all memes: in *The Sandman's* Ishtar, for example, exalted goddess and degraded stripper literally co-exist.

In turn, as we progress through this thesis, we will see that one of Gaiman's primary goals is to create an inclusive sub-creation. *The Sandman* may not offer representations of every possible ideology, but it does try to leave room for them. From the start, Gaiman is taking a fundamentally 'popular' medium, the comic book, and using it to encompass philosophy, mythology, psychology and humanism. Not only is this an expansion of this 'popular' mode to embrace 'higher' concerns, it has also literally forced 'high' culture to reassess the capabilities of the 'popular': in 1991, *Sandman 19,* 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' "became the only monthly comic in history to win a literary award: the…World Fantasy Award for Best Short Story" (Bender, 74). Subsequently, the award proved so

scandalous that the rules of the competition were revised to exclude ‘graphic’ works – surely proof that the boundaries between the ‘high’ and the ‘popular’ need a very emphatic demarcation to hold true.

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In *The Sandman*, the postmodern conception of heteroglossia exists alongside the Jungian theory of the collective unconscious. To recap, the basis of the latter is the theory of the archetypes, and it is, as the name implies, a theory of *unconscious* impulses common to all humanity. However, as well as this theory of pre-existant models for signifiers, Gaiman’s postmodern intertextuality is also drawing on a heritage of pre-existant signifiers themselves, a diffusion of arbitrary, heteroglossic intertexts, none of which have the authority to definitively dominate the others – that is to say, Gaiman is drawing not only on a collective unconscious, but a collective conscious.

In hindsight, when we have used the term ‘meme’ above, we have been refering to these intertexts of this collective conscious. Therefore, it is time to explore the theory of memetics in more detail, and establish its correspondences with Gaiman’s conception of knowledge.

Memetics holds that knowledge is modular, protean and transmittable – that is, it holds that knowledge occurs in chunks, called memes, of pre-associated information, ranging in size from basic concepts to full narratives; that the meaning of these chunks is open to deliberate adaptation or casual shift; and that they can be passed from one knower to another.

Initially concieved by evolutionary theorist Richard Dawkins, memetics has developed out of natural selection theory. Memes have thus been envisioned as 'mental genes' with an existance in their own right, independent of the humans who carry them – that is, from our perspective, as intertexts.

Gaiman's conception of knowledge is implicitly memetic, and this shapes his exploration of how narratives are created, and how they interact with their heteroglossic context. Of especial interest is the way that Gaiman approaches the idea of memes as independent entities. According to Susan Blackmore, author of *The Meme Machine*, the most central characteristic defining meme theory is "whether the…unit [of information] is being treated as a replicator in its own right." (Blackmore, 31). Blackmore also paints a metaphorical picture of memes acting independantly, on their own behalf and in their own self-interest.

Though Blackmore is using this description as a thought experiment to indicate a behavioural tendency, and not to imply actual consciousness, character or intention, Gaiman is literalising it to do exactly that. This is a clear premise underlying Gaiman's depiction of say, the Kindly Ones, exploiting Lyta to fulfil their own agenda. More subtly, it underlies Gaiman's treatment of all his personfications, including Morpheus himself: they are concepts personified, memes which become characters in their own right. Thus, not only do all actions in the *The Sandman* take place within the context of a community of pre-existent memes, but Gaiman casts memes as central individuals.

Overtly, this is part of Gaiman's fantastical exploration of how meaning and narratives work. Ultimately, the way that *The Sandman* plays with the distinction between

individual and information has broader implications: this thesis will explore why Gaiman takes this route, the premises which underlie it, and its ramifications.

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Yet, in *The Sandman*, not only do all narrative acts take place within the context of a complex heteroglossic intertextuality, they actively interact with it. How, then, does this interaction work?

Jacques Derrida, in his essay *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences*, posits the dynamic between the pre-existant meme and the freshly minted work as endemic to writing, and probably unavoidable. He draws on Lévi-Strauss's term *bricolage*, and Lévi-Strauss's definition of a *bricoleur* as 'someone who uses "the means at hand"', to realise that "if one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*", and 'the notion of an engineer who supposedly breaks with all forms of *bricolage* is a theoretical idea" (Derrida, 285).

The great advantage of *bricolage* is that the recombination of significant elements can alter the significance of the new whole for "brilliant unforeseen results" (286). The disadvantage is that all writing, all attempts at creating new meaning, must negotiate a pre-existant meaning system. Negotiating this dichotomy will be become a central dynamic in *The Sandman* cycle.

Central to this negotiation is a principle the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky formulated as 'defamiliarisation'. Pre-dating Derrida's more abstract conception of art,

Shklovsky is concerned with the relationship between a subject and its expression in art, and argues that the habituation of perception could attenuate our experience of both. Since "as perception becomes habitual, it becomes automatic", mere reference to the subject will be artistically ineffectual, merely reproducing the reader's habitual, and imprecise, conception of the subject (Shklovsky, 'Art as Technique', 11). Because this habitual conception no longer has an active, vital connection to the subject, the subject "fades, and does not leave even a first impression; ultimately even the essence of what it was is forgotten" (11).

In the face of this dilemma, "art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things" (12). The "technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception" so that "art…impart[s] the sensation of things as they are percieved and not as they are known" (12).

In my introductory comments to this chapter, I claimed that, by creating a narrative about narratives, Gaiman was ensuring that his ideas about narrative were 'contemplated as they are enacted – essentially, Gaiman is formulating and demonstrating his theories by putting them into practice'. In much the same way, Gaiman is not only writing a story in which the the proliferation of memes and the need to reinvigorate symbols are topics of the plot. These are ideas which influence Gaiman's own style of writing, and are part of the structure of his stories. He is not simply writing about the postmodern proliferation of memes; the awareness thereof permeates his work from conception to execution.

Thus, the most prominent *bricoleur* in *The Sandman* is Gaiman himself. The memetic community that Gaiman builds into *The Sandman* is largely a product of his own highly

referential, intertextual and multi-modal style. Pre-existant memes fertilise Gaiman's imagination, and he has no qualms about tailoring them to his own specifics - any meme, even those which have laid claim to profound and symbolic resonances. Deeply engaged with the memetic heritage, yet mediating it through a postmodern artistic technique, Gaiman's approach can be best described as postmodern archaicism

I call Gaiman's approach archaicism because it draws on a long tradition of memes and modes; it is postmodern because it remains aware of them *as* memes and modes, – as signifiers distinct from the concepts they signify, however sacred these concepts may be. They are created, and thus open to re-creation without fear of disrespect. Gaiman's approach is also postmodern in its eclecticism, combining disparate memes for new meanings, and in its use of modern culture as a means of providing contrast or modification.

For Gaiman past events, whether philosophical, fictional or factual, provide memes to be used in new processes of story-telling: recurrent, recognisable and semantically loaded figures, patterns and forms. This approach informs his highly allusive style. The text has an abiding concern with the 'life' and nature of memes: Gaiman is simultaneously concerned with how these memes come to be embodied in specific texts and in different versions, but he also posits their existence independent of any specific text. Throughout the cycle, for example, Gaiman reifies the meme of the three-who-are-one in several of its incarnations. When we come to discuss Lyta Hall's story in more detail, we will see her interact with alternative versions of the meme (Geryon and the Gorgons) before finding the Furies – I will argue that this is because this is the version of the meme that is most significant to her, and that that significance had accreted over a lifetime. We will also see

Gaiman address the processes whereby aspects of real life acquire a fictional existence, as we watch Lyta use the Furies to express aspects of her real life, letting them become embodiments of her drive for revenge, her sense of oppression, and aspects of her idea of motherhood.

To return to the ideas discussed above, we have seen that the central dynamic of *bricolage* is the interaction between the old and the new: all writing must negotiate a pre-existant meaning system, but it can treat the elements of that system in a new way, with the aim being Derrida's "brilliant unforeseen results" (Derrida, 286). Shklovsy's defamiliarisation is central to the negotiation of this dichotomy, opening the way for the renewal, re-imagination and ultimately the reinvigoration of the elements at hand. Thus when Gaiman as *bricoleur* confronts the myth of Orpheus in 'Song of Orpheus', it is a dead myth, devoid of any but literal meaning to modern audiences. Gaiman as defamilariser, however, can re-cast ancient myth as modern story. By using realistic modes of characterisation, he creates an inlet for modern readers, used to relating to characters as pseudo-people rather than symbolic figures. Modern readers cannot relate to Ancient Greek mythology as sacred truth, but Gaiman capitalises on its status as 'just an old story' by freely interweaving it with elements of his new story, to which the reader is already receptive.

The new story also provides the reader with inroads towards overcoming their resistance to the myth's 'non-truth': on a modal level, the reader takes their cues from the fantastic, and consequently does not feel obliged to review the story from a factual viewpoint; on the level of *The Sandman's* sub-creation, we are given the context of a relativist universe, habituated to paradigm shift. Thereafter, we legitimise the story's

events in terms of its own paradigm. Out of mythic memes, Gaiman creates a story by re-emphasis and re-formulation: by rooting our interaction with the story in our sympathy for the characters, Gaiman allows us to feel the tragedy of their situation as they feel it.

A modern reader, confronted with the myth of Orpheus, might feel the bitter irony of the way Orpheus loses Eurydice by looking back on the way out of Hades, and distaste at his gruesome dismemberment; given Gaiman's story of Orpheus, we feel so much more: the joy and optimism of Orpheus's love for Eurydice, and the complexity introduced by Destruction's observation that "I think you're more in love with the idea of your dead love than you ever were with the girl herself" (*F&R,* 6:18). Gaiman's story reclaims for us the full horror of Orpheus's dismemberment, but it makes the truly terrible aspect of his story his immortality thereafter, bodiless and alienated from all the friends and family who attended his wedding at the beginning of the story. At the same time, the story's 'mythic' aspect adds greater resonance to its meaning. It ensures that the reader treats the events of the story with respect. It is this receptiveness that allows Gaiman to take the meme of a talking severed head, in modern times confined to the horror mode, and use it to great tragic effect. When Orpheus and Morpheus meet at the end of the story their personalities, follies and tragedy are so well established that there is nothing grisly, horrific or even absurd in Morpheus lifting his son's head from one place to another.

The results fall somewhere between Derrida's concern with the creation of the new – the 'brilliant, unforeseen results' of canny *bricolage* – and Shklovsky's desire for an active reconnection with the pre-existant. This is one of Gaiman's most significant virtues as a writer: his ability to engineer these interactions to create bountiful stories in which meaning can simultaneously coalesce and refract. At times the challenge has been to make

the significance of a meme fully manifest, at others it has been to use a meme as a vehicle of exploration, using aspects of its significance as starting points from which to postulate new meanings and ramifications.

Thus, Gaiman's conception of narratives hinges, not only on the idea of a heteroglossic, intertextual context, but on the narrator's active interaction with it. This is a profound departure from Lyotard's idea of people as passive inheritors of their culture's static, homogenous metanarratives. In the next chapter, we will see the implications that this has for 'metanarratives' in *The Sandman*, and what it means for Gaiman's characters.

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In conclusion, this chapter has traced the ideas and premises which are not just the main themes of *The Sandman*, but part of Gaiman's context and his identity as a writer. The primary proposal of this thesis, that *The Sandman* is a meditation on how humans use narratives as bridges between the world and themselves, must be understood in terms of how Jungian and postmodern ideas have influenced Gaiman. Both situate meaning within the human mind, and, in dialogue, they help Gaiman formulate a model of constant archetypical meaning and flexible signification. Faced with the models of communal meaning provided by the Jungian collective unconsciousness and postmodern intertextuality, Gaiman's writing creates a context of protean, transmittable meaning, which can be understood in terms of the theories of memetics, *bricolage* and defamiliarisation.

Central to the way Gaiman operates is his role as fantasist: his method of exploring these ideas is to literalise them, and create a world in which these ideas are not just conceptual models, but actual laws of nature. Therefore, as we progress, we must be aware that the world of *The Sandman* enacts its own premises: it is not just a discussion of the human use of narratives, but a model of it.

Chapter 1: The Practical Narrator

The Sandman universe is multifaceted, ranging from the mundane world to the supernatural to the metaphysical realms of gods and mythical beings. Since the essential premise of this thesis is that humans interact with the world through narratives, we will begin with the mundane, and a review of Gaiman's humans as they narrate, demonstrating how their narratives are formulated, the implications of living in a narrative universe and the challenges they face because of them.

Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to delineate the way that interpretive narratives work in *The Sandman*, particularly the dynamic between narratives, mortal individuals and the world around them. In turn, Chapter Three will address Gaiman's conception of his primary narrative form, myth, the postmodern and Jungian ideas which underlie it, and how they contextualise the conclusions he draws. At last, in Chapter Four, we will see Gaiman's ideas crystalise around Morpheus, the mythic personification of Gaiman's engagement with narration.

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At the end of the last chapter, it was proposed that Gaiman has literalised postmodernism's relativist, heteroglossic, subjective intertextuality. In contrast, metanarratives fashioned on Lyotard's model take it as implicit that they are definitive descriptions of a stable, comprehensible world. Thus, while Gaiman accepts the Lyotardian idea that people

interact with the world through narratives, he has a different conception of how these narratives work.

Gaiman challenges Lyotard's model of the implicit, unquestionable, fully cogent metanarrative, inherited rather than created, and taken for granted without ever being questioned or modified. Replacing the Lyotardian metanarrative, Gaiman presents a model of narration as *bricolage*: an active engagement with a selection of possible narrative systems, or even with their separate component memes. Providing us with a way to understand the world and determine our behaviour, yet distinct from Lyotard's metanarratives, Gaiman's *bricoleur* structures can be referred to as interpretive narratives.

The above is not meant to imply that Lyotard championed the use of metanarratives. The idea was conceived as a critique, a model of the subjectivity and self-reflexivity of human ideologies. The theory itself is a response to the postmodern destabilisation of meaning, whereby formulations of 'the truth' are downgraded to social constructs. Gaiman is working from the same premises, and engaging with the same context, but he sees no reason why, once we acknowledge our ideas as constructs, we should be trapped by them: Gaiman is trying to formulate a way for us to interact with our ideas, a new approach that will enable us to assess and modify rather than simply perpetuate them.

Accordingly, Gaiman's narrators become active agents. While Lyotard's metanarrators are passive heirs to a dominant metanarrative, Gaiman's people are *bricoleurs*: they synthesise the intertexts around them into a personal narrative, and if there are 'dominant' metanarratives, there are likely to be alternative, non-dominant metanarratives competing with them. In practice, the synthesis of an interpretive narrative is an automatic rather than a conscious process; yet, in this chapter, I plan to show that

even at their most passive, Gaiman's narratives will still never inherit even the dominant metanarrative as a precast whole, but prioritise and modify its components according to their own understanding, preoccupations and drives.

This agency changes the status of the individual. Even on an unconscious level, it is the mind of the individual which is determing the narration process; and it it is the narration process, we must remember, which determines our interactions with the world. Now however, the narrative in question can never be objectively right: it is no longer powerful on its own terms, but because the individual agrees to accord it power. In turn, should the individual become conscious of the process, they have the potential to take conscious control of it.

In *The Sandman's* engagement with moral and cosmological questions, the agency of the human individual becomes definitive. Lyotard's metanarratitive model vests power in the metanarrative itself: the individual will never question the rightness of the values it enshrines. Gaiman's model attributes power to the individual who, consciously or unconsciously, selects their own values and decides whether to enact them.

Yet if the individual is to have such a prominent place in Gaiman's cosmology, then before we review the text itself we must resolve certain discrepancies between Gaiman's *bricoleur* conception of narrative, and traditional conceptions of the integrity of the individual.

Gaiman's humans use narratives to interact with the external world; however, we will also see that they use them to interact with themselves: just as they superimpose narratives over the world to make it understandable, they synthesise an identity in order to manage their own nebulous, multi-layered minds. This identity is a narrative, a default framework

for interpreting information and determining behaviour. Indeed, it is a primary narrative, and its formulation is not easy.

Many of *The Sandman's* characters are overtly synthetic beings. We actually watch Morpheus create the Corinthian, and when he proves unsatisfactory Morpheus even 'edits' him. Fiddler's Green takes advantage of its status as a synthetic, a legendary paradise, to completely remodel its identity, turning itself into a 'human' modeled on G.K. Chesterton. It is telling, however, that *The Sandman* draws little distinction between 'real' human beings and beings who originate as symbols or in fictions. It is logical that synthetic beings should have synthetic identities, but it is also indicated in *The Sandman* that all identity is synthetic, even those identities which belong to 'real' people – in fact, the designation 'real people' itself becomes inaccurate and problematic.

The synthetic nature of identity complicates the individual's status, and challenges the role they were cast in above. We have prioritised the individual, but if identity is construct, can we distinguish between the narrator and the narrative, between individuals and the ideas they are using to define themselves?

I claim that *The Sandman* casts identity as a narrative because it overtly portrays identities as constructions. Take, for example, the tenants sharing Hal's house in *The Doll's House*. In a community which includes Gilbert/Fiddler's Green, the identities of the human residents are just as overtly shown to be constructions – Zelda and Chantal have co-authored their identities in a fictional mode, the gothic. Hal has created the co-identity of Dolly, which he performs to an audience, and will later create the more successful, more vicious co-identity of Vixen LaBitch. Ken and Barbie are putting up the cheery façade of a perfect marriage, so co-operatively that they consistently finish each others' sentences.

Later, caught in the Vortex, they will encounter each other's very different subconscious selves, and the façade will not survive it.

In addition, these created identities are clearly *bricolage*. These characters internalise and enact memes and models ranging from the gothic mode to socio-cultural models of gender and relationships. Individuals use different models to express similar drives, making identity as much a matter of the strategies used to approach natural propensities as the propensities themselves. For example, Hal, Zelda and Chantal are all homosexual, but Hal creates his identity on contrasting principles to the lesbian couple. He forefronts the difference between his sexuality and gender by acting out his female identity to an audience which knows he is a man. In contrast, the gothic modes Zelda and Chantal enact traditionally grapple with transgression, and present transgressive models of femininity. Zelda and Chantal use them as a precedent to validate their own transgression of social norms. Unlike Hal, they choose a model which simultaneously asserts their gender and their sexuality, and where Hal requires an audience, Zelda and Chantal are elaborating on their own marginality, creating a private, co-dependent reality between themselves.

Thus, identity is a *bricoleur* narrative. However, in casting identity as *bricolage*, Gaiman has also brought into question the distinction between 'individual' and 'information': in *The Sandman,* an individual's identity is one more type of narrative construct; therefore, is what a person considers a 'self' just one more set of ideas they hold? Are we to question whether the individual exists at all?

I propose that this is a misrepresentation of Gaiman's position. While identity itself may be a narrative, its subject, the psyche, is very real. This is where Gaiman's Jungianism asserts itself. However, as well as providing the identity narrative with a subject, a psyche,

it also casts this psyche as difficult to define: it is nebulous, multi-layered, and contradictory. The psychoanalytical model Gaiman uses means that much of the psyche is not even accessible to the conscious, narrating self. Thus, any narrative trying to define it is likely to be incomplete. This is the root of Gaiman's reservations about narratives.

Thus, it is vital to note that Gaiman's identity narratives are not straightforward, objective observations or chronicles, but a struggle to define a very nebulous subject using pre-existing models, like 'husband/wife', 'lesbian', 'performer'. Thus, it is vital to note that the *bricoleur* creation of identity is a dialogue. On one side, the mind seeks a phraseology for its own processes and impulses, from the subconscious drives of the archetypes to more conscious ones like homosexual tendencies. On the other side, the external intertextuality of memes, models and narratives provides it with the material with which to do this. Yet it is the mind itself which is the active agent here, which internalises, enacts and personalises the material it uses: identity is a narrative, but the mind is the narrator. In turn, this gives the individual room to take conscious control of the narration process.

It is reiterated throughout the series that identity is both optional and fluid, even for entities personifying absolutes. "I didn't know you could stop being a god," Delirium remarks to Morpheus; "You can stop being anything" he replies (*BL*, 3:21). It is not accidental that Gaiman uses Morpheus's quest to take control of his identity as his primary example of the battle to take control of all interpretive narratives. Like identity narratives, interpretive narratives about *The Sandman's* external world are a dialogic interaction between a complex, contradictory and chaotic world and the intertextual context.

With this in mind, in order to find more insight into the dialogue between the mind and the memes through which it expresses itself, let us look Lyta Hall's relationship with *The Sandman's* version of the meme of the furies, the Kindly Ones. Lyta's fraught and finally disastrous engagement with the Kindly Ones demonstrates just how problematic the relationship can be, and just how many factors conspire to complicate it.

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Gaiman's depiction of Lyta is a direct engagement with the ideas listed above. Lyta stands on the transition point between old and new ways of thinking: unconscious of the fact that her ideas are constructs, Lyta behaves like a metanarrator, trusting them implicitly; yet her story also demonstrates that they are constructs, unstable, and, explicitly, *bricolage*. Indeed, Lyta's engagement with the meme of the Kindly Ones demonstrates the dialogic, *bricoleur* nature of interpretive narratives. Lyta's own passions, her history with the meme of the furies and the mental habits of lifetime all drive her to seek out the Kindly Ones; in turn, the meme of the Kindly Ones comes with its own baggage of existing meaning and associations. Indeed, it encodes an entire worldview. When Lyta adopts the meme, she finds herself compelled to perpetuate it, with tragic results. In this, Lyta comes to embody a central theme in Gaiman's prioritisation of the individual: the need for individuals to reclaim the power which they allow their metanarratives to direct for them, and the disasters that can result if they let themselves be misled.

Even confronted with evidence that the notion of a stable, unquestionably true metanarrative is a fallacy, Lyta continues to insist on the accuracy of her misguided

perceptions. The folly of this false certainty is central to the text, because Lyta's commitment to false ideas leads directly to Morpheus's destruction. Lyta mistakenly blames Morpheus for her husband Hector's death. In turn, she blames him when she believes, wrongly, that her son Daniel has been murdered. It is to take her revenge, that she seeks out the Kindly Ones. Since her pursuit of her misguided beliefs has such climactic consequences, Lyta's narrative strategy is one of the most prominent in *The Sandman*.

Even as Lyta commits to her 'metanarratives', there are clear indications that the narratives themselves are unstable, subjective, synthetic *bricolage*. Indeed, rather than operating within a single paradigm, Lyta passes between three: in the course of *The Sandman*, we see Lyta step between three different metanarratives: she is cast as the passive wife of the superheroic 'Sandman' in Brute and Glob's dreamworld, the 'Dream Dome'; returns to the real world and takes up the role of practical and dedicated single mother to her son Daniel; and finally goes insane when she believes Daniel has been murdered, traveling the Dreaming and meeting various memes before becoming an incarnation of the Kindly Ones.

None of these narratives can make any claim to being an objective truth. Though Lyta accepts them all as reality at the time, they obviously contradict each other. In addition, their nature as synthetic narratives is made explicit in at least the first and third case. The Dream Dome is an explicit construct, created by Brute and Glob in Jed's dreams, and makes explicit references to *The Sandman* comics of the 1970s and the *Little Nemo in Slumberland* comic strip. Lyta's third metanarrative is nothing less than a journey through a landscape of fictions, until finally Lyta's own identity merges with the fictional meme of the furies.

When she seeks out the an existing meme, the Kindly Ones, to wreak her vengeance, Lyta is unquestionably acting as a *bricoleur*. Above it was proposed that the psyche pre-exists and shapes the narratives imposed over it. Lyta's case proves this: her interaction is with the Kindly Ones is determined by her own mental habits and unresolved issues, and by a context of social roles and cultural heritages which have influenced the meme itself as much as they have influenced her.

Therefore, some brief background about Lyta will help us understand her relationship with the narratives she encounters. Lyta is not Gaiman's original character, but the second incarnation of the DC superhero the Fury. She is the daughter of the original Fury, who abandoned her as a child, and Lyta retired from the role after the death of her lover and partner, Hector 'The Silver Scarab' Hall, while she was pregnant with his child. In *The Sandman*, Hector's ghost was parodically cast as a substitute Sandman by the rogue dreams Brute and Glob, and Lyta posthumously 'married' him. The root of Lyta's misconception about Morpheus as Hector's 'murderer' is the fact that, after capturing and disciplining Brute and Glob, Morpheus exorcised Hector's ghost. Since Morpheus also displayed a rather clinical interest in Lyta's unborn child, Daniel, who had gestated in dreams, Lyta was quick to blame him when Daniel was kidnapped by Loki and Puck.

At first glance, Lyta's time as a single mother in Los Angeles is less overtly a narrative than her other two, since it lacks a fictional aspect. However, it remains an interpretive narrative, providing Lyta with an implicit set of assumptions about the world and a set of concordant behaviours. Its affinity with the other two narratives becomes clear when we see that all of these narratives, different as they are, express the same needs, drives and preoccupations: Lyta's psyche is expressing itself in different forms.

For example, Lyta has always struggled with her identity as a woman. She takes on the roles of deferential wife, then dedicated mother, then dream-traveler encountering a range of feminine figures in her search for the one which will empower her, the Kindly Ones.

Though she possesses both superheroic physical powers and psychological strength, she has struggled to find an acceptable way to be powerful. She has consistently sought validation by dedicating her strength to the service of others, and, perhaps as a reaction to her mother's abandonment, sublimates her own needs to fulfill those of her loved ones: prior to *The Sandman* she was a superhero, and her deference to Hector in the Dream Dome is an exaggeration of their relationship when he was alive and "Hector's dreams came first" (*DH*, 3:9). She goes on to build her life around her role as Daniel's mother, restricting her own needs until she feels that "if I don't talk to an adult soon I'm going to start climbing the wall" (*F&R*, 7:1). At last, she allows herself to be completely assimilated into the Kindly Ones.

Thus, in her various narratives, Lyta is fighting the same battles on different grounds. Her Los Angeles narrative may be cast in a more realistic mode than her alternative narratives, but it is still one more way of defining herself. It is central to note that, as much power as Lyta accords to her narratives, they begin in her mind, and are determined by it.

All of Lyta's preoccupation with female disempowerment, her own empowerment and her relationships with her loved ones will come to bear on her interaction with the Kindly Ones. Through them, her mind is trying to find a product that will help it 'phrase' its emotions so that they can be understood and acted upon, and thus effectively channel its energies towards fulfilling its goals. Thus, though the Kindly Ones are depicted as

independent beings, what powers and shapes Lyta's interaction with this meme is the way that it expresses her own feelings, and gives her a way to grapple with issues that have preoccupied her throughout her life. This interaction can be roughly analogised to Jungian symbolism: while the meme itself has an existence exterior to the individual, belonging to the heritage of a 'collective consciousness', it only really gains its power as an expression of the individual's psychological drives. From the start, Lyta seeks out the Kindly Ones because their model of an inexorable avenging force offers her a way to express her drive to avenge Daniel.

Her choice of the meme of the furies is not accidental. Indeed, her engagement with it has been lifelong. As mentioned above, 'the Fury' was Lyta's superheroic identity, inherited from the mother who abandoned her: it is the guise in which, as a superhero, she has been most effective as a warrior. As she seeks the power to avenge her son, it is the meme she associates with both heroism and motherhood. As someone who has always struggled to reconcile power and womanhood, the Kindly Ones will tempt Lyta by offering her an image of empowered femininity. Lyta's habitual way of dealing with this issue, her drive to validate herself by conforming to the demands of her loved ones at the cost of her own needs, will also come into play: to avenge Daniel, she will throw herself into the fury role and be exploited by the Kindly Ones to fulfill their own goal, even when it diverges from her own.

Thus, Lyta's personal psychology is a determining factor in her interaction with narratives and memes. However, the interaction is not one-sided: the memes and narratives themselves are part of a pre-existent intertextuality, and come with baggage of their own.

To really understand this interaction, it must be understood that the narration process is psychological by nature. It is telling that Lyta enters the realm of meme and story by going mad. This demonstrates that this intertextual dimension exists within the mind. This is why Gaiman's humans can interact so easily with his memes and fictional beings: fictional beings may lack a physical aspect, but they are made of the same psychological material as human individuals. As her Los Angeles metanarrative collapses, Lyta finds herself adrift in the world of narratives and memes

This experience is a literalised depiction of the way humans live in a complicated context of intertexts. In crossing between the real and the fictional, Lyta represents the many humans in the cycle who have come to blur this already permeable line – for example, Zelda and Chantal are entangled in Gothic paradigms, while Barbie explores and populates the pre-existent fantasy world of the Land. Lyta surpasses all these characters in the extent to which she penetrates into the fictional; the extent to which she loses track of the difference between the physical and fictional worlds; and the sheer scale of the ramifications of her actions.

Thus, we must understand that Gaiman literalises the subjectivity of the postmodern worldview: the external, physical world falls away, as the mind interacts with its own products.

The dialogic nature of this interaction is paramount. The Kindly Ones are autonomous: in Gaiman's narrative universe, memes are not simply the products of human minds, but exist in their own rights. They have agendas of their own which do not necessarily correspond with those of the humans who draw on them, and can trap those who invoke them without understanding their full ramifications. This is a literalisation of

the fact that memes are intertexts, existing in a collective consciousness: their use is *bricolage*, and they come with a baggage of connotations which the individual must negotiate. Indeed, the Kindly Ones themselves are only one version of *The Sandman's* recurring, multiform figure, the three-who-are-one, which occurs in forms ranging from various versions of the triple goddess to female relatives across three generations. Blackmore's model of the 'selfish meme' is also relevant here: while humans use memes for their own purposes, 'parasitic' memes 'use' humans as 'hosts', and to perpetuate their own connotations and denotations.

It is vital to note, that in Gaiman's conception of narrative memes are 'parasitic', in the sense that they have no agency of their own: they perpetuate themselves by shaping the behaviour of human agents. If they are accepted implicitly, as metanarratives, then the ideologies they encode should be perpetuated unquestioningly – barring, of course, any obstacle thrown up by the humans own complex, contradictory psyche.

Lyta's interaction with the meme of the Kindly Ones will demonstrate the tension between the two sides of this interaction. Her superheroic identity as 'the Fury' is an aspect of herself. As Lyta blurs the boundaries between the real and the fictional, it also becomes a connection to the heritage of ideas that have attached to the meme 'the furies': Lyta correlates her identity as 'the Fury' with the meme of the furies. The reference begins by invoking the connotations that it already has for Lyta: the empowerment to action implicit in the heroic role, vengeance, implacability and motherhood. In turn, however, it will also invoke the narrative of the real furies, the Kindly Ones, with all the connotations Lyta never considered. At last, when Lyta realises Daniel is alive and tries to extricate herself from the Kindly Ones, she will realise that the ideas they encode have trapped her.

Importantly, Lyta is subject to these connotations and encoded ideas even if she does not understand them. While Lyta associates the fury meme with her mother, she is unaware that her mother, Helena, whom Rose Walker meets in *The Kindly Ones*, abandoned her because she became obsessed with revenge, and the obsession destroyed all other impetuses[6]. All other, personal desires and drives, including maternal affection, were sacrificed in the pursuit of a "sanctified" (*KO*, 6:9) moral idea. Helena commited herself to the idea of pure, inexorable revenge, embodied in the furies, but the implication of this purity is that nothing, not even maternal love, will distract from it. In effect, another narrative subsumed Helena's individual identity, and her agency.

In adopting the superheroic identity of the Fury, Lyta attempted to follow in her mother's footsteps. As a substitute for a personal relationship, she is participating in her mother's legacy. Unfortunately, that is exactly what Lyta will do. Helena became caught up in the pattern set by fury meme, and thus became part of the meme's heritage of associations. Though she does not know the role that obsessive vengefulness played in her mother's story, Lyta will nevertheless perpetuate the pattern. Like Helena, Lyta will eventually have to play the role of avenger instead of the role of mother.

Like memes, narratives in *The Sandman* have a life of their own – they are not only patterns imposed over reality, but, in a narrative universe, they conform reality to themselves. Thinking Daniel was dead, Lyta adopted a pattern of action to achieve her revenge. The irony is that Daniel is not dead, but the pattern she has adopted will ensure that Lyta loses him. As Thessaly tells her when her quest is over, "Your actions have ensured you will never see Daniel again," (*KO*, 13:20).

[6] The identification of Helena as Lyta's mother is one of *The Sandman's* vaguer intertextual references, essentially depending on the reader's unlikely recognition of the original Fury's first name, but Gaiman confirms her identity in *The Sandman Companion*.

This patterning effect is part of the nature of narratives. Interpretive narrative patterns impose a logical structure onto events, and *The Sandman* literalises this, so that events conform to the criteria of the logic at hand. Thus, Lyta loses Daniel not only because of the precedent set by Helena, but because the orchestration of a revenge is reliant on a crime: Lyta sets out to avenge the loss of Daniel, therefore Daniel must be lost to her.

It is at this point that we see the interaction between the individual and the idea that they adopt. Since the adopted meme or narrative is phrasing the individual's thoughts and impulses, superficially, it can become difficult to determine the difference. It is in this way that *The Sandman's* memes and narratives determine reality, by becoming indistinguishable from it: gradually, Lyta is sucked into insane obsession with the idea of revenge which the Kindly Ones embody, eventually becoming so single-mindedly devoted to it that she loses her individual identity and merges with the Kindly Ones. Metaphor becomes reality, and she becomes, literally, a fury.

At the same time, though narrative and referent may seem indistinguishable, they are not actually identical. Seeking out the Kindly Ones as an idea that will fulfill her own needs, Lyta is not devoted to the Kindly Ones on their own behalf, but on her own. She never really comes to understand their deeper implications as a symbol. On closer examination, her motivations for seeking to destroy Morpheus differ drastically from theirs. The Kindly Ones do not care about Daniel, and are seeking revenge as much for its own sake as on behalf of their history with Morphues and Orpheus, about which Lyta knows nothing. Lyta is especially hungry for the power and implacability of the meme because she sees her battle with Morpheus as almost certainly doomed. When Lyta does discover Daniel is alive, the behaviour of the Kindly Ones is telling. Their implacability

turns out to be double-edged: Lyta attempts to divert from her vengeance and rescue her son, but the Kindly Ones will not be diverted. The Kindly Ones "do not rescue…what do you think we are? /…We revenge" (*KO,* 11:21). It is commonality of purpose, not of opinion, that lets Lyta and the Kindly Ones essentially merge. They diverge, however, as soon as Lyta's purpose changes – the Kindly Ones are the embodiment of a single idea, and unable to accommodate her.

The way that the Kindly Ones exploit and abandon Lyta is an allegory for the way ideas work in the real world. Their adherents may find that they have unexpected implications, and they may escape their adherent's control, taking on 'a life of their own'. This is also an allegory of the way in which our narratives delimit our options, sanctioning some actions to the point of making them almost inevitable while ruling out the possibility of others. Thus, part of *The Sandman's* message is that no one perspective is sufficient for all aspects of life.

The depiction here of Lyta's relationship to the Kindly Ones is central. It is the Kindly Ones who are dominant. It is the woman who has been used by the idea and is now at its mercy, not the other way around. Ironically, the narrative Lyta used to formulate a response to her powerlessness has usurped her power, using it to further its own ends. What Lyta has not realised is that the power the meme of the Kindly Ones gives her is predicated on an assumption of her powerlessness. The idea of a supernatural avenger is a facility for those who cannot avenge themselves. This is the premise underlying the Kindly Ones' conception of themselves as representatives of the oppressed. Lyta has been sabotaged by an unthought-of implication of the idea she has adopted.

Thus, if Lyta's psychology helps detemine her interaction with the Kindly Ones, the meaning of the meme itself is just as determinant. However, no narrative is constructed in a vacuum – the meaning which attaches to memes reflects the broader ideological context in which they develop. On closer examination, we can gain some insight into the influences which have determined the development of the meme of the Kindly Ones.

In *The Sandman* sub-creation, memes and tropes are not merely ornamental, but encode ideologies with powerful implications. One of the points on which Lyta engages with the Kindly Ones is as a narrative of femininity. The Kindly Ones cast themselves as embodiments and representatives of all women. They reject the name "Furies" because it's "such a nasty name. It's one of the things they call women, to put us in our place…/ termagant / vixen / witch / bitch" (*KO*, 7:21. Gaiman's ellipses). On an immediate level, the Kindly Ones are practicing a form of ideological slight of hand: they are quite as bad as the name "furies" implies, but they are shielding themselves with feminist narratives of oppression. However, the matter is more complicated. In fact, in *The Sandman* sub-creation, where facts conform to the narratives told about them, the Kindly Ones are also telling the exact truth. They are the products of perjoration, demonisations of feminine power produced by a patriarchal culture, and this act of perjoration is double-edged. By creating the symbols of demonised femininity, the cultures that created the Kindly Ones have spawned incarnations of that corrupted power. The Kindly Ones claim to embody the feminine, but the sort of femininity they define is a palimpsest of patriarchal reactions to women and women's reactions to patriarchy. There is no 'true' definition of the feminine underlying the Kindly Ones, only a series of narratives about women's role, and the echoes of cultural battles with the issue of femininity.

Thus, if Lyta is unaware of the processes of how narratives work, the Kindly Ones themselves seem to have tracked their own development through legend (the belief that three demoniacal women will take vengeance on those who violate their obligations to their family) and fiction (in representations like the *Oresteia*, and for that matter *The Sandman*) and finally confronted themselves as a reflection and embodiment of culture and ideology. Watching the Kindly Ones perpetuate the ideas they embody, we see that they exploit the workings of Lyotardian metanarrative: they validate their ideas by appealing to standards of validity already in place. In Lyta's case, as shown above, they appeal to feminist formulations of the oppression of women.

While such formulations are relevant to Lyta, as her time fulfilling the passive-wife role in the Dream Dome shows, the Kindly Ones here use them largely metaphorically, as a way to express the powerlessness Lyta feels against Morpheus. Lyta knows Morpheus only as a persecutor. Though she doesn't fully understand who and what he is, she does suspect – and the Kindly Ones encourage her to believe – that her efforts against him are doomed to failure. Ironically, by equating Lyta with all oppressed, powerless women, the Kindly Ones are putting her in touch with something larger and more powerful than herself: she rises above her individuality and becomes a righteous representative of all women.

Yet while the oppression of women may be a metaphor for Lyta's powerless against Morpheus, it is precisely that: a metaphor, conflating two things which resemble each other, but have no real relationship. The Kindly One are sincere in their railings against misogyny, but such railings are irrelevant to Lyta's relationship with Morpheus. Lyta is not

being persecuted because she is a woman; she is the victim of the personal agendas of supernatural beings ranging from Puck and Loki to the Kindly Ones themselves.

Thus the invocation of feminist discourse is, on closer examination, a narrative smokescreen. Drawing Lyta's own preoccupations with her gender role, the Kindly Ones give her a channel through which to focus her emotions, but it is now their narrative which is being enacted, regardless of the truth. What is important here is that for all practical purposes, metanarratives can replace 'the truth' – once it is accepted implicitly, it is the metanarrative which will determine the individual's subsequent behaviour, and thus subsequent events.

By the time Lyta realises that there is a discrepancy between the narrative of vengeance she is enacting for the Kindly Ones, and the truth that Daniel is not dead, she finds that she has set events in motion which she cannot stop. Effectively, she has surrendered her agency and cannot easily take it back.

Thus, Lyta's attempts to fight her 'enemies' are misguided because they are aimed at the wrong targets: the real threat is her commitment to ideas she does not fully understand. Ultimately, the Kindly Ones do exploit Lyta successfully, assimilating her into their own agenda: they win the power struggle between individual and idea. Their success is an indication of the power of ideas, but just as surely, it points towards the necessity of personal responsibility, and the individual's need to fully understand the ideas to which they commit. The consequences of deferring this responsibility can be disastrous.

There is a power struggle here: on the one hand, the narrative determines a pattern for events to follow, but on the other, it is the individual who must do the following. However, since the narrative is usually implicit, as long as the individual does not question

the narrative itself they will usually follow it automatically. The doctrine of personal responsibility is an answer to this dilemma, entreating the individual to take responsibility for their ideas, to consciously consider their implications and consciously decide whether to follow them to their conclusion. Lyta, however, never attains the necessary insight into her relationship with her ideas to be able to do this. Thus, in a literalised, exaggerated form, her example demonstrates what happens when the individual defers authority to the metanarrative. In the context of the doctrine of personal responsibility, Lyta's is a cautionary tale about the dangers of passivity: the individual who does not understand the narrative process, and take responsibility for the formulation of their narratives, is liable to follow a misguided course of action that could have calamitous results.

To summarise, then, both minds and memes are shaped by various external influences – Lyta by her mother's abandonment, for example, the Kindly Ones by patriarchal input. The mind is subject to a range of unresolved concerns, habits, emotions, values and drives, and the meme to a heritage of connotations and influences of various *bricoleurs*.

Thus, the creation of interpretive narratives is *bricolage*. For Gaiman, narratives are never objective or truths in their own right. They are the products of an interaction between mind and memes and, though the mind is the active agent in this interaction, its power can be usurped if it is uncritically commited to perpetuating the meme's ideology.

It is telling that, though Lyta never manages to understand the metafictional, metaphysical reality underlying her, and though she is misguided and actively misled throughout her mission to destroy Morpheus, *The Kindly Ones* does end with Morpheus's death. Accuracy has no relation to the effectiveness of narratives. Also noteworthy is how,

for all her determination, Lyta ultimately plays only a contributory role. She has become a pawn in the agendas of the Kindly Ones and, indirectly, Morpheus himself. Knowledge may have power, but Gaiman is at pains to communicate that ignorance can be manipulated by the powerful with devastating effect.

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Above, we saw a model of human behaviour based on the unpredictable interaction between the complex psyche and a range of multiform outside influences. This is strongly anti-deterministic. It offers the potential for freedom, for individual agency, but this potential is problematised because the model is so strongly postmodern, offering a vision of the human experience as a plethora of psychological phenomena – ideas, drives, memes, emotions, preferences, influences – with no authoritative evaluatory standard except the synthesised narratives which we impose.

However, this freedom comes at the cost of certainty, and as the saying goes, its price truly is eternal vigilance. Therefore, against Lyta's story, Gaiman contrasts an account of a more self-conscious, critical narrator: Rose Walker. Lyta and Rose play parallel roles in *The Sandman*. Both pose major threats to the Dreaming and are threatened with death by Morpheus; they even look after each other's young, male relatives – Rose's brother Jed and Lyta's son Daniel – and fail to protect them from supernatural threats. In *The Kindly Ones*, Rose and Lyta's stories run parallel. Thus, their approaches, beliefs and behaviour are juxtaposed, casting different perspectives on the processes of narration.

Gaiman emphasises different aspects of Rose and Lyta's engagements with narrative and narration. Heedless of the way in which narratives work, Lyta is free to engage deeply and without reservation with the narratives themselves. Above, we saw that Lyta treats her narratives as implicit, unquestionable truths, failing to acknowledge any evidence to the contrary. In contrast, Rose embarks on a more self-conscious, critical relationship with the process of creating a metanarrative, and this engagement is challenging in itself. Many of Gaiman's supernatural characters discuss personal responsibility, but Rose puts the doctrine into practice in her mundane, mortal life.

Rose's engagement with narration begins at the end of *The Doll's House*. Here, Rose confronts a crisis when she encounters supernatural phenomena that she cannot reconcile with her narrative. Having herself become the Vortex, a potentially apocalyptic supernatural phenomenon, Rose has encountered Morpheus, discovered that her friend Gilbert is Fiddler's Green in disguise and seen her grandmother Unity die in the physical world and live on in the Dreaming. She struggles with the implications of these indications that her narratives about the universe are false:

> If it was true, my dream…/ then / nothing makes any sense. /…Everything we know, everything we think we know is a lie. / It means the world's about as reliable as a layer of scum on…a well…which goes down forever, and there are things in the depths that I don't even want to think about… / we just kid ourselves that we're in control while a paper's thickness away [are] things that would drive us mad.

- *DH*, 7:18-19.

Rose has come to understand that narratives ("what we know") are subjective ("what we think we know"), and that they are limited, failing to cover every aspect of the world. She realises, too, that narratives provide an illusion of certainty, of "control". However, Rose is unable to fomulate a way to cope with the "madness" that lies beyond the parameters of her narrative.

It must be understood that these realisations are a crisis for Rose. At the end of *The Doll's House*, Rose is unable to deal with them. At the same time, the abandonment of her narrative paralyses her, and she spends months trapped in an introspective stasis. Eventually her only solution is to put the matter aside. When we meet Rose again in *The Kindly Ones*, she is still wrestling with the insufficiencies of narratives, and we see her "making a list of things they don't teach you at school," echoing the feeling she has at the end of *The Doll's House*, that the model she's been given is insufficient to address the problems facing her (*KO*, 5:4). She is also keeping a diary: as she records and reviews her thoughts and behaviour, she is consciously wrestling with herself, the world and her place in the world. In effect, Rose's diary is a new, conscious type of narration, as opposed to the standard implicit, unconscious metanarrative.

While this new narrative complements the old one, however, it does not replace it; and when all is said and done it is still a narrative. It is vitally important to note that Rose never manages to escape the need for narration. Rather, she involves herself more consciously and critically in the creation of her narrative. In *The Sandman*, narration is an unavoidable part of human thinking.

Rose is put in an a unique position to appreciate this after her time as the Vortex. Lyta threatens the Dreaming through her blind adherence to her metanarrative, but Rose threatens it when her efforts to dissolve these boundaries demonstrate the chaos that would result. Not only does she amalgamate the dreams of her housemates, but she also dissolves the boundaries between their conscious and subconscious minds – though they remain in their dreams, we see the surrealism that characterised their dreams replaced by coherent, waking behaviour. Rose sees that this disruption of the relationship between their conscious lives and subconscious dreams has consequences. The cheery façade that Ken and Barbie put up, so co-operatively that they consistently finish each others' sentences, does not survive their encounter with their very different subconscious selves. Afterwards, Ken begins to display the selfishness and shallowness that characterise his dreamworld of "money and sex and power" (*DH,* 15:15). Barbie loses touch with her fairy-tale dreamworld completely, and must regain it in *A Game of You*, suggesting that her relationship with it requires privacy.

For all the destructive potential accorded the Vortex, the situation here it is not portrayed as a simplistic disaster - it would be difficult to argue that the co-dependent façade Rose destroys is healthy or even desirable, and should ever have been preserved. Undoubtedly, Barbie and Ken are both changed by the incident, and replace their harmonious co-dependency with more overtly dysfunctional behaviour, but for Barbie at least this is the first step on a personal journey towards a truer self, and the wisdom she begins to gain at the end of *A Game Of You*. What Rose is coming to understand is the synthetic nature and fallibility of narratives. This is why, after her time as the Vortex, Rose critiques her narrative at every turn.

In essence, Rose is aware of the difference between the world and the narratives phrasing it. It is telling that the cost of this awareness is certainty: the purpose of a narrative is to establish implicit principles and default behaviours, so that the narrator does not have to consciously formulate an approach to every situation. In contrast, Rose must constantly evaluate her narrative and herself, taking nothing for granted, contemplating her thoughts and behaviour in her diary and then reviewing her diary to track her own development. The youthful Rose of *The Doll's House* is blithe and self-assured, almost cocky, in her assessments of the world, but her experiences sabotage this self-assurance, and by *The Kindly Ones* Rose is more serious, suffers more angst, and is constantly analytical.

Though Rose may have to work harder without it, Gaiman is damning about those who insist on the certainty of their narratives without properly reviewing them, and the behavioural consequences they have. Narratives are, after all, fallible.

Gaiman critiques the insistence on certainty is integral to Lyta's approach. Indeed, in the Dream Dome, we see her make far-reaching sacrifices for the certainty of a stable, unquestioned narrative. She represses her worries and personal discontents to fulfil the role of submissive wife, in order to preserve Hector's role as macho hero – this despite the fact that the role is a farce, and Hector's behaviour buffoonery. Lyta's insistence on certainty comes at the cost of personal fulfillment and integrity. In Los Angeles, Lyta remains uncomfortable when called on to act without it. She is anxious when offered a job, because it does not fit in with her conception of herself as a mother. Indeed, is this insistence on certainty, in a postmodern, subjective universe in which there is none to be had, that is

Lyta's greatest folly: generally unable to question her assumptions, Lyta lets her false certainty of Morpheus's guilt compel her attack against him.

Rose, too, is looking for certainty, but she is more careful and critical about the process of finding it. Essentially, Lyta does not see the difference between her perceptions and objective reality, so she fights to conform to, and reacts in terms of, what she perceives. Rose believes that the world is objective, but also that it is more complicated than she understands. Carefully and critically, she is looking for a way to understand it.

This is not to say that Rose's lack of certainty does not distress her. The Rose of *The Kindly Ones* is a chronic worrier, evaluating and re-evaluating every aspect of her life. She has to, not only because she knows that narratives are fallible, but because she accepts responsibility for her thoughts and behaviour. This personal responsibility is important to Rose. To her, the most chilling possibility at the end of *The Doll's House* is that "we're just dolls," manipulated by "things which would drive us mad if we thought about them for too long" (*DH*, 7:19). Rose values her integrity as an individual. In accepting responsibility for herself and her narrative, she is refusing to relinquish it. Rose's situation may be difficult and painful, but in a world of unreliable narratives, and personal responsibility, it is necessary.

When we examine the behaviour that results from Rose and Lyta's different approaches, and the way in which their approaches let them interact with the world, Rose does seem to be at an advantage. Lyta is stuck perpetuating patterns that are familiar to her: even after she brings a lifetime of making compromises to a climax in her Dream Dome passivity, she insistently defines herself through her relationship with others. Her

unresolved issues with power, motherhood and oppression/self-suppression culminate in madness and destruction.

In comparison, Rose's approach is far more fluid. Her distinguishing characteristic is the way she can deal, with aplomb, with sudden challenges, unfamiliar situations and people whose opinions and worldviews differ from her own. This is demonstrated in Rose's interpersonal relationships. Not only does she deal with the shifting boundaries of her family and the challenges that result from her relationships with Jed and Unity – finding her quest for Jed turning into something darker and more difficult than she expects, suddenly finding herself becoming the Vortex with potentially fatal consequences – but her ability to interact with a wide variety of people is demonstrated by her time in Hal's house.

Not only can Rose interact with a variety of people, but she can help them and be helped by them. Gilbert rescues her from an attack from a street gang, and the entire house waits to support her while Jed is in the hospital. In turn, Rose will support Zelda both financially and emotionally during Zelda's illness, though they have to negotiate their different positions on sex. Lyta has the strength of certainty, even when she is catastrophically misguided. Rose's heroism lies in her ability to help those who differ from herself. Rose's relationality may challenge her, as we see when her friendship with Hal begins, breaches and heals, but her strength is the malleability of her boundaries, her ability to tolerate and adapt.

The dialogic nature of our interactions with the outside world may be part of the *bricoleur* nature of narration, but Rose demonstrates that it may also be a resource: we can alter our courses according to new information or new perspectives drawn from outside

sources. Outside influences can keep us from sabotaging ourselves with our own behaviour.

Rose and Hal's interaction enriches them by inspiring them to veer from their preconceived behaviour: Hal is adamant that he will not attend Zelda's funeral, but Rose presses him out of his self-absorption. Concurrently, Hal solves a moral problem for Rose who, despite her willingness to help Zelda, still associates AIDS with transgression. Rose feels she has to convince Hal that Zelda and Chantal contracted the disease "innocent[ly]", through a kidney transplant and not drug use (*KO*, 13:18). Hal's reply is simply that "Rosalita, there isn't any innocent, there isn't any guilty, there's just dead" (*KO*,13:18). This is the answer Rose needs to hear. It validates her decision to care about Zelda's life and death, and absolves her of any false 'moral responsibility' to judge her.

Rose's interactions with other people are also her way of engaging with the *bricoleur* nature of narrative: she is assembling input from various sources and and trying to review and process it. Relationality is *bricolage* with an emphasis on dialogue: as we see with Rose and Hal, interactions can adjust the 'texts' of both parties. Contact with different minds can give us information that we lack but need, correct our misapprehensions and validate our virtues. The contact is not always painless or any less than traumatic – as Rose learns, when she confronts the discrepancy between her feelings for Jack and his for her – but it always has at least potential benefits. Rose's encounter with Jack leaves her more emotionally mature, rejecting her earlier selfishness in her love affairs and coming to understand romantic relationships as more than just conveniences.

Thus, if *The Sandman* advocates personal responsibility for one's beliefs and behaviours, Rose puts this into practice. She confronts the inadequacy of interpretive

narratives as well as (at least in the *The Sandman* universe) their necessity, and engages with narrative as *bricolage*. Though her approach is more difficult, when it is juxtaposed against Lyta's more reflexive, less self-conscious narrating its benefits become apparent: though Lyta's habits are damaging to herself and make her behaviour damaging to others, Rose is better equipped to handle an unpredictable world, and to interact with other people. Ultimately, though Rose never finds a stable or conclusive narrative, and suffers for it, her flexibility does make her receptive to more information, and makes moments of insight more likely.

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Thus, central to *The Sandman's* cosmology is the idea of personal responsibility. In the postmodern world, where all ideology is constructed and subjective, failure to take responsibility for one's ideas, and to evaluate their premises and consequences, can be disastrous. Yet this approach is difficult to put into practice, because it requires one to confront all the uncertainty of the postmodern climate, and one's own inability to formulate a reliable, authoritative worldview. To be truly responsible, one must live with irresolvable uncertainty and constant, self-analytical struggle.

However, acknowledging one's limitations opens up new possibilities and opens the mind to new insights and ideas. Not inconsequentially, it also improves the individual's ability to relate to other individuals. Thus the benefit of this struggle is that it forces us to improve our interactions with the outside world, particularly with other people and the humanist legacy of memes which contextualizes us. These interactions are complicated and

potentially dangerous, but a conscious, responsible approach enables us to make them enriching.

Thus, in place of Lyotard's conception of static, implicit metanarratives, which humans perpetuate but do not question or challenge, and certainly never consciously change, Gaiman proposes a conception of narration as *bricolage*, a dialogue between our selves and the intertexts of the external world, ranging from symbols to memes to socio-cultural mores.

We may not be able to count on the factual accuracy of our narratives, but we can try to ensure that they provide the best interaction with the outside world. The interaction itself is central, and part of it is the maintenance of a dynamic metanarrative. We may never be able to find the perfect metanarrative; the process of creating and editing our metanarrative has become primary.

Thus, while the options available to Gaiman's humans are something of a double bind, it is still preferable to take on the challenge of being a conscious and responsible narrator, rather than leave oneself vulnerable to both one's own unresolved psychological issues and the influence of external ideas. It is ironic, however, that the deciding factor in this choice is the chance of a less dangerous, more beneficial, more informed interaction with the external world, and a community of people and ideas. From a philosophy which began by prioritising the individual, the doctrine of personal responsibility has rooted itself by prioritising the individual's relationship with the wider world.

The next chapter, as we review Gaiman's conception of mythology, we will come to better understand the ideas, and Gaiman's interaction with them, that have led to this philosophy, and helped determine its development.

Chapter Three: The Modern Myth

Lyta and Rose demonstrate how Gaiman's humans operate within a narrative universe. However, their physical, mundane world – the human world – is only one level of *The Sandman's* subcreation. Alongside it lie the metaphysical realms of gods and religious figures like the devil, and the Dreaming, with its imaginary inhabitants. Indeed, the difference between the two is a technicality, only dependent on the degree of power humans accord to metaphysical narratives – myths. *The Sandman's* gods:

> "begin…as dreams. Then we walk out of dreams into the land. We are worshipped and loved, and take power to ourselves. / And then one day there's no one left to worship us. / …[And we] journey back into dreams.
>
> - *BL*, 5:20.

Essentially, gods are empowered narratives, used to understand reality and only ascendent as long as humans perpetuate them, and religions are to be understood as interpretive narratives rather than facts.

The narrative/mythical is by far the more prominent aspect of *The Sandman* than the mundane, physical world, and narrative/mythical figures, including Morpheus, are more numerous prominent than humans. Having seen that *The Sandman's* subcreation literalises the narratives imposed over it, we can now treat the cycle's mundane reality as a reflection of this narrative context.

Thus, this chapter will proceed on the premise that *The Sandman's* primary concern is with the stories we use to encode our most fundamental assumptions about the universe, and that myth is a dominant form of these narratives. In the last chapter, we watched humans use narratives to mediate between their minds and the outside world, reviewed the obligations they were under and critiqued their behavioural strategies. In this chapter, we will examine the dynamics of the narratives themselves.

In turn, while the previous chapter explored Gaiman's conception of interpretive narratives, we will now examine the premises of Gaiman's mythology, and track the influences which shaped this conception. Most especially, we will come to understand its emphasis on the power and responsibility of the individual, and how and why this idea is the basis of *The Sandman's* morality. Thus we will not only extend our understanding of Gaiman's narrative universe, but come to understand why it functions in the way it does.

The previous chapter showed Lyta and Rose enacting a particular conception of interpretive narration, which cast them as *bricoleurs*, simultaneously vulnerable to the ideas they followed and empowered to change them, and faced in turn with the difficult task of being responsible for their own narratives. What Gaiman gives us, then, is not just 'a story', but a depiction of the struggle to find the right stories, the right myths to express our archetypical values and the right metanarrative to guide our behaviour. The traditional myth of the hero's fight ceases to be significant in itself; what becomes significant is our choice of the values we fight for, and how we choose them.

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Let us begin with an overview of the basic ideas and proposals that will drive this chapter.

The proposal that we impose narratives on the world around us is made explicit in the cycle's approach to mythology. Not only does Gaiman draw on a heritage of mythic memes, but he constructs his own myths even while deconstructing the processes of mythology, all on the premise that myths are stories that provide a working cosmology, reflect the workings of our minds and encode our ideologies – that is, they tell us about the world, tell us about ourselves, and tell us how the two should interact. Thus, Gaiman is approaching mythology as interpretive narrative, as stories which encode our conceptions of the world, having internalised our perceptions and value systems.

Gaiman's work enters into the metamythic, addressing the functions, nature and processes of mythology, particularly its psychological role. It is on this level in particular that he addresses the changes wrought by postmodern theory and writing practices. Gaiman's work negotiates a somewhat torturous, in places apparently irreconcilable, dynamic between the mythic and the postmodern – it is here, in the interaction between the two that we see him formulate his conception of how interpretive narratives work.

In the postmodern climate, myths are not able to make the claims to transcendant truth that they once did; at least, not on the terms they once did. We will see that Gaiman's Jungianism intercedes between traditional myth and postmodernism, preserving traditional myth's claim to present universal truth while taking into account the cultural relativism of postmodernism.

It is an awareness of this relativism which determines the course of Gaiman's own mythology. If we are subjective narrators, and the impostion and interpretation of symbols

is loaded with specific, nuanced ideology, then no objective perspective is possible – as an inheritor of the postmodern tradition, Gaiman is fundamentally skeptical of any claim to ultimate authority, and this will determine both his approach to the metamythic and the mythology he formulates himself.

To address this problem, Gaiman formulates his own set of values, based on the individual's responsibility to evaluate authority, select their own values and respect the rights of others to their own point of view. In turn, he attempts to encode these values using mythic memes. I would like to show that Gaiman's use of mythology is a meditation on how stories shape our interactions with the world, and that the conclusions he reaches lead him to embrace the responsibility to encode his own manifesto in his own story. Simultaneously, there is a close inter-relationship between the values Gaiman's myths encode and the conception of the world/narrative relationship which underlies his mythology. If the postmodern climate imposes on myth a new set of requirements and restrictions, I will argue that part of Gaiman's achievement is the creation of a myth which fulfils these new requirements.

*

Concerned as we are about memetic heritages and metanarrative frameworks, it should be established at the outset that Gaiman himself roots his work in a very Western heritage, not only of memes but also of individualistic, democratic ideas. Indeed, postmodernism is the most prominent of these Western inheritances, and Gaiman's approach to the various traditions he references is rooted in its conceptions of heteroglossic relativism,

intertextuality, and an equalisation of status between 'high' and 'popular' culture. In this context, the mythologies Gaiman references are those that have made a particular impact on the Western imagination – the Judeo-Christian, Greco-Roman, Norse and Ancient Egyptian pantheons, and even the rational empiricism of the Eighteenth Century – including systems more popular than religious, like fairies, the Arabian Nights, a law/chaos mythos reminiscent of that in Michael Moorcock's *Eternal Champion* fantasy cycle, and American superheroism. In turn, the myths in the forms in which Gaiman recieves them have been passed from incarnation to incarnation by a lineage of *bricoleurs*, and the lineage he chooses to trace is strongly British: Milton's Lucifer is not the sole influence on Gaiman's, but Gaiman's Lucifer is Miltonic. Likewise, his fairies are explicitly Shakespearian. The *bricolage*, however, is dialogic: Gaiman's award-winning short story 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' does not only reference Shakespeare's play, it defamilliarises, expands, interrogates and parodies it.

Thus, in true postmodern fashion, the existing work ceases to be a finished product and becomes an active participant in an intertextuality. Heteroglossia is even more prominent, not only in the plethora of memes on which *The Sandman* draws, but also in the way it crosses between genres and modes. All paradigms are cogent on their own terms, but none are more cogent when compared to others. From within this heteroglossia, Gaiman indicates a relativist climate of different cultural mores. Thus, while he enjoys the mythic traditions his presiding culture provides him with, Gaiman also makes room for paradigms with less place in the Anglo-American mainstream, like Babylonian mythology, African and Russian folklore, Arctic shamanism and even a messianic mythology perpetuated by cats. His engagement with these traditions may be briefer, but the important

thing is that they are accommodated. The implication is that, if there are worldviews that are not directly referenced in *The Sandman*, it is due to limitations of space, not the regulation of points of view.

Thus, the way Gaiman uses his mythic memes is determined by a postmodern conception of memetics, a community of heteroglossic modes and mingling memes. This becomes problematic, however, because the heteroglossia of postmodernism undermines the authority traditionally attributed to myth. In practice, myths gain their power and prestige through their association with the sacred. Traditionally, a 'living' myth, that is, a myth still actively encoding a culture's spirituality, is perceived by its proponents as encoding 'the ultimate truth', a perception reinforced by the powerful spiritual experience produced by the symbolic connection with the archetypes. In turn, the alternative mythologies produced by other cultures are rejected as invalid.

In modern times, however, this status has been compromised by an upsurge of skepticism, a condition not a little exacerbated by improved intercultural communications. Not only are modern theorists less inclined to dismiss alternative cultural conceptions out of hand, but they have also had to acknowledge that, while all cultures have myths, and myths which they experience as loaded with sacred, symbolic significance, no myth is universal in all its details. Under these circumstances, how can any one mythic system claim certain superiority over any other?

From the perspectives of postmodernism and post-structuralism, which internalise this skepticism, myth can have no especial validity. The subjectivity of the psotmodern model destabilises the idea of an objective, external, inarguable authority: we have no insight into the universe in its own right; we have a selection of metanarratives and no way

to prioritise any particular one except by appeal to a broader metanarrative. This state of affairs ideologises the choices of every individual: if every action or inaction is chosen in preferance to an alternative, the most minor of choices become significant. In turn, deprived of recourse to an external authority, all of these choices become the individual's personal responsibility. This trend of thought is the kernel of Gaiman's mythology.

This would seem to imply that myth simply cannot do what it claims to do, to connect us to the timeless, universal sacred. How can it, when all utterances are markedly products of their particular time and place? When meaning is a construction of the human mind, a product of the game of semiotics, there can be no trans-human meaning encoded into the inanimate universe itself, or at least, none accessible using the strategies we have.

From these perspectives, all semiotic constructions occur purely on their own surfaces. Their arbitrary relationship with their referents, their inescapable quality of subjective interpretation rather than objective evaluation, effectively disassociate them from their referents. Thus, the referents cannot be invoked to create 'deeper' meaning; only what is immediately formulated is tangible.

Essentially, myth can be nothing more than an attempt to fill an authoritative void: to deal with those aspects of the universe we do not understand, humans invent a network of signs with which they can interact more easily. Bestowed on myth, assigned attributes like 'sacred' and 'true' can be dismissed as a form of sociological engineering, a way to validate our existent hierarchies and reduce the anxiety that comes from uncertainty.

These ideas permeate Gaiman's approach to the mythic. In Chapter One's discussion of the postmodern archaic, it was observed that Gaiman distinguishes mythic memes from the sacred concepts they connote, treating them instead as portable, mutable signifiers, raw

material from which new stories can be crafted. These ideas are at the root of the de-sacrilisation that allows him to do this. Gaiman's use of mythic memes is not accidental, nor entirely piratical: he is attracted to them as *bricoleur*, drawing on the meanings and associations they already have, and as defamiliariser, playing off these existant meanings to create new ones.

However, even in the face of the postmodern deconstrution of meaning, Gaiman is adamant that powerful, subtle and profound meaning can still be made available to us, and that the mythic can be its vehicle. In this, *The Sandman* seems to have internalised a heritage of Jungian ideas, specifically, the hypothesis of archetypical meanings which are psychological constants, common to all humans, but which can be expressed in different ways.

While Gaiman's apprehension of the mythic has internalised postmodern skepticism; yet he has not responded by rejecting the concept of the sacred, but rather joined Jungian theorists like Joseph Campbell in relocating it. Where once myth drew its authority from an external source – divine revelation, tribal history, etc. – twentieth-century myth-theorists like Campbell have turned to the internal authority of Jungian archetypes:

> Heaven, hell, the mythological age, Olympus and all the other habitations of the gods, are interpreted by psychoanalysis as symbols of the unconscious. The key to the modern systems of psychological interpretation therefore is this: the metaphysical realm = the unconscious.
>
> - Campbell, 259.

The Jungian dimension of *The Sandman's* mythology has already been discussed in depth in Stephen Rauch's book, *Neil Gaiman's* 'The Sandman' *and Joseph Campbell: In Search of the Modern Myth*. Briefly, Rauch contextualises Gaiman's conception of myth against the Jungian perspective favoured by theorists like Joseph Campbell, which locates the significance of mythology within the archetypical subconscious. The topic is broad and rewarding enough to occupy Rauch for an entire book, but I will focus on its implications for the mind/world/narrative relationship: disguising the processes of our own minds as depictions of the exterior cosmos, Jungian myths are exemplary examples of the human use of narratives to interact with the world.

The relationship between Jungianism and postmodern skepticism must be clarified here: From a postmodern perspective – and once the questions postmodernism asks have been raised they cannot simply be ignored – no one could argue that the Jungian approach is any less of a metanarrative, any less arbitrary or more authoritative than any other approach. Yet, of all the hypotheses that Gaiman could use as a counterpoint to postmodernism, and ultimately choose to literalise in *The Sandman*, Jungianism is particularly suitable because it is working from the same primary premise: that the creation of meaning is the definitive human act, and that meaning is located in our minds, not in an objective external world.

This provides a new interpretation of a post-structuralist problem: while the specifics of the expressor's context may shape the expression of meaning, for the Jungian that is a product of the relationship between symbol and archetype, not a symptom of the arbitrary relationship between sign and referent. Granted, to recap an earlier example, there is no reason why the signs 'woman', 'femme' and 'frau' should have the same referent, but the

hypothesis underlying Jungianism is that symbolic meaning, distinct from ordinary signification, works differently. The subconscious archetype is constant, but it is designed to be accessed by whatever suitable cue the undependable, protean conscious world can provide. Thus, in the symbol/archetype relationship, the mutability of the symbol is not a symptom of crippling arbitrariness; rather, its adaptability is a way of dealing with the fact that expression is always determined by context, precisely the realisation which so problematises post-structuralist semiotics.

Paradoxically, the ability to formulate an individuated symbol, one adapted to the individual and their context, ensures access to the archetypical universal. Yet at the same time, Jung's conception of symbols is flexible, but by no means arbitrary – Jungian psychologists like Jolande Jacobi and Jungian mythologists like Joseph Campbell trace the way in which certain associations recurrently attach to certain images. We may not be able to rely on the objective universe to validate our semiotic systems, but in the case of symbols, we are able to appeal to consistencies in the way our minds work. Thus, centrally, meaning ceases to be a fact, and becomes an interaction between self and world, with the symbol as the correspondence point.

By fusing the postmodern and the Jungian, Gaiman formulates a working answer to the problem of the illusory relationship between sign and referent: instead of casting this relationship as 'arbitrary', it recasts it as 'adaptive'. The processes of our subconscious mind, like the referent in front of us, are already there. What we need is a way to interact with this meaning that, in the context of our inescapable baggage of premises, cultural conditioning and metanarratives, makes sense.

Thus, in *The Sandman* we see that the sacred was once embodied in prostitution (by the goddess Ishtar), cats (Bast) and the sun (Ra), things that modern day humans respectively hold in contempt, patronise and take for granted in the wake of scientific demystification. But as the patrons of 'Suffragette City' strip club, a boy at a Glasgow cat show and Urania Blackwell find out, these faded symbols are still capable of powerful effects.

The Sandman's symbols are literalisations of the Jungian ones. As fantastic structures existing in their own right, they make overt the sudden impact of symbols, and both their power – Ishtar, once engaged, causes an explosion which allegorises this – and the fleeting nature of the insight they offer – only "for a moment" does the boy at the cat show "[see] a goddess" (*Wake,* 1:21). As independent as these symbolic figures are, I would also argue that they allegorise the fact that their meaning is an interaction between the symbol and the archetypical within oneself – before the symbolic engagement, Ishtar is degraded, Ra is forgotten, and Bast is decrepit and lonely; they regain their glory only in the act of communicating epiphanies to their human worshippers.

At the same time, they make overt the dynamic between recurrent associations and and the power of cultural specifics. Ishtar is one of many incarnations of the figure of the love goddess. She embodies the sacred in sexuality, and one of her aspects, a sub-symbol if you will, is the significance of "money given for lust" (*BL,* 5:14). This act is significant because it distills the experience 'lust' by freeing it from any other connotations – familial or romantic, for example. Thus, the idea of 'lust' can be grasped in its purest form. However, cultural changes can derail the functioning of symbols. In Ishtar's case, it is emphasised that "sacred prostitution is only found in matriarchies. Men are so terrified of

female sexuality that they have to repress it, or regulate it – which is where we [exotic dancers] come in" (*BL*, 5:13).

Thus, the symbol of 'money for lust' remains, and it retains its power to characterise a particular sort of sexuality, but modern culture has diverted its significance. From denoting sex as "a terrifying experience for both women and men, where they gave themselves to lust and the unknown" (*BL*, 5:12), the symbol has come to signify a debased, consumable sort of lust. The mutual participation of both partners that was a condition of the symbol's power has been muted into a parody of participation – only men are actually sexually engaged and, distinguishing the voyeur-dancer relationship from actual prostitution, the act is never consumated. In fact, the symbol has been converted into the illusion that the 'unknown' is known, reducing women's sexuality to the accessible and consumable.

The element of sacred terror is missing from the performances at 'Suffragette City', although Shep Cayce's presence at the club, despite his impotence, implies that, to him, the act of watching the dancers is still a ritual enactment of sexuality. Tellingly, Tiffany quickly counters the suggestion that she is "in the sex industry" with the claim that she is "in showbiz" (*BL*, 5:13). Sex still has connotations so powerful that, ironically, Tiffany can only participate in an act which once embodied sexuality by disassociating herself from its sexual aspect. Tiffany, however, will never experience its sacred symbolism while she does so, and even after Ishtar's dance forces it on her she is quick to tame the insight with repressive Christian rhetoric. Nancy, who views stripping as an act of feminist empowerment, is no less of a disconnection from the 'terror' and vulnerability of sacred prostitution. She is asserting that she is in control, while the essence of sacred prositution

was the surrender to the 'unknown'. The symbolic process is derailed, reasoned away by replacing the symbols with more controllable narratives.

This inertia is swept away, however, in Ishtar's final dance. Definitively, Ishtar revivifies the jaded act of the erotic dance by resupplying real samples of the phenomena which the erotic dance originally symbolised, and has been degraded to implying – Ishtar quits going through the motions and injects into her dance her real sexuality, her real power, and the real and ultimate surrender and loss of control that builds into her explosive annihilation. This reunion of the real phenomenon with its signifier is the definitive act of symbol creation. In its wake, the loss of control is 'terrible', but it is also ecstatic. The transcendence is so powerful that even extreme physical pain becomes inconsequential:

> There is pain, true, but [Jay Musgrave] scarcely notices it… / Murray Brown…gasps for breath while he stares, and rejoices... / Shep Cayce, who hasn't had an erection in a dozen years, is…coming blood, and he doesn't *care*…
>
> - *BL*, 5:22 Gaiman's emphasis.

The message underlying the story of Ishtar is that the sacred itself is not transient, though symbols may rise and fall. The story expresses a Jungian conception of universalism: phenomena like sexuality are a constant, part of our nature as humans. Therefore, a re-connection with the sacred is always possible. Over the millenia between Ishtar's ascendancy and modern times, society's attitude towards sexuality may have changed, but the fact that we keep trying to express it through the same vocabulary of signifiers

indicates an archetypical association, a resonance between the signifiers and the most consistent areas of our own minds. Our preoccupation with these phenomena is not temporary – we wrestle with them in an ongoing attempt to reconnect our conscious experience of them back to our archetypical drives. ‘Sacred’ is a description of what we experience when we are successful. Yes, the postmodern world is desacrilised, but it is not the sacred itself that has been eliminated, but our connections to it – given the right symbol to reconnect us, the sacred will be there to be found.

Whether Gaiman’s signifiers actually achieve symbolic status themselves – whether, for example, the symbol of Isthar actually makes the connection with the reader’s archetypical subconscious – is beside the point. An actual symbolic experience is a hit-or-miss interaction between reader and text and may indeed be a bonus in individual cases, but, primarily, Gaiman is depicting the symbolic process itself.

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Thus, the collision between the postmodern and the mythical has resulted in Gaiman relocating the sacred, from a feature of the universe into a feature of psychology. Thism proposition has a very significant corollary: that the aim of myth in *The Sandman* is no longer to tell us about the universe outside of ourselves, but about the no less mysterious nature of our own minds, explained in terms of the universe outside of ourselves. More than ever, myth is blurring the lines between story, psychology and epistemology.

At this point, we concede that our sense of the ‘sacred’ is rooted within ourselves: it is a particular type of transcendent ‘meaningfulness’ we feel when an aspect of the external

world, a symbol, aligns with our subconsious archetypes, the fundamental templates of the meanings which we most fundamentally need. What we imply in the term ‘sacred’ is the sense of harmony between our selves and our world that results from this interaction. Centrally, myth is a reflection of ourselves, and it is the function of Gaiman’s mythology to tell us about ourselves.

This is not merely an interesting corollary of Jungian myth-theory. In terms of Gaiman’s work, it cannot be emphasised enough. This is where mythology meets our concern with *The Sandman’s* premised link between story-telling and thinking: Jungian myths are pure psychology in story form; they are narratives encoding our own thought processes.

In this tradition, the sense of the sacred remains an awareness of a larger context transcending our sense of our conscious selves; but now, when we assign to an object the value ‘sacred’, we are expressing an aspect of our interior experience in terms of the exterior world. Since its roots are subconscious, and thus not part of what we recognise as ‘self’, it is not surprising that the power of this awareness is often projected onto an exterior object.

As postmodernism asserts that we can say little objective about the universe, Gaiman embraces the congruent implication that everything we say is about ourselves. Meaning may be solely a product of our minds, projected onto the universe rather than an aspect of it, but Gaiman’s premise is that this does not invalidate it. If the proper study of man is man then, to bastardise the old humanist saw, *The Sandman* shows the mythic, and by extension the memetic, to be the proper study of man because they are expressions of man.

Rauch skims the surface of the issue when he notes that Gaiman's portrayal of Morpheus is an inversion of the traditional heroic quest:

> The most important change of all, indeed the central plot-line of *Sandman*, is Dream's [that is, Morpheus's] process of becoming human….Rather than a human hero becoming godlike and performing various exploits, Dream starts as more than any god, and over the course of the series becomes a man. And this process of humanization turns the hero myth on its head…thus, heroes matter not because they are heroic, but because they are *us*….We learn that relationality and compassion are critical parts of what we call 'being human'.
>
> – Rauch, 40. His italics.

At the centre of this humanist mythology is the process of anthropomorphic personification, the conversion of inanimate processes and concepts into humanoid figures. Thus, to extend the humanist saw further, the proper study of *anything* becomes man: we understand the inanimate through metaphor, assigning it traits, motivations and connotations that make it intelligible. Beyond intelligible, we even make the inanimate universe seem sympathetic or, if malevolent, persuadable, making our conception of our place in the universe more comfortable.

This anthropocentricity is strikingly evident in Gaiman's formulation of the Endless. Not only are the members of Gaiman's primary pantheon themselves anthropomorphic personifications, but the things that Gaiman chooses to personify are tellingly humanocentric. If Gaiman's interest were in the physical universe on its own terms, then

surely, when humans comprise such an infintesimal fraction of the universe, and the inanimate dominates on scales ranging from the galactic to the sub-atomic, Destruction should be ranked above Death in the Endless's age-hierarchy, let alone above Dream? Desire, Despair and Delirium seem rather more arbitrary principles of the universe than, say, heat, light and gravity.

To understand the Endless, it must be understood that they are not depictions of the physical universe. Rather, like any pantheon, they embody a human interaction with the universe (For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted that Destiny is "an established DC character created by writer Marv Wolfman", and pre-dates *The Sandman* series [Bender, 234]. The anthropocentric slant established by the other members of the pantheon is Gaiman's entirely). Thus, for example, Morpheus's pre-eminence over Destruction is indicative of Gaiman's priorities: humans are psyches before they have any of the physical interactions with the world around them which Destruction represents.

Though the Endless can breed, it is telling that their descendants are mortal, whether the other parent is human (Rose's grandmother Unity, who is raped by Desire) or a mythical being themselves (Calliope, mother of Morpheus's son Orpheus). This implies that there is something fundamentally human about the Endless and other mythical beings. They are a product of human consciousness, and it makes sense that their breeding produces more human consciousness in the form of another individual. In *The Sandman*, we recieve constant reminders that when we attribute profound metaphysical truths to the universe, we are really expressing what is located within us. This is why, in the climactic event of the the cycle, when one aspect of Dream of the Endless dies, it is a transfigured mortal, Daniel, who takes his place.

What Gaiman has actually accomplished in the Endless is a reification of human psychology, almost an ur-pantheon. Just as traditional pantheons embody things like thunder, making them tangible to the human mind, the Endless incarnate aspects of the human mind. As constants in a universe of mutable, temporary gods, the Endless are literally the backdrop to all mythologising in *The Sandman* sub-creation, but this state of affairs is also symbolic: all myths begin in the psyche.

Thus, underlying Gaiman's mythologising is the sense that myth is made by humans, for humans. He is aware of myth not as a description of the world, but as an interaction with the world. In, for example, scientific assessment, the interest lies in the traits of the object assessed, and the ideal is as little interference from the observer's preconceptions as possible. For Gaiman, myth is interesting not for what it says about the objects it assesses, but for what it says about those who assess: how their minds work, what their preferences and preconceptions are and how they arrive at them, which behaviours hint at Jungian universalities and how these interact with specificities of culture and fashion. He is interested in myth as psychology.

This is the dynamic which engages Gaiman, and which underlies *The Sandman's* concern with narratives: he expands the interaction between human observers and their universe into a cosmology, the better to explore and understand it. Before anything else, he is trying to give us insight into ourselves.

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Contemporary reading practices are ill-suited to the mythic-symbolic. Karen Armstrong traces the way in which more abstract, symbolic thinking has lost status, as literal, deductive interpretive practices have risen to prominence in the scientific age, indeed becoming a default approach. This is problematic when the literal approach is applied to intrinsically abstract, symbolic myths – Armstrong stresses that it is a mistake not to distinguish mythical from literal thought, that "mythology is not an early attempt at history, and does not claim that its tales are objective fact" (Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* 10).

> In mythology we entertain a hypothesis, bring it to life by means of ritual, act upon it, contemplate its effect upon our lives, and discover that we have achieved new insight into the disturbing puzzle of our world…A myth, therefore, is true because it is effective, not because it gives us factual information. If, however, it does not give us new insight into the deeper meaning of life, it has failed…[but] a myth will only transform us if we follow its directives.
>
> – (Armstrong, 10).

It will be central to the clarity of this part of the thesis to note that I concur with Armstrong in using 'literal' to label a way of thinking, but do not intend it as a value judgement. As I will use the term, to think 'literally' is to contemplate given information on a rational, concrete level. I would argue that accepting or rejecting information as factually correct is a conclusion reached by this way of thinking, but I will be working on the premise that it is

not a necessary one: we evaluate the events of a detective story 'literally' – as 'what happened' as opposed to 'what is symbolised' – without ever considering them as having actually occured. Armstrong was dealing with 'real' cosmologies, that had the potential to be evaluated as 'objective facts', but this distinction must be made when we extend her theory to the purely fictional cosmology of *The Sandman*.

Paradoxically, Gaiman's work has internalised literalist thinking practices alongside its commitment to Jungian abstraction. Though Armstrong is right to point out that to approach myth literally is to sabotage its symbolism, the literalisation of myth is nevertheless as much a part of Gaiman's heritage as the Jungian conception. Though the abstract, Jungian-symbolic conception of mythology is an essential premise for Gaiman, it is not the complete story. Not all the meaning of *The Sandman's* mythology can be defered to the intangible level of the symbolic – irrefutably, it has a prominent aspect that is meant to be taken at face value; as a literal depiction, albeit of fictional events. An understanding of the symbolic may be central to reading the story of Ishtar thoroughly, but it would be no less of an omission to ignore her status as an individual, a character living out her life in a day-to-day setting. In fact, Ishtar's story cannot be fully grasped if it is not understood as a contention between these two poles of the literal and the symbolic: for all the symbolic meaning Ishtar embodies, she must wrestle with the vagaries of the mundane world, eking out a role for herself to suit changing times.

As we proceed, we will see that Gaiman's relationship with literalised myth proceeds along two seams. The first trend may be labelled 'myth as story': whether or not Gaiman's myths achieve symbolic status, they begin as stories designed to be read literally, as representations of 'what happened'. That is to say, whether or not they are symbols, they

are memes. The importance of this is the comparative creative freedom it bestows. Not only may sacred symbols be percieved as inviolate, but if their connection to the archetypes is to function their integrity may even be necessary. In contrast, any writer can play with memes and, especially in the wake of Postmodernism, the degree of respect accorded to a meme is entirely a personal choice.

The second trend of Gaiman's literalisation may be labelled 'myth as metanarrative': the premise of Gaiman's mythology is that, alongside its abstract, symbolic meaning, myth lays a claim to ideological authority, and its corollary, the prescription or proscription of real behaviour. Precisely because the experience of archetypical meaning is so powerful and definitive, while the symbols that enable it are open to tailoring and specific design, the choice of symbol can be ideologically loaded: which behaviour do we choose to associate, by this inseperably instantaneous connection, with the archetypical right? Any appraisal of *The Sandman* would be incomplete, if it did not acknowledge Gaiman's awareness of myth as ideology, and his constant efforts both to question the ideology that particular myths enshrine, and to re-cast myths to encode his own ideas. To a great degree, this is actually facilitated by the transmutation of inviolate myth into adaptable, portable memes. Thus these two trends are interwoven.

Gaiman is less condemnatory than Armstrong about the modern tendency to read myths literally. From Gaiman's perspective, the power of myths to mean symbolically and sacredly occurs *adjacent* to their literal meaning. While the former is nebulous, its effective communication to the reader distinctly uncertain, the literal meaning of these memes is constant and accessible. Hades and Persephone may no longer inspire the reader with the awe of death, but they are still recognisable death-gods in 'Song of Orpheus'.

Abstract qualities of the sacred aside, they imply the concrete connotations of the idea 'death', and fulfil their role as custodians of the dead in the story.

We have seen that postmodernism tells us we cannot be objective; meanwhile, Jungian theory shows us that the subjective can be valuable. We have seen that Jungian myths are functions of psychology whose aim is to tell us about our inmost selves – and we have seen postmodernism claim that indeed, all stories tell us about ourselves. In the dialogue between the two theories, myth and story conflate: like myths, mundane narrative processes come to be seen as encoding our psychology, and they become valuable for the same reason. The literal aspect of story is important, because for better or worse it encodes and perpetuates our conscious values, just as its symbolic aspect encodes the subconscious drives underlying them. Ironically, then, while myth means so powerfully, its ability to mean is being preserved and expanded by Gaiman's conversion of myth into story. Myth may function on the symbolic level, but in story the literal and symbolic co-exist.

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I would argue that the relationship between the literal and the symbolic is vital to understanding *The Sandman's* model of the mind/world/narrative relationship. We cannot understand our metanarratives without understanding their relationship to our subconscious needs and the criteria we require our values to fulfil, and we can only fulfil our subconscious drives by formulating them in such a way that they can be put into practice.

Concurrently, when we acknowledge that myth often encodes ideology, we must also acknowledge that it has moved from playing a personal, spiritual role to a social one.

Traditionally, societies have turned to myth as a source of moral prescription, or as a guideline for negotiating moral shifts – the bible is an exemplary example. Traditionally, this gives myths an elevated status among texts – they are canonised as a uniquely authoritative forumulation of a culture's most sacred values. Thus, for Gaiman, to treat myth purely as a subconscious abstraction and a manifestation of archetypical universals, is to neglect its ability to enshrine very specific ideologies, to dictate behaviours and taboos, to proscribe as well as prescribe. At the same time, to ignore myth's symbolic status is to rob it of exactly that power which justifies its authority. There seems to be no middle ground – authoritative myths must simultaneously operate on a symbolic and a literal level.

In turn, while Gaiman approaches myth both literally and symbolically, he is aware of the problems raised by the dichotomy. Essentially, it is difficult for the two to co-exist: a symbolically resonant image may be unwieldable if taken as a prescription. At the other end of the spectrum, as Armstrong found, the flaws and compromises of a real situation defuse the purity of concept necessary to the symbolic. The confusion of the two can have ideological consequences: symbols given literal, prescriptive authority can be used to validate oppressive power structures as, for example, the myth of Eve has been taken to indicate the corruptibilty and inferiority of women in certain Christian traditions. In our post-colonial world, where literalism is such a distinctly Western tradition, it can also be an obstacle to understanding, even an excuse for dismissing, the thought traditions of other cultures.

We must acknowledge that there is a discrepancy between our archetypical need for certain values and the fallible codes we formulate to enact them. Friction between these

two levels of the literal and symbolic is a recurring theme in *The Sandman*. The Jungian emphasis on the symbolic neglects the very practical effects myth can have when it is used to enshrine authority. At the same time, the way in which we can rationalise away the sacred is a central peril: just as Tiffany and Nancy disarm their exotic dancing by rationalising their actions and motivations, we see cases in *The Sandman* where apparently fundamental values have suffered the same fate. Most notably, in 'Thermidor', we see Robespierre and St Just argue justify the Reign of Terror in the name of "a new religion, based on reason" (*F&R*, 2:14).

At the same time, there is a tension between our ideals and our realities. Many of Gaiman's characters try to negotiate the gulf, and their efforts develop into an examination of the nature of the real versus the nature of the ideal, and the inter-relationship between the two, as each feeds into the other. This paradox is especially evident in the case of *The Sandman's* various ruler figures, including Nada, Augustus Caesar, Haroun al-Raschid, Prez Rickard, Robespierre and Joshua Norton: as temporal authorities, they have had to deal with the messiness and often the grimness of real life, but the realm of the symbolic looms over them. It is a starting point, providing the metanarrative which underlies, validates and definitively characterises their reigns; and it threatens to become a finish line as the historical events over which they preside are rarefied and glorified into becoming myth.

Nada (in *The Doll's House* and *Season of Mists*), Haroun (in the short story 'Ramadan') and Augustus (in 'August') all negotiate the border between individual reality and mythical elevation. Nada, for example, initially appears in *The Doll's House* as a mythical figure in a story related by another character, but she is also presented to us

directly in *Season of Mists*. The driving force in 'August' is the tension between reality and mythic idealisation, and the central theme of Haroun's tale, 'Ramadan', is the division of mundane and fabular realities. Thus we see rulers straddling the borders between the real and the fictional – between the reality they administrate, and the metanarratives they enact.

We can see this tension in play if we examine the events of 'August' in detail. More than any other of *The Sandman's* ruler figures, Augustus demonstrates the dichotomy between gritty reality and mythical status: he has propelled Rome to a level of excellence that has become a symbol in its own right, but to do so he has to both experience brutality – betrayed and abused by "his uncle, his hero" Julius Caesar (*F&R*, 4:8) – and inflict it, having Cicero killed though he admits he is a "great man" (*F&R*, 4:13). Disillusioned, Augustus makes the decision to transcribe Rome's boundaries and duration, a private admission that, for all the greatness of Rome, her gods and her rulers are essentially transient and flawed. They are not, and should not claim to be, eternal perfections – at least, not in the real world. Augustus is negotiating between the real and the mythical. Like perfection, eternity is the realm of the mythical, not the real, and Augustus's actions can be seen as attempts to ensure that the latter is not allowed to divide from the former. Perfection cannot exist in the real world, and therefore neither can an eternal Rome.

Even as he delimits physical Rome, Augustus strives to enshrine his city as a glorious concept. Julius and Augustus are absorbed into the city's religious metanarrative. In myth, however, their imperfections are erased. They can become the perfect rulers of a perfect, and eternal, Rome, a situation impossible in the real world.

Thus Gaiman portrays rulership as a dynamic between the ideal and the real. Underlying this portrayal are reservations about the insitution of rulership, based on a strong awareness of the humanity, and thus the fallibiltity, of the rulers to whom their subjects entrust themselves so totally. The validation of human hierarchies is a central function of myth, and a clear case of the way that the mind uses narratives to impose structure on the world, and the use of stories to validate social and ideological structures. Gaiman seems to have tapped into the unease that drives this quest for validation: fitting institutions of power into a cosmic order creates security, countering any suspicion that those with power over us may be as fallible as we are, and that those with more privilege may not have a superior entitlement.

Particulary, *The Sandman* professes a distinct awareness of the vulnerability inherent in allegiance to a ruler. Any ruler, that is: the malicious Carnifex Mairon (*World's End*) and tyrannical Robespierre only illustrate the problem at an extreme. *The Sandman* has reservations about the ruler/ruled relationship itself. It is a relationship which amplifies the consequences of one person's actions, or inactions, or faults or follies, and transmits their cost directly onto those who are supposed to be under their protection. The Kindly Ones are not empowered to kill Morpheus, but they destroy his subjects along the way. Nada is a great queen in a mythical age, but though "she ruled wisely, and she ruled well," her subjects must suffer for her fallibility (*DH*, 1:6). When her affair with Morpheus violates a cosmic taboo against love between a mortal and one of the Endless, the sun itself destroys her city. Subtly but inarguably, those who choose to fulfil the role of subject are putting themselves not just at the mercy of individual rulers, but of the entire cosmology which they represent, and which validates their power. The same metanarrative that gave Nada

her place in the universe imposes the taboo she has violated, and the punishment that will follow. At best, rulers can only negotiate their way through their fallibility. This makes the use of mythology to validate, even sanctify, authority into a process requiring constant vigilance.

To depict an ideal ruler in 'The Golden Boy's' Prez Rickard, Gaiman must take us into the realm of myth. 'The Golden Boy' is recited as holy writ, by narrator who frames it in explictily theo-mythical terms and language. Taken literally, Prez's story is even self-deflating: the democracy denoted by the meme 'American president' is disavowed by the idea of an innate ruler. Taken as a myth, however, Prez is perfect. As a symbol, his aesthetic is subject to the mores of his time: he is conflating the archetype of the perfect ruler with the contemporary ideal of democracy, invoking that archetypical perfection in terms of what are felt to be acceptable practical options.

It is not a condemnation to say that to be a perfect ruler in *The Sandman* is to be neccessarily mythical. Dying an individual's death, Prez would be re-assimilated into Boss Smiley's hegemony. Prez as myth is a pervasive messiah, able to come 'to all Americas'. His influence is not temporal, but symbolic, and, in *The Sandman*, that is the priority. Prez demonstrates that its discrepancy with gritty reality is what gives myth one of its most invaluable powers: to express our archetypical longings as an ideal for which we can strive, beyond the imperfections and compromises of the realities we must settle for.

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These are the ideas and problems which contextualise Gaiman as he sets out to create his own mythology. Much of this process is *bricolage*, the redesign and defamiliarisation of existent myths to encode new values. In fact, we will see that in many cases, Gaiman is constructing a counter-myth, using mythic memes to deconstruct traditional value systems and validate a democratic system that values individuals, respects their right to their individuality, and insists that every individual is responsible for their own choices, mistakes and outright wrongdoings. The use of mythic memes becomes not an invocation of an authoritative meaning, but a forum for the negotiation of meaning. Gaiman is constructing a mythology of his own, but he is building his heteroglossic, postmodern, metanarrative premises into its foundations.

We have seen that *The Sandman's* subcreation literalises the theme of story-telling, that is, in this world story-telling, and its analogue, the correspondence between narratives and models of reality, are the most determinant forces. Gaiman's mythologising must be approached from this starting point. The most glaring question is, if this is a world in which reality is arbitrated by stories, does that imply that Gaiman is setting up Morpheus as some version of a supreme being? If reality is arbitrated by stories, then surely the Prince of Stories must be the ultimate arbiter? The answer is emphatically negative: in practice, not only is his power limited and largely passive, but Gaiman's Morpheus is just as subject to his metanarratives as anyone else – a topic we will confront in more detail in the next chapter.

We have seen that this reluctance to impose an ultimate mythological authority has its roots in Gaiman's postmodern legacy, but on level more specific to *The Sandman*, any cosmology which empowers narrative is, by implication, democratic. In a system where

the perceptions of any individual sway reality, all individuals are vastly empowered and, theoretically, all individuals should have equal authority.

Thus the question of authority is especially important in a narrative universe. Once we have abandoned the idea of an objective authority, we find ourselves in the position of having to choose the best code of values from a vast range of such codes, with no authoritative standard against which to evaluate them. The danger is that metanarratives can be used to justify behaviours that would otherwise be considered abominable, as we see when Robespierre and St. Just oppress France in the name of reason and liberty in 'Thermidor'.

At the same time, in the metanarrative universe Gaiman has designed, individuals are central. The failure to respect others as individuals in their own right becomes a recurring concern of *The Sandman*. Throughout the cycle, characters ranging from cats to African slaves to Morpheus himself are imprisoned and abused by 'masters' who fail to acknowledge their individual rights. Ultimately, however, the kind of power at stake is more than the usual hierarchical authority, the scope to impose or restrict behaviours. At an extreme, the dominant narrative dictates reality.

Even on an individual level, the dominant narrative claims the power to prescribe and proscribe identity. Wanda, the preoperative transexual of *A Game of You*, is denied permission to travel the moon's road because she was born male. After her death, her identity is left in the hands of a family that cannot tolerate, let alone understand her. They impose the name 'Alvin' on her tombstone, while her mother insists that she be remembered only as "the god-fearing child *he should have been*" (*GY*, 6:15, my italics). In this, they have the complete support of their (Christian) mythology. As Gaiman presents

this event, it is the certainty itself which is a sign of ignorance. His challenge will be to formulate a mythology that can validate its own values without excluding those of people on different paths.

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So far we have seen that, via his own route, Gaiman has reached conclusions similar to Armstrong and Campbell's: the symbolic aspect of myth is central; and to approach myth literally is to misread it. He is all too aware, however, of the paradoxes that result from trying to put these viewpoints into practice. The symbolic cannot be excluded from a healthy mental life, but it must undergo much translation if it is to be used as a literal guide to actual action. At the same time, we need some correspondence between our archetypical moral drives and our actions. Rather than trying to reconcile the practical and the mythic, Gaiman's mythology remains dynamic – a constant negotiation between the flaws and virtues of the two; a depiction, essentially, of the quest for balance rather than a formulation of a system that is balanced.

This dynamic semiosis permeates *The Sandman*. One of its central loci is the character of Lucifer. With the Endless as *The Sandman's* primary pantheon, and Morpheus as its primary mythic figure, it may seem arbitrary to focus on Lucifer at this stage. However, Lucifer's primary role is to contextualise Morpheus, to provide a counter-point that formulates the options Morpheus has but does not take, and highlights the fact that Morpheus's behaviours are the results of his choices, rather than being inevitable. Thus, while Lucifer himself appears only sporadically, the values he embodies permeate *The*

Sandman, and are an integral part of the cycle's philosophy. I begin with Lucifer rather than Morpheus because, as we will see in the next chapter, Morpheus is bound by his own strict, personal narrative, which he treats as irrefutable. Lucifer, however, is vocally aware of the 'metamythic' – he gives voice to the processes, corollaries and restrictions of myth and narrative which Morpheus does not explicitly acknowledge. Thus, through Lucifer, Gaiman explicitly formulates his conception of the mythic and its place in the relationship between story, mind and world. By discussing Lucifer first, we will have a clear idea of these underlying principles when we begin to address their implicit ramifications for Morpheus, and how and why he ignores them at his own convenience.

Thus Lucifer, traditionally the counterpoint to the Christian god, is placed as counterpoint to Morpheus. He sheds light on what underlies Morpheus's perceptions and choices, and his own actions act as a critique. This re-casting of his role is just one of the ways in which Gaiman's use of Lucifer is fundamentally *bricolage*, the redesign of an existant figure to create a new meaning – the treatment, essentially, of myth as meme. By shifting emphases between the characteristics of the Christian Lucifer, Gaiman makes the character the embodiment of a new value system: where personal pride has heretofore been condemned as hubris, it is now elevated as the basis of a doctrine of personal responsibility.

The *Sandman* interrogates an archetypical model once the province of mythology, and which has found a modern home in the template fantasy novel: objective good, championed by the hero, is threatened by objective, powerful evil. Against this context, *Season of Mists* sees Morpheus traveling to Hell, the ultimate seat of evil in present day paradigms, to confront the ultimate personification of Evil, Lucifer. However, after a

straight-faced, dramatic build up to this perilous quest, Morpheus arrives in Hell to discover that Lucifer has quit.

Gaiman's depiction of Lucifer is a deliberate refutation of the character implied by the Satan myth. The ease of his abdication refutes any conception of Lucifer as lusting for power. His preoccupation with wreaking evil is belied by his dismissal of Breschau's brutalities as inconsequent and long-forgotten. His treatment of the devoted Mazikeen would be inconcievable in a figure of pure symbolic evil: though firm, it is certainly gentle, and may even be described as compassionate, and we later find that he has relented in his refusal to allow her to accompany him.

Gaiman is also creating a more literal version of Lucifer, and emphasizing his status as an individual. To be symbolically effective, an evil figure must be as purely evil as possible, but Gaiman is discarding this trait from his conception of Lucifer. Instead, he is creating a personality. Lucifer is self-aware and he has opinions of his own. His range of behaviour implies a full and complex psychology, and his equilibrium demonstrates a common sense lacking in the one-dimensional dramatics of another 'Prince of Hell', Azazel, later in the volume. Markedly, he is also thinking of himself as an individual: he steps away from using the royal 'we', and philosophises about his role as something external to himself.

Lucifer has been created as an embodiment of pride, but is incongruently conceived as being utterly preoccupied with the transient deeds of powerless mortals, an idea Gaiman, fittingly, allows him to refute on his own behalf. He objects to being characterised as "a fishwife come market day," scurrying after souls (*S of M*, 2:18). Personally, Lucifer just doesn't care enough about the humans who consider themselves his only motivation.

This is somewhat ironic, since divine beings in *The Sandman* begin as human-created symbols and memes. Presumably, Lucifer is powerful because his paradigm is currently dominant but, as the Norse, Egyptian and Babylonian pantheons have found, this predominance is temporary. Thus, while Lucifer has been created by humans, and is sustained by their belief, they only value him because they consider him a cosmic overseer with authority over themselves. Authority has been encoded in mythology. The internal strife between unsavoury impulse and morality is externalised, projected onto a symbolic figure who can be disavowed or, as Lucifer has found, blamed when we do in fact stray.

In practice, Lucifer is asserting Gaiman's answer to the notion of monolithic philosophies and cosmic entrapments: the idea of personal responsibility. Lucifer is taking responsibility for his own existence, and refusing others the right to defer that responsibility themselves: "They use my name as if I spend my entire day sitting on their shoulders, forcing them to commit acts they would otherwise find repulsive," says Lucifer, "…I do not live their lives for them" (*S of M*, 2:18). Even the Devil, the Western world's ultimate embodiment of evil, sees no need to work at making humans sin – that capacity is entirely their own. The metanarrative they created to take responsibility for their actions has declined to do so, opting to take responsibility for his own instead. Inherent in Lucifer's design is his rebellion against his mythical creator. His real creators have only themselves to blame when he rebels against them.

This is a standard example of Gaiman's technique: his re-creation of Lucifer is a re-emphasis, an expansion of existing elements in the traditional Lucifer's character. He is the archetypical rebel, and the essence of rebellion is the assertion of self against authority. In the traditional interpretation of Lucifer's myth, a flawed, petty selfhood flails against an

unassailable totality of goodness, and a rebellion against the essence of righteousness can only end in corruption. The traditional Lucifer is the epitome of hubris, and his actions can be nothing but hubristic because the individual can contribute nothing to an authority so totally and objectively right. Bring the myth into the late twentieth century, however, and its premises are destabilised. Through the postmodern lens, no authority can be objectively right. Nor, through the post-structuralist lens, do idioms of authority even exist in their own right: authority cannot extricate itself from its source in human psychology and society, let alone claim to transcend the humans it administers. It is they who enact it – if they did not play the role of the authorised, their idioms would not be authoritative.

In a narrative world, culture may be strongly influential, even dictatorial, imposing powerful prejudices for and against certain memes and values. However, it is the individual who enacts these preferences or taboos. Previously, the appeal to authority validated the individual and their behaviour. In our new conception, it is the individual who enacts authority, fully as much by choosing to submit as by asserting authority over others. Seen as narratives, structures of authority lose their inarguability. As the range of narratives on offer becomes more and more diverse, and as elements of narratives become more open to individual tailoring, individuals become bricoleurs. Through their choices, they customise the frameworks imposed upon them. Alternatively, they have them shaped by accident or misunderstanding. Even failure to amend one's metanarrative at all is a loaded choice.

Thus, in his portrayal of Lucifer, Gaiman is redrafting the established myth to validate his own philosophy of personal responsibility. Lucifer the individual is hero, not pariah. Previously, Lucifer's 'pride' meant hubris; now, 'pride' is a sense of a self-worth.

However, while there is dignity in this, there is no pretension to authority. Lucifer is too insistently an individual to want to take responsibility for other individuals.

The price of asserting our rights as individuals is the necessity of taking responsibility for ourselves. We lose the right to say 'the devil made me do it' – all our actions, and their consequences, are our own. Refusal to bow to authority is no longer a sin in itself – in fact, not only is unconsidered obedience an excuse for perpetuating an abominable status quo – a realm of eternal torment, for example – it is also a dangerously comfortable one, a chance to defer responsibility for one's own actions and situation, a trap. In the new mythology, the matter of sin ceases to be the fact of obedience or disobedience, and becomes the question of why, with what motivations and what degree of consideration, we choose to obey or disobey. To prioritise one's own judgement over external authorities becomes not a sin, but a responsibility. It must not be forgotten, however, that the responsibility is the price of the self-prioritisation.

In a context where relativism has replaced the idea of a centralised authority, *The Sandman* also redrafts the traditional notion of an objective dichotomy of good and evil. In a departure from the heroic model used in myth and high fantasy, not only is there no active monolithic anti-morality threatening the *Sandman* universe, but even the idea of monolithic evil is deferred with Lucifer's abdication.

Instead, Gaiman's offers a new, metamythic conception of the relationship between good and evil at the conclusion of *Season of Mists*, when Hell is reclaimed by Lucifer's 'Creator'. The angel Remiel announces that:

> Hell will once again be the abode of the damned and the demons… / The war between Heaven and Hell is over / Hell is now directly under Heaven's control
>
> - *S of M*, 6:13.

To function as a cogent myth, the basic Judeo-Christian conception requires a seperation of Heaven and Hell, of benevolent God and evil Lucifer. From a metamythic perspective, however, the two are inextricably interlinked. A cogent metanarrative needs to define both good and evil for its adherents: thus, though the two may seem to be in opposition, they are in fact two aspects of the same system. To use Gaiman's metaphor, they are 'two sides of a coin'. When Remiel, an agent of 'good', becomes the administrator of 'evil', Gaiman reveals that the separation between good and evil is illusory: they are both part of the same system, and indeed define themselves in relation to each other.

At the same time, by letting Lucifer remove himself from this monomyth, Gaiman is creating a new, pluralistic system. Lucifer is no longer a nominal rebel, defined as such precisely by that against which he is rebelling, but a true rebel, who has left the system entirely and formulated a new philosophy of his own – personal responsibility. A plurality of systems is possible, and the individual is imminently capable, not only of leaving any given one of them, but of creating their own.

Indeed, in Lucifer's absence, apparently with the 'Creator' and his followers none the wiser, rebellion is superseded by conformity as the essential act of evil. Remiel and Duma, the new rulers of Hell and filling the role of prime evils, are not exiled as rebels but dispatched as bureaucrats. It is Duma who accepts the job: though for Remiel the exile is a catastrophy, he follows his partner's lead. Later, in *The Kindly Ones*, Lucifer

contemptuously highlights Remiel's conformity and reluctance to risk asserting any beliefs of his own. Even Remiel's loyalty is worthless: Lucifer speculates that Remiel would have followed him if he had won the battle with the Creator, emphasising that Remiel's loyalties are to the fact of authority, not to the values that authority stands for. Thus Remiel values himself just enough to be self-serving, but not enough to trust himself to formulate judgements of his own. Evil is truly no longer a matter of individual agency, but of official sanction.

In contrast to Remiel, Duma does have the volition to accept the key to hell. Duma, however is the 'Angel of Silence'. Duma may have potential agency, but he will not use it. He allows Remiel free reign, and gives him neither advice nor criticism. Previously, Hell was based on Lucifer's act of rebellion. Now, all dissent is literally and intrinsically silenced. That it remains as a possibility, however, symbolises the uncertainty of the conformity Remiel embodies. Remiel will never achieve confidence, because he refuses to make personal ideological commitments – there might be opposition from current authority, or from any conceivable later authority that might disagree. Correctly deducing Duma's behaviour – "just sits there…and watches you" – Lucifer's intuition is that Duma drives Remiel "quite mad" (*KO*, 4:2).

Thus, ironically, though Remiel is part of a dominant paradigm, his problem is not a blind faith that it is the only true and righteous paradigm, but an awareness that other possibilities exist. His most telling quote is "I wish I could be certain I was doing the right thing" (*KO*, 4:1). This is the situation that confronts all of the characters in *The Sandman*, whether they consciously engage with it or not. All sorts of gods and metaphysical beings congregate in *The Season of Mists*, reinforcing the plurality of metanarratives available.

Mortals must formulate their morality and make choices about their interactions with the world. Remiel and Lucifer are offering two approaches to dealing with this problem, and the difference between them comes down to allocation of power: Remiel defers to external authorities, acceding to their power over him. Lucifer permits himself to authorise his own decisions. In a world where authorities can be neither inviolate nor infallible, and where blind obedience can lead to the perpetration or perpetuation of wrongs, Lucifer's course is not only the right one, but a responsibility.

*

How does the idea of personal responsibility function *en masse*? Can consensus, the alliance of various individuals with the same opinions, contend as a possible source of authority? Certainly, if the majority of people adopt an idea, their alliance supports and compounds each other's belief. In 'The Dream of a Thousand Cats', the power of consensus is literalised. Morpheus tells a prophet-cat on a myth-like quest a story about a time when cats dominated humans; when a human prophet persuaded enough humans to dream a new reality, this replaced the cats' reality as the dominant metanarrative. If enough cats do likewise, the process will be reversed. In *The Sandman's* narrative sub-creation this is literally what happens, but the myths of the cat and human prophets are also symbolic allegories, a reflection of the way that paradigms are expressed, reinforced and ultimately validated through narratives.

However, this approach is too simplisitic for Gaiman to embrace wholeheartedly. 'Thousand Cats' demonstrates the power that an alliance of dreamers can attain, but it also

demonstrates the danger to those outside of, or opposed to, the ideology of that alliance. The story is essentially about an ideological wrestling match, where cats and humans compete to see which will be all-dominant and which will be abject slaves. Gaiman, meanwhile, engages our sympathy for both sides. The idea of human enslavement is bound to strike a chord with the reader, but as we watch the Siamese cat lose her children and suffer through her quest, her dignity and determination demand respect. With the reader unable to condone the opression of either side, an authority with partisan tendencies becomes grotesque.

Gaiman's response to partisanship lies in his depiction of people. Just as he allows the Siamese cat to display her virtues and win our respect, we can find that we are obliged to give our respect in cases that initially seem unlikely to elicit it. By focusing on character, Gaiman makes the issue not the act-as-archetype, but our respect for the individual. Faced with the Mann family's treatment of Wanda, we are not asked to condemn them for their views, but for their disrespect – their sin is to deny Wanda her dignity as an individual. Gaiman strives to create a mythology that will include the dispossessed. "Significant", in the eyes of Stephen Rauch, is Gaiman's inclusion in his mythology "of characters who have been, up until now…left outside of the mythological discourse: strong women outside the roles of wife and mother, and queer and transgendered characters" (Rauch, 97).

To accommodate the range of individuals and their choices who inhabit our world, our parameters have to remain flexible. By trying to enshrine tolerance, however, Gaiman's mythology is put in the contradictory position of having to prescribe a reluctance to prescribe. Not only is this contradictory, but it is also problematised by the notion of

personal responsibility as we have formulated it so far: if failure to grapple critically with ideas is a sin of omission, if misguided ideas about gender roles, questioning authority or the price of revolution have the potential to be a real threat, then we cannot simply take it for granted that billions of other people can be trusted to muddle through on their own.

I would argue that Gaiman's answer is rooted less in what he tells us than in how he tells it to us: by giving us a story, rather than more abstract myth, Gaiman presents us with individuals to whom we can relate, rather than symbols with which we are expected to identify. Symbol locates significance within ourselves. With story, the vehicle of significance is now our sympathy with someone else. If we read *The Sandman's* stories in the way they are intended to be read, we are obliged to approach these characters, these 'people', with sympathy, tolerance and respect, especially respect. In the act of reading itself, we are already enacting Gaiman's receptive philosophy – a conflation of story-telling and epistemology if there ever was one.

For example, Wanda is not presented to us as a symbolic figure to be used for our own enlightenment, but a character in her own right who demands our respect and possibly requires us to re-evaluate our own moral preconceptions. Thus Gaiman's experience when *A Game Of You* was first published:

> When chapter 1 was published, we received mail from lots of readers saying, "Who is this horrible, creepy Wanda character? How dare you put somebody like this into our nice comic?" And I really enjoyed the fact that many of those same characters wrote back six issues later to say, "They cut off her hair!"

> "They didn't even let her be buried under her name!" I found that immensely satisfying.
>
> - Gaiman, 126.

Gaiman produces myth that has internalised both metanarrative theory and postmodern skepticism, and in doing so has redrafted its own parameters. I propose that, unlike its predecessors, Gaiman's mythology is not out to enforce the certainty of a particular world view. Instead, it is out to explain a world which has come to seem fundamentally uncertain, and to accommodate subjectivity – and, consequently, pluralism - as vibrant and dynamic facts of life rather than semiotic disasters. Truth in *The Sandman* is not a fact to be stated, but an interaction between world and mind which creates meaning dynamically, through quests, crises, reformulations and reclamations.

*

Essentially, then, Gaiman is telling us stories about ourselves and how we relate to the world. To explore this subject, he is drawing on the memes and stories we have historically used to explain ourselves and to relate to the world – the myths that we have used to encode our metanarratives. Thus the most striking feature of Gaiman's metanarrative conception of mythology is its anthropocentricism

This anthropocentricism is rooted in Gaiman's two major theoretical influences. Jungianism and postmodernism, both concieve of meaning as the creation of the human mind rather than a quality of the external universe. It is the dynamic between the two that

is central: while postmodern destabilises traditional meaning structures, including mythology, by revealing their relativism and subjectivity, Gaiman counters with Jungianism's claim that mythology is valuable precisely because of its subjectivity. If our conception of the world is a product of our own minds – a metanarrative – myth is valuable because it gives us insight into the way our minds work, reflecting the most fundamental workings of our subconscious minds in a consciously accessible form. By extension, too, if myths as symbols help us to understand our subconscious drives, myth taken literally, as story, encodes our more individuated, conscious ideologies, including the values and hierarchies of our cultural contexts.

Thus, when Gaiman adapts his mythology to the requirements of the postmodern age, the Jungian idea of universal archetypes is the foundation which stabilises his engagement with postmodernism's relativism, heteroglossia and the destabilisation of authority. It is this lack of authority, in particular, which drives Gaiman to critique the way in which myth encodes ideology, and to recast myth as a dynamic process of meaning creation rather than an act of meaning prescription.

In turn, the destabilisation of external authority leads to a new emphasis on the individual: not only are individuals empowered to determine their own ideas and actions, but they have the right to have that identity respected. Thus, Gaiman's own mythology encodes a doctrine of tolerance and personal responsibility.

Responsibility is the price of individual agency: Gaiman's individuals have lost the right to say 'the devil made me do it'. Ultimately, what the doctrine of personal responsibility asks us to do is to take control of our metanarratives; in practical terms, that is, once we have acknowledged the subjective, constructed nature of our value systems –

our metanarratives – we can recognise that they have no power or authority except that which we provide by consenting to observe them. While this means that we are not beholden to any system or obligation which we do not want to fulfil, the price of this empowerment is responsibility: we are the arbiters of our own values and our own actions, and we are responsible for the consequences of our actions.

At last, because of the way it functions – providing a story that expresses our psychology, encodes our values, and gives us a blueprint for our interactions with the world – myth becomes our template of the mind/world/narrative relationship.

In our next chapter, we will examine the character of Morpheus. If Lucifer is the mythical embodiment of Gaiman's morality, Morpheus is the embodiment of his conceptions of narration, and the quest to transfigure metanarrative thought into *bricolage*.

Chapter Four: The Sandman Himself

Central to any discussion of *The Sandman* is, of course, the cycle's title character. Morpheus, however, is not central in the way that any well-conditioned comic reader might expect. In comic book practice the main character is the nexus and priority of a given series, a convention so entrenched that, at the time of writing *The Sandman*, the right not to sport Morpheus on the cover of every issue was one of Gaiman's hardwon innovations (Gaiman, 24).

In fact, this decision was only an aspect of Gaiman's most important innovation, and his greatest departure from the heritage of the two previous incarnations of 'The Sandman': his decision to convert Morpheus from a predominent character into a dominant theme. As the personification of Dream, Morpheus is invoked every time the series addresses any question of imagination, story-telling, mythologising or, as becomes increasingly apparent, the mind/world/narrative relationship.

Morpheus's story is the main narrative thread of the cycle, and ties together the themes we have explored in the previous chapters. As the mythic personification of story, Morpheus is simultaneously narrator and narration. His is the ultimate engagement both with the dynamics and limitations of narrative, and with the responsibility of being a narrating individual in a narrative universe.

As a narrator, Morpheus begins, like Lyta, by treating his interpretive narrative as unquestionable. His story is a quest towards, as Rose does, acknowledging its fallibility, taking responsibility for it and changing it. In doing so, he demonstrates both how potentially drastic such reinventions can be, and how potentially costly.

Yet in addition, Morpheus is an embodiment of *The Sandman's* conception of narrative and narration, and that conception is encoded in his characterisation. While ostensibly the personification of Dreaming, one of Morpheus's primary roles is also 'Prince of Stories'. He is the personification of narrative itself, and as such his traits and actions are both informed by the concept and comment upon it. Thus, as *Preludes and Nocturnes*, the first volume of the cycle, ranges over decades in the lives of various other characters, some of whom will have important roles, many of whom will never be seen again, we are aware of Morpheus not just as an individual, but as an effect. Traditional superheroes are definitive agents, distinguishable because of their scope for unusual action. Morpheus is a background, a passive influence invoked every time the phenomena he embodies become factors in the lives of others: when others dream, tell stories, and so forth.

In turn, we will see tht this contradiction – Morpheus is simultaneously a communal property, a concept, and an individual in his own right – is at the heart of the crisis Morpheus undergoes, and, as we shall see, it is a dynamic with profound ramifications for the theme of narration. Most of this chapter will explore this dynamic: in practice, Morpheus is shedding light on the practice of narrative living from two persepectives simultaneously. He is the model which defines the process itself, but he is also an individual, putting it into practice in a particular instance.

We shall see, too, that no discussion of Morpheus is complete if it does not address the theme which most consistently attaches to him: the possibility of change. In Morpheus's case, this has direct implications for the question of personal responsibility: Morpheus must grapple with his own power to change his circumstances, and the

consequences of both action and inaction. Morpheus's development through the cycle can be characterised as a movement towards acknowledging his perogative take control of his narrative and attempt to formulate a better one. As we try to evaluate his success, we will have to evaluate Gaiman's conception of just what is required from a 'good' narrative.

As the embodiment of the theme of narration, I also plan to demonstrate that Morpheus's position and behaviour are conditioned by Gaiman's conception of the psychological role of narration. Morpheus's choices only make full sense when interpreted in context of psychological theories: not only the tripartate psychoanalytical model of consciousness, the sub-conscious, and the collective unconscious, on which Jungianism is based, but also those theories which cast narration as the primary psychological process. In determining Morpheus's role and his relationship with his domain, the Dreaming, Gaiman explores premise that human reality is psychological, that our reality consists of stories our minds create for us.

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The previous chapter claimed that Lucifer and Morpheus are, to hijack Gaiman's phraseology, the 'two sides' of the 'coin' of narration and narrative: both are products of, and enmeshed within, the dynamics of their narratives, but Lucifer is acknowledging his narratives as constructs and taking back their power over him, while Morpheus is treating his narratives as authoritative, inflexible, something to which the individual must defer – above all, as implicit.

From a certain perspective, *The Sandman* is the story of Morpheus's journey towards acknowledging what Lucifer already knows: that by their nature, our myths and narratives are the products of our own minds and reflections more of ourselves than of the external world; that they are not imposed by an external authority, but subjective constructs which we choose to observe; and that, above all, we are personally responsible for their content and the actions we allow them to influence. With a clearer understanding of the underlying principles of Gaiman's mythology, especially as a form of interpretative narrative which helps us to understand and interact with the external world, we are better equipped to understand Morpheus's sometimes opaque principles, and his behaviour when it seems at its most wilfully perverse.

This is because Morpheus, in his turn, is a mythic figure, and while his broad role is to embody imagination in general, the way he is characterised emphasises the issues of narrative and narration, and most importantly, the way that narratives mediate between our minds and the world. Just as Thor embodies the boisterousness of thunder, Morpheus is the avatar of what it means to live by a set of ideas. This embodiment is twofold: on the one hand Morpheus is the embodiment of the urge to narrate. He causes and administers this phenomenon as it occurs in *The Sandman* universe. At the same time, however, Morpheus lives by a narrative of his own. On a personal as well as a 'professional' level, Morpheus regulates himself according to his conception of the characteristics of the King of Dreams. This comprises an idea of the behaviour required of him and the respect due to him, but is just as emphatic about what would be inappropriate.

At all times, Morpheus insists on 'correct' behaviour, and he is less tolerant of his own deviations than is he of others'. Thus, he prioritises his professional role as a Prince of

Stories and personification of dreams over his personal needs and desires. Embodying the patterning process of story-telling, he extends it to fit an inflexible framework around his world, his standards of right and wrong (or perhaps it is more accurate to say, of the permissable and impermissable) and himself. The most important of his crises revolve around the conflict between his commitment to his narrative and his clashes against its limitations and insufficiencies when dealing with far messier realities.

However, while this chapter will draw implicitly on the previous chapter's treatment of myth, it is here that I will be addressing in detail the common mythic device of anthropomorphic personification – that is, the tendency to conceptualise a non-human phenomenon as a humanoid figure, like Thor or like Morpheus, understanding it by ascribing it traits and motivations that can be understood. In exploring the contradictory demands made on Morpheus – he must be as far as possible a disciplined and impartial dreamlord, embodiment of an idea, while all the while his individual needs and personality assert themselves – Gaiman is simultaneously exploring the contradictions inherent in anthropomorphic personification.

Personification of the inanimate is a clear instance of narration, in which narratives have become a point of contact between humans and the external world. Anthropomorphism is a translation strategy: phrasing ideas as characters lets us access the non-human by putting it in human terms. *The Sandman's* subcreation literalises personification, so that what began as theoretical constructs become real people. This leads us to personification's main complication, its simultaneity: personifications are commentaries on concepts at the same time as they are characters.

Unavoidably, their traits and behaviours as characters become metaphorical commentaries on their concepts. Artistically, letting theme inform characterisation is an economical way of expressing both a commentary on the theme and the nature of the character. However, the conflation of theme and character is not without its problems. This simultaneity is also a crisis, at the juxtaposition point of the literal/specific versus the mythic/archetypical, as characters try to be both themselves and concepts universal to the human race. We will see that this dynamic both energises and destabilises the identities of Gaiman's personifications.

The traditional approach to personification is to let concept inform character, so that, for example, delirium is embodied as Delirium, a teenage girl with a changeable, colourfully eccentric appearance and rambling dialogue. Gaiman also takes advantage of juxtaposition. To modern readers, Ishtar has lost her potency as a symbol of passion and sacred sexuality, and no longer communicates the body of knowledge that she once did. To re-access some of what she once stood for requires a carefully defamiliarised portrayal. Gaiman's Ishtar, who might be reflexively imagined as passionate and sensual, is reserved, jaded and working as an exotic dancer in a degenerate shadow of sacred prostitution. By characterising her as such, Gaiman puts her on equal footing with the readers – she, too, has disconnected herself from the sacred sexuality she used to embody. Because Gaiman has departed from the traditional way of letting concept inform character, Ishtar's final, suicidal reassertion of her power can come as a revelation, a resurgence of that old awareness of sexual power – we saw the success of this device in the previous chapter.

Personification can be understood in terms of the relationship between a collective property, an archetype or a concept, and individual symbol: the collective is communicated

through a tailored expression, an individual instance. Gaiman, however, is expanding on this relationship by treating these expressions not just as individuated symbols, but as individuals who have to cope with being symbols. Delirium is in the unique position of having had to move from embodying one concept – Delight – to another, and her behaviour has changed accordingly. The personality of Delirium the individual must conform to the concept of delirium, on every level from the cosmetic to the mental. In Destiny's garden in *Brief Lives*, Delirium demonstrates the strong and wise individual she remains at her core – upbraiding Destiny and helping Morpheus when he "fall[s] apart" – but composing herself enough to do so "hurts very muchly" (*BL*, 7:12). Resistance can only be temporary. At all other times, Delirium must fulfil the requirements of embodying delirium, obligated to spend her life in a restless state of derangement. "You wouldn't want my name," she told Pharamond's receptionist earlier, "It would really mess you up," (*BL*, 3:7).

For Ishtar, the reverse applies. She is living out a hollow existence, out of contact with the power and truth she is meant to personify. As tenuous as that contact has become, however, Ishtar's nature as a personification still gets in the way of life as an individual. Because she embodies archetypical sex and love, Ishtar cannot love as an individual without invoking her nature as a love goddess – the individual must be an instance of the archetype. "I loved your brother" she tells Morpheus. "You were goddess of love," he replies, "I would expect nothing less of you." (*BL*, 5:19). Next to the great entirety of love she embodies, Ishtar's personal feelings can only be reduced. To live purely as an individual is to diminish. Ultimately, the only way out of that diminishing existence is a reconnection with the powers Ishtar has avoided – a reconnection, however temporary,

between a symbol that has lost its meaning and the archetype it means. Because Ishtar is a fallen goddess, who will never again effectively communicate the meaning of her archetype to humans, this reconnection can only be temporary, a farewell assertion before a final disengagement.

Like Delirium, Morpheus is strictured by his responsibilities to his portfolio. Like Ishtar, he finds his individual identity compromised by the burden of being a personification, but inextricably tangled in his role as embodiment of an idea. Since the characterisation of personifications is so loaded, Morpheus's characterisation will reflect directly onto the primary themes of the cycles primary themes: dream and imagination, story-telling, narrative and the relationship between narrative, mind and world.

Morpheus's key convictions are leitmotifs throughout the series: he asserts again and again that he has responsibilities. He is dedicated to, and strongly dependant on, notions of rules and order. Stubbornly, he will insist even in the face of definitive evidence that he cannot and has not changed. Other aspects of his narrative are indicated by his failures: his behaviour is starkly impersonal – not only does he consistently fail to achieve sympathy with other individuals, he seems singularly disassociated from his own emotions and personal needs. His narrative seems to demand the exclusion of the personal and individual, that they be sublimated for the benefit of Morpheus's 'professional' role as dreamlord.

Hy Bender offers an explanation for Morpheus's emphasis on stasis that will have broader ramifications. He observes that Morpheus's character contradicts what one would expect of the personification of the imagination:

> At first blush, you might expect someone who rules over dreams and stories to display flexibility, openness, sensitivity and even a certain amount of flightiness. But *The Doll's House* shows the Sandman to be inflexible…insular…closed off to other people's feelings…and entirely devoted to his duties and responsibilities.
>
> - Bender, 47.

Bender has an explanation for this apparent paradox which has even broader implications in the context of this thesis:

> This incongruity may be at least partly understood by considering the nature of the Sandman. As demonstrated by such scholars as Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, there are certain primal images and myths that crop up in every culture because they're built into our collective unconscious and are…fundamental to us….People rely on these archetypes to have dreams and to create stories; but the Sandman *is* dream and story. In other words, his very being is collective and eternal…[Bender's ellipses] and very, very slow to change.
>
> - Bender, 47.

Thus, Morpheus may be static because he represents the most inflexible aspects of the human psyche, the archetypes, out of which have grown our symbols and stories. I would argue that 'represents' is the keyword here: Morpheus is not himself an archetype, and

certainly cannot be all the archetypes. Like any Myth, he is a symbol connoting the existence of the archetypical, and as a personification, their nature has influenced his personality. It is best to concieve of Morpheus's realm, the Dreaming, as incorporating the archetypes themselves. Morpheus in turn adminsters the Dreaming.

Bender does not expand on his observation, but it does offer tempting illuminations. It explains at one swoop Morpheus's fundamental starkness and his ability to fit smoothly into all the times, cultures and paradigms he encounters. Morpheus, in his monochromatic depiction, disengagement and inexpressiveness is stark because, like an archetype, he stands behind and beyond specific instances. Preoccupied with the sweep of great patterns, he pays no heed to the concerns of small, transient individuals "as other than things that dream, as creatures of stories" (*BL*, 8:8). Simultaneously, like an archetype, he can transcend the specifics of time, place and culture. He can be equally comfortable in the fairy-tale Russia of 'The Hunt', in Nada's folk-tale Africa, modern Los Angeles or a world ruled by cats. He can effortlessly bridge five hundred years of cultural changes to meet with Hob Gadling. In all of these cases, Morpheus will adopt a few cosmetic specificities – of dress, for example – yet remain fundamentally himself.

Thus, in personifying Dream and Story, Morpheus has been specifically designed to embody a Jungian conception of how Dream and Story work. Here we are tracing the specifics of Morpheus's characterisation back to an underlying narrative: his characteristics are determined by the Jungian, psychoanalytical model of how our minds work.

At the same time, however, the idea of Morpheus purely as a universal is a simplification. As a personification, he also has an identity that is purely individual – and

we have already seen, in the previous chapter, that reconciling the individual and the archetypical/universal is a problematic endeavour.

Thus, though in terms of the Jungian model Morpheus's archetypical aspect is innate to his nature as a personification of story and dream, it is no surprise to find that its predominance in his personality is in no small measure an achieved state, the product of consistent and wilful repression. Phrasing the abstract and undifferentiated archetype in particular, individuated symbols, Morpheus is in fact on the border line between the pre-meaning and its expression. This may explain Morpheus's self-repression: he cannot afford to have too individual a viewpoint, or give his personal preferences too free a reign, because to do so would disconnect him from the archetypes which it is his function to express.

He cannot avoid his identity as an individual, however. In practice, Morpheus's repressions in service of his work are personally crippling. What may be metaphysical preoccupations on a grand level can simultaneously be personal failures: in *The Doll's House* Morpheus foresees that Daniel, gestating in dreams, will be of importance to the Dreaming (whether at this early stage he knows precisely how is a matter for debate). Therefore, he bluntly tells a distraught Lyta, grieving for her husband, that he intends to take her son from her too. This type of casual inhumanity may be explained by Morpheus's archetypical aspects and the long-sighted, broad-based view it gives him, but it is not explained away. It is a premise of *The Sandman* that no identity is inflexible, no action so predetermined that it excuses the actor. Morpheus's unfeeling treatment of Lyta is his own personal responsibility, and he is bound to answer for it. It is not coincidental that Lyta plays such an integral part in the climax of his crisis.

In practice, then, it is a simplification to think of Morpheus 'as' archetype. He is also an individual consciousness, and like an individual he is struggling to negotiate a functional relationship both with the abstract, archetypical subconscious and the complex external world. Like any individual in *The Sandman* he is doing this through narrative. Thus, Morpheus is a template, a symbolic manifestation of a battle common to humanity.

In this context, anthropomorphic personification, the imposition of a personality onto an object, takes on a particular significance: in Chapter Two we saw how Gaiman's humans self-create by impose a personality, an identity narrative, over their own psyches; with this in mind, personification ceases to be a purely mythic device, and becomes an allegory of the dynamic between the self and one's narratives. Part of being human is the ongoing dynamic between the individual and the collective, the conscious and the subconscious. Like personifications, we are all subject to our individual and collective aspects.

As of yet, however, we have not defined this collective in full. Morpheus is the combination of an individual consciousness and the archetypical subconscious; however, like all of Gaiman's mythical beings, he has a postmodern aspect as well as a Jungian one. An ordinary consciousness is suspended between two more chaotic levels, the subconscious and the external world. As we have seen, *The Sandman's* world literalises the postmodern conception of the external world as an intertexuality mediated by narratives, and this is the worldview that Morpheus embodies. Thus, his realm consists not only of the archetypes, but of the various memes and narratives of the postmodern intertextuality. Thus, the Dreaming features a range of imaginary geography and inhabitants.

As different as these areas of Morpheus's domain are, the common factor in his relationship to them is his role as narrator. Morpheus imposes the narrative order that makes the abstract subconscious and the complex external world comprehensible to the human mind. As a personification, Morpheus passively embodies the subconscious and the external; as Prince of Stories, and as an individual, he actively adminsters them through narration

To understand this complicated dynamic, it is best to distinguish between Morpheus and his realm, the Dreaming. As with the different layers of consciousness in the mind of a person, this is a working distinction rather than a clean separation: though Morpheus and the Dreaming exist independantly, it is stipulated that technically the Dreaming is an aspect of Morpheus. We can consider the Dreaming as Morpheus's collective aspect, consisting of both the archetypes of the subconscious and the memes of the collective conscious. In turn, Morpheus is an individual administrator, and he performs this administration using the processes of narration, using memes both to express archetypical meaning symbolically, and to mediate with the external world.

Thus, Morpheus's behaviour is not merely a personal matter. It sheds light on the processes and consequences of being an interpretive narrator, but it is also determined by the requirements of being Prince of Stories. Therefore, how he behaves tells us something about what Gaiman's stories require in order to function, and thus offers us insight into how they work.

With this in mind, let us review Morpheus's behaviour and its implications in more detail, and let it help us understand the deeper conception of narrative that his personality has been designed to reflect.

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Even at first glance, we can see that all the traits upon which Morpheus's narrative insists are those which compliment his role as a ruling authority: constancy and consistency, responsibility, and a degree of orderliness that can only be achieved by someone defined by adherence to rules and the role of rule-maker. It seems that Morpheus's narrative is founded on a clear division between the personal on one hand, and one's place in and responsibilities to a larger context on the other. Formulated to favour the latter, it makes little or no provision for the former.

Whereas generally the people of the literal age must be reminded about the role of the collective unconscious, Morpheus must be reminded that his identity as an individual is just as inescapable. As we saw in the previous chapter, in Gaiman's cosmology it is central: Morpheus begins as a metanarrator, unquestioningly committed to his ideas, but he will learn that the personal areas his metanarrative excludes are important, and that he takes control of his own agency. His progress towards this realisation will be an epic tale, because Morpheus has dedicated himself so completely to his role as Dreamlord that he refuses to acknowledge his personal needs.

Even in the personal life Morpheus allows himself, it is important to note that he prioritises his narratives above himself – he may love Nada, but he reacts ruthlessly when he feels she has offended his dignity. He will not be so indecorous as to dance at Orpheus's wedding. He loses Thessaly because once "he no longer needed to woo me…he returned to work. To his duties" (*Wake,* 2:21). Morpheus strives to fill a role, not be a person. This

commitment to his narrative both limits and lessens him, because it gives him no space to arrive at any decisions or observe any set of values that do not align with this single narrative. Because he does not validate his personal feelings, he cannot let them direct or even temper his behaviour.

As an individual, Morpheus begins his story in a similar position to Lyta Hall: commited to a narrative which he treats as the ultimate truth, but which is only a incomplete and inaccurate representation of the real truth. However, while Lyta never recognises this discrepancy, there are hints that Morpheus does, but refuses to acknowledge it. Before he takes responsibility for his narrative and reinvents himself and his ideas, Morpheus demonstrates not only how we voluntarily oppress ourselves in our commitment to our narratives, but also the devices with which we decieve ourselves, and the dysfunction which results.

When challenged, Morpheus insists that he is thinking and feeling only those thoughts and feelings that his narrative permits, so that at first glance he seems to have successfully repressed himself. However, there are signs that this repression is not entirely comfortable. Gaiman points out that the Endless do not have names, merely references to their functions (Gaiman, 98). Yet Morpheus "accumulates names to himself like others make friends; but he permits himself few friends" (*S of M*, prologue:11). Seeking a name rather than a description is a groping towards a personal identity; seeking names repetitively is a symptom both of a reluctance to let any particular name be really definitive, and of an unsatisfied compulsion. Names as substitute friends are a reaction to a strict discipline that, in limiting personal expression, also limits personal intimacy – and

since Morpheus is the subject of the names he is 'befriending', it seems that he is compulsively seeking an accord with himself.

Because of the division between his personal psychology and the obligations the narrative of his role impose on him, there is a significant element of posture in Morpheus's behaviour: that is to say, he stops the gaps in his narrative with more narration. Deliberately crafting his actions, he tends to model his behaviour on fictional tropes. When Thessaly leaves him, his reaction is to mope dramatically alone in the rain, even if he has to create the rain himself. The irony of this is doubled on a symbolic level – in this trope, rain usually symbolises an uncaring universe, thus casting the mourner as forlorn as well as depressed; with Morpheus's universe, the Dreaming, subservient to his every whim, he has to tell it to look properly uncaring. The use of narrative to interact with the world has crossed the line into self-parody, going from shaping the template behaviours that let us interpret the world to shaping the external world to suit our templates.

This is not the only time that Morpheus must confront the problems, the potential for *reductio ad absurdum*, inherent in the mind/world/narrative relationship that *The Sandman* posits – problems based on the fact that there will always be a difference between the physical world and our narratives about it. Even the most tailored narratives will never *become* the reality they represent, and like anyone using narratives in this way, Morpheus is interacting with his perception of the world, not the world itself.

This is not a healthy approach. At times the discrepancies can be irreconcilable, so that Morpheus often finds himself stifling his feelings and impulses to fit in with what he feels is allowable. Yet, though he excludes very valid knowledge and feelings if they threaten the integrity of his narrative, he can never un-know or un-feel them. To fully

understand Morpheus, it must be understood that, as a result, his mind works on several different levels, and that what he knows he does not always acknowledge, let alone bring to the point of practical action. As Death says:

> I don't know anyone who can be so completely straightforward, and so utterly devious at the same time…/ the *stuff* you do, where you do it, and you won't even admit to your*self* it's what you're doing.
>
> - *KO*, 13:5, Gaiman's italics.

The result of living according to an imposed, inflexible narrative is the possibility of just such a discrepancy between what Morpheus is actually thinking and feeling and what he expects or permits himself to think or feel. Yet, though Morpheus always acts according to what his narrative allows, he cannot entirely quell his real feelings. The result is a multi-tiered personality, working on several levels even if only one is acknowledged. Eventually, Death finds him hiding the most monumental of decisions from himself, his own suicide. Certainly, this is an extreme dysfunction born of extreme denial, which in turn is born of extreme commitment to his narrative.

In effect, Morpheus is living a lie. As well as leaving him out of touch with himself, this compromises his ability to interact with the outside world: Morpheus can be efficient, but when a more humane approach is necessary the results are often not only disastrous, but far reaching – the chain of events which leads to Morpheus's destruction begins with his inability to comfort his son, Orpheus, after the death of Orpheus's wife.

In itself, Morpheus's behaviour demonstrates the dangers of this extreme commitment, and the dangers of ignoring the discrepancies between reality and the narratives we impose over it. Yet in every case, Morpheus will defer to the rules he imposes on himself.

Only at the end of the cycle, in the very last chapter of *The Wake*, do we see that this state of affairs is something Morpheus has actively struggled to achieve. In 'The Tempest' we see Morpheus acknowledging his personal discontent, but only as he tries to exorcise it. The event occurs during the Renaissance, and afterwards, apparently, Morpheus does not confront these issues again until his imprisonment in the Twentieth century.

Characteristically, what Morpheus has denied himself, he has tried to access by proxythrough stories. He has 'commissioned' William Shakespeare, with the fee of years of story-telling talent, to write two original stories for him. The last of these, *The Tempest*, is: "…a tale of graceful ends. I [Morpheus] wanted a play about a King who drowns his books, and breaks his staff, and leaves his kingdom." (*Wake*, 6:35). Morpheus requests it solely "because I will never leave my island…/ I am not a man. And I do not change / I am Prince of Stories, Will; but I have no story of my own. Nor Shall I ever." (*Wake*, 6:36).

Denying himself the actual freedom to change and leave, Morpheus seeks to quell his desires by fulfilling them through a fictional proxy. What he cannot fit into his narrative he will sublimate into fiction. His true self is eternally secondary. Its needs may be genuine, but they are unwanted, impractical, impossible to reconcile with the requirements of the Dream King narrative. Morpheus will discipline it peremptorily and carry on as if the discipline has been effective, even when it has not.

Yet to himself, Morpheus has refused to acknowledge that this is an untruth on any practical level. He has refused to comprehend his position and his options on a level where he can address them constructively. This coda confirms what Death has implied about Morpheus, and drives home his tragedy. His death has been a suicide. Though he has, since the Renaissance, been aware of a sense of entrapment, he has not allowed himself to do anything about it in four hundred years. It is possible that, had Morpheus allowed himself to address and deal with his pain directly, his situation might never have come to suicide.

Gaiman comments on the irony of the speech quoted above:

> That's really the capstone to *Sandman*, because everything he says there is simply not true, and becomes more untrue as he goes along. I think he knows it even then; but it really becomes apparent following his escape from Burgess's glass prison.
>
> - Gaiman, 229.

The Sandman cycle is precisely that story which Morpheus claims he will never have. As we, the readers, hear him assert this at the end of cycle, the irony of Morpheus's situation becomes even more poignant.

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With this in mind, the rigour with which Morpheus adheres to his narrative seems astounding. Even when the consequences are tangibly calamitous, Morpheus does not waver. When the Kindly Ones invade the Dreaming, he has an opportunity to end their

onslaught by killing Lyta Hall. However, he finds that Thessaly has struck a deal with the Kindly Ones, protecting Lyta within a magical circle. Morpheus knows that "I could kill her…without breaking the circle". "Without breaking the circle, perhaps." Thessaly responds, "But without breaking the rules?" (*KO*, 9:21). Defeated, Morpheus returns to the Dreaming. Even when obedience threatens the Dreaming itself, Morpheus cannot bring himself to deviate from the parameters he has set for himself.

Why, when adherence to his narrative is personally costly and morally problematic, does Morpheus remain so rigourously commited to it? We have seen that this allegiance is not inherent but a construction, whose design has been in large measure his personal choice. To answer this question, we must begin with another: if Morpheus is choosing his narrative, why is this a part of the narrative he chooses? Our narratives help us determine what we need to know to determine our behaviour. Why is this what Morpheus needs to know, or feels he needs to know? Why is this how he needs to behave?

In fact, to condemn the rigour with which Morpheus structures his existence begs an important question: are the parameters he imposes on himself actually unneccessary? On closer examination, *The Sandman* strongly implies the opposite. Morpheus's parameters may not be inherent in his nature, as he would like to think, but they are not arbitrary either. The very flexibility of his parameters may be what drives him to insist so dogmatically on their inflexibility. Without them, the temptation to remedy the deprivations he suffers on a personal level may be too great. The very fact that they are not inherent, that different choices are possible yet unmade, the very fact of their narrative nature, may be part of Morpheus's tragedy. It is possible for him to do other than what he does, but not, I would argue, the for him to do otherwise and still be a successful Prince of

Stories: the liberties he denies himself as a person would be catastrophic in the personification of narration.

This hypothesis is borne out by the case of Morpheus's double, the false dreamlord John Dee. Above, it was proposed that while Morpheus is an individual, he is also the custodian of the collective, archetypical unconscious. Morpheus draws a strict line between these two identities, but Dee demonstrates what happens when a lord of dreams dissolves the boundaries between them.

Dee's usurpation is enabled by Morpheus's imprisonment, during which he claims the most potent of Morpheus's accoutrements, a ruby which contains part of Morpheus's essence, and sets himself up as a false dreamlord. This usurption is so direct that Dee actually alters the ruby so that it responds to him alone, and strikes Morpheus down when he tries to use it. Thus it is not merely power over dreams which is at stake, but, specifically the identity of dreamlord.

At this point, it is an identity that Dee and Morpheus are occupying simultaneously, like two aspects of the same individual. Thus, Dee becomes a mirror-image of Morpheus, his shadow, to use Jungian terminology. Dee's approach is the exact inverse of Morpheus's: his actions are the opposite of those Morpheus takes, and indirectly demonstrate the disastrous consequences that Morpheus's approach averts. Dee sees power over dreams as an occasion for self-indulgence – he fails to see himself as responsible for his actions or beholden to the dreamers he abuses in his efforts to stimulate himself. While Dee awaits a showdown with Morpheus, he spends hours playing torturous and ultimately fatal mind games with the occupants of a diner. These mind games are tantamount to the disruption of his victims' narratives. Dee unleashes the impulses that their notions of

taboos have made them supress, and even going so far as to substitute false identities for their conceptions of reality, forcing them into roles like ‘animal’ and ‘worshipper’.

This abuse of power for personal gratification is bad enough, but the real danger of an unfit dream lord is far-reaching and metaphysically profound. One of Morpheus’s roles has been to negotiate the relationship between the conscious mind and the collective unconscious. His dreams and stories mediate between them, using a collective heritage of memes and symbols to translate subconscious events and collective archetypes into terms amenable to the conscious mind. If this process breaks down, however, the dreamlord risks influencing the collective unconscious with his own personality, an effect tantamount to pollution. All around Dee, the city is swept up in an outbreak of sudden, psychotic rampages, as Dee’s personality, his individual madness, infects the collective unconscious.

Dee’s case may seem to be an extreme example: when he injects the unconscious with his own personality, he infects it with his own madness; but Morpheus, whatever his flaws, is certainly not a homicidal maniac. However, it is the integrity of the unconscious that is at stake. The archetypes are Morpheus’s domain. As template meanings they will lose their ability to function as collectives if they are too defined by the personal preferences of their adminstrator. This is the area of the psyche that provides feelings and drives *before* they are sorted into categories, associated with objects or people or shaped by opinions. Its function is to remain open to all possible expression by all possible individuals, not straight-jacketed according to one opinion – and it is proven repeatedly that Morpheus’s opinions are fallible.

This is a practical safegaurd, but it also goes to the heart of *The Sandman’s* metaphysic, which places such a premium on the individual. The unconscious must not

dictate personal choices, but provide the basic impetus underlying all individual choices: there is a basic drive towards achieving happiness, but the problem of achieving it must be open to the different strategies of different individuals. In *The Sandman* universe, the integrity of the individual is paramount – if individuals are responsible for their own choices and destinies, they must be allowed the freedom to be individuals.

In practice, we have seen that Morpheus's feelings do have an influence on the Dreaming. In *Brief Lives*, as mentioned above, we see him creating rainy weather while he mourns the end of his relationship with Thessaly. The difference between Dee and Morpheus is that Morpheus understands how to mediate between the conscious and the unconscious, using narrative tropes. We have seen that, when depressed, Morpheus expresses his depression through the creation of symbolic rain, a natural association that has had its symbolic power ratified in uncountable narratives. Translating chaotic emotions into forms that can be handled is the process of healthy minds. Similar processes underlie both the expression of undifferentiate archetypes through symbols, and the projection of narrative structures onto the formless external world. Dee, however, cannot master this translation, or grasp the need for it. He cannot disconnect himself enough from his madness to phrase it into symbols. Unable to address and resolve the disruptions in his psyche, he can only, neurotically, replicate them in others. The only way he can engage with his homicidal fantasies is to live them out in the real world.

Thus Morpheus must keep his personal consciousness from corrupting the unconscious. Conversely the unconscious has such unregulated power that it must be not be allowed to infringe freely on the world of conscious action. Morpheus notes that the ruby, the conduit that puts Dee into such extreme contact with the unconscious, "was not

made for mortals. / The damage to your mind must have been considerable" (*P&N*, 7:21). The contact has unleashed Dee's id, formless and unregulated. This formlessness is especially important. The atrocities Dee commits in the diner are distinguished by their purposelessness, and their random segues from one 'game' to another. Here, unregulated, unsocialised, and unordered by a moral structure – a narrative – Dee's unleashed subconscious is wreaking havoc.

Without a narrative, and with his ability to be cogent narrator compromised, Dee's individual identity is swamped by the memes he is meant to be administering. Not coincidentally, his mind is flooded with echoes of the dreamlord narrative Morpheus has so painstakingly created. Shakespeare has served as Morpheus's proxy, a vessel to express the personal issues Morpheus could not address himself; Now, Dee repeatedly and apparently reflexively mutters quotations from Shakespeare – all of them misquotations or rendered nonsensical by context, indicating that Dee's relationship with the material is garbled. As the balance is upset between the individual Dee, the collective unconscious and the collective conscious of the intertexts, and as Morpheus's legacy infringes on Dee's identity, Dee ironically turns to the devices Morpheus used to regulate the relationship between himself and his domain: narratives.

Their parallel struggle may explain why Morpheus treats Dee so leniently after Dee's defeat – he may very well sympathise with the challenge Dee faced. Morpheus, at least, has had aeons before the evolution of the human race to formulate the behavioural narrative that now serves them so efficiently. It is telling that Dee's reflexive narrative is the inverse of Morpheus's, prioritising selfishness and exploitation where Morpheus disciplines himself into dutiful service and self-effacement. It emphasises that Morpheus's

narrative is a conscious achievement, something he has formulated and fought to implement, and, if nothing else, his encounter with Dee must remind Morpheus just how essential that narrative is. This is true of Morpheus's specific narrative, and it also implies the necessity of narratives in our interactions with the world and ourselves: if we do not impose the sort of order that a narrative provides, the alternative is the chaos of Dee's madness.

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Contributing to the tragedy of Morpheus's eventual destruction are the repeated attempts of other characters to tell him he has another option, "the freedom to leave" (*S of M*, 2:20). This is Lucifer's phrase as he abdicates as Prince of Hell, and Morpheus's brother Destruction, who has happily walked away from his own domain, sets a parallel example in *Brief Lives*. Despite its attractions, however, this is not an option open to Morpheus.

We are told that the Endless are only aspects of the concepts they embody, and a new aspect cannot ascend until the current one – Morpheus – dissolves itself. Thus, as Bender points out, for Morpheus to simply flee the Kindly Ones "would have barred anyone else from assuming the Sandman's position as protector of the Dreaming" (Bender, 189). Though Destruction has left his realm unregulated and it functions on its own, I am about to argue that Morpheus cannot, because the Dreaming would not.

A primary issue is that of control. Above we saw that Morpheus is a mediator, providing a controlled way for the the different levels of the mind to interact. It must be noted that while some of the damage Dee did was by design, as much of it was simply the

product of a lack of control, of allowing the relationship between the conscious and subconscious to derail and the subconscious to run unregulated.

The necessity of a lord of dreams is also inherent in the type of creativity Morpheus represents. According to the rule of the two-sided coin, Destruction administers cycles of physical creation and destruction, and they seem to function perfectly smoothly without a guiding intelligence. However, Morpheus's domain is creation by subjectivity: human perceptions and narratives, patterns and symbolic structures; in short, art. When we see Morpheus ordering the chaos of the Dreaming into form and symbol, he becomes a symbolic artist figure, his role, responsibilities and actions reflecting those of anyone who creates artistically, and his actions and the restrictions on him become a commentary on art in general.

While Destruction can leave his realm without the realm itself malfunctioning – "Things are still created and destroyed", though it is now "no-one's fault" (*BL*, 8:8) – when Morpheus is imprisoned at the start of the series, the unattended Dreaming decays.

It seems that Art requires an ordering principle, embodied in Morpheus's lordship; it cannot rely on physical laws the way cycles of natural destruction and creation do. Narratives are products of the human mind, attempts to impose forms intelligible to the human mind. The Dreaming itself is boundless, representing unfettered creativity. Anything can happen in dreams, but this potentiality is a direct result of a lack of structure, and many of the images encountered there have no obvious meaning in themselves and no context to provide one – Ruthven the frock-coated rabbit, for example, permanently escorting a woman dressed like a pre-revolutionary French aristocrat.

By contrast, meaning in a story has to be constructed, and structure is therefore primary. Plots, characters and the development of themes play out according to a logic of action, effect and reaction. This logic may be distinct to the story or mode of story-telling – allowing or disallowing, for example, acts of god or fate, magic, or psychological realism – but for the story to mean cogently its parameters must be observed. Deeper social, ethical and psychological messages are determined by what, with what effect, happened how, to whom, who had behaved in which particular way.

From this perspective, Morpheus's orderliness makes sense. It is up to the artist to set and follow a story's structural rules. Morpheus's highly orderly nature symbolises this aspect of the artist as designer. To be 'Prince of Stories', Morpheus must be an organising principle. Thus, Morpheus's preoccupation with rules is rooted in the nature of narrative. This includes those narratives used to impose an interpretive order on the world: if this organisation does not take place, and the conscious mind is made to act on random, formless material, we are left with the madness embodied by Delirium.

In Gaiman's cosmology, this has far-reaching implications. In Chapter One, we saw that, at least in part, Morpheus's influence can be attributed to the idea that is repeatedly evoked through the image of the two-sided coin: a rule if *via negativa* stating that each of the Endless, in defining their portfolio, indirectly defines its opposite. According to this principle, it is proposed that Morpheus/Dream defines "reality" (*BL*, 8:16). At this point, we can see that this proposal is used to account for *The Sandman's* predominance of narrative and metafictional patterns: in effect, Morpheus is the personification of interpretive narratives; in Gaiman's narrative universe, interpretive narratives determine reality.

On examination, this formulation of Morpheus's role is a precise description of the way humans impose narratives onto the external world; that is, the use of imaginary structures to give shape to reality. In addition, if it applies, then every action Morpheus takes as dreamlord is liable to reverberate in the material world. I have said before that Gaiman is literalising the idea that narratives shape humans' worlds. We see now that Morpheus is the mechanism through which he achieves this.

Narratives are an attempt to impose patterns on the universe, and indeed, the influence that Morpheus has manifests itself through the repetition of patterns. This principle can be applied metafictionally: on one level, *The Sandman* cycle comprises a collection of stories; on another, events in *The Sandman's* sub-creation pattern themselves like stories because Morpheus, the Prince of Stories, defines reality.

However, since the things Morpheus does 'make echoes', *The Sandman's* sub-creation also mirrors Morpheus's personal concerns. Morpheus's actions, preoccuptions and repressions initiate patterns: like themes in a story, they manifest themselves recurringly across his universe. Everyone is subject to their effect, dreams, mortals and immortals alike. In *Preludes and Nocturnes*, for example, Morpheus is imprisoned by a magician; thereafter, the tropes of magicians, magic and magical imprisonment recur throughout the storyline. For example, John Dee's story begins and ends with imprisonment in Arkham Asylum, because his attempts to approach magic scientifically have, via his experiments on a powerful totemic ruby belonging to Morpheus, driven him mad.

Yet what is most notable in Dee's case is that, in at least one feature, his entrapment seems pre-ordained: his name, Dr John Dee, is exactly that of the leading occultist of the

Elizabethan age. Note that there is a causal sequence behind Dee's coming into possession of the Ruby: he inherits it from his mother Ethel, the former mistress of Morpheus's jailer Roderick Burgess and herself an occultist who probably named her son deliberately. It should not be implied that Morpheus's patterns impose themselves on the universe, forcing events that would otherwise turn out differently – as has been noted, the predominance of narratives is an implicit part of *The Sandman* sub-creation, built into the way things are. Whatever events progress, for whatever causes, they are simply subject to correspondance to a pattern. However, it is Morpheus who is the personification of this impulse, the source of patterns and, thus, the source of narratives.

Throughout the cycle, the repetition of patterns enlarges the scope of Morpheus's tale, with consequences that are artistically elegant. The ramifications of Morpheus's actions and experiences refract and refocus. Their significance expands as their different aspects are re-emphasised from a new perspective. This weaves Morpheus into a holistic tapestry of meaning that transcends his personal experience. Though his individual tale ends tragically, and, in its capacity to have ended differently, with a certain bitter irony, it has parallel tales, in which the same themes and events are addressed differently and with different results. These parallel tales give us closure and catharsis, providing a context in which its meaning can be fully mapped, and give us as readers full access to all the insights which underlay Morpheus's tale.

We see this when at last, in *The Wake*, we meet Master Li. Like Morpheus, Li is a father grieving the loss of his son, as, on account of his son, he enters exile; but his thoughts on the process of grieving also mirror the truths Orpheus could not grasp, a failure that left him unable to cope with Eurydice's death. Master Li can come to terms

with his loss and continue with his life, concluding that "everything changes. And nothing is truly lost" (*Wake,* 5:24). The details may change, but patterns which encompass them will recur. Indeed, though the specific identity of the role-players may have changed, Master Li puts Morpheus and his son to rest by resolving their patterns. Within the cycle's sub-creation, these events will no longer need to recur. Thematically, Li offers answers to the questions which plagued Morpheus and his son.

In practice, the tendency of events in *The Sandman* to conform to recurrent patterns is perhaps the most characteristic feature of a sub-creation which literalises the imposition of narratives over reality. The way Morpheus functions as a source of patterns can almost be paralleled to the Lyotardian metanarrative. His actions and preoccupations constitute a template, a phenotypic ur-pattern that determines the shape of other events. In this case, Gaiman has taken what was, for Lyotard, a function of imposed interpretations – our perception that events tend to conform to patterns – and literalised it into a causality. Our narratives do not merely help us to detect patterns; Morpheus, the personification of narrative, actually causes them.

At the same time, this predominance of patterns also has an artistic effect: events in *The Sandman* resonate, providing the sense that their significance transcends what may be accessible in their particular case. They can only fully be understood in the context of parallel cases, where the same potential has been realised with different emphases and different consequences.

In fact, the predominance of patterns actually re-emphasises the subject matter of *The Sandman*. It is not just events themselves which are important, but the patterns which they enact and help to create. Thus, centrally, *The Sandman* becomes a chronicle not only of

particular events, but of the recurring patterns and structures which shape them – essentially, of narratives.

Thus, Morpheus's obsession with order is a direct consequence of the nature of narratives. That this orderliness is necessary is demonstrated by the nature of the Vortex, a phenomenon which "destroy[s] the barriers between dreaming minds", and by doing so "destroys the ordered chaos of the Dreaming". The Vortex dissolves the boundaries between individuals, letting them intrude on each other's dreams as it forcibly retracts consciousnesses into the subconscious, and turns individual subconsciousnesses into a collective. It would ultimately fuse them all into "one huge" dream. Inevitably self-destructing under its own weight, it threatens to "damage the Dreaming beyond repair" and to repeat an incident in which "a whole world perished" (*DH*, 16:5). Thus, the Vortex is is the most potentially dangerous phenomenon in *The Sandman*, and it is Morpheus's responsibility to destroy it.

Metaphorically, the Vortex is an inversion of Morpheus's role. If it is Morpheus who 'orders' the 'chaos' of the Dreaming, he does so by a process of differentiation, distinguishing roles and traits that allow objects to be separated or catalogued together. From a narrative perspective, humans need to be able to differentiate objects in the world around them. Only then can we think about them, or fit them into a system of values. The amorphousness the Vortex causes would indeed "leave nothing but darkness", dissolving the narratives that order *The Sandman's* sub-creation. As the nemesis of the Vortex, Morpheus is preserving this order. As Eve tells Matthew in 'The Parliament of Rooks': "It's part of [Morpheus's] nature, making rules" (*F&R*, 7:5).

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In the previous chapter, we invoked Stephen Rauch's proposal that Morpheus's progress through *The Sandman* is a reversal of the traditional hero myth: whereas the object of the typical mythic quest is a transcendance of the hero's mortality, Morpheus begins as a divine immortal and progresses towards humanity. This reverse emphasis makes Morpheus the perfect vehicle for Gaiman's anthropocentric philosophy.

We have seen that Morpheus has repressed his personal self in favour of his professional role, a role which keeps him responsible for the deeply personal interactions of others, both with other individuals and with themselves, even as it forces him to isolate himself. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the crisis Morpheus undergoes is triggered by a resurgence of personal angst, or that it catapults Morpheus into personally engaging with other people, whom he has kept at a distance so effectively for so long.

One of Morpheus's most important relationships is with his son, Orpheus. However, his role first impairs this relationship, then obliges him to sacrifice it and leave Orpheus trapped in a terrible, crippled immortality. In *The Wake*, Calliope tells us that Morpheus "would play with the child. He would tell it tales. He would listen to its songs" (*Wake*, 2:6). Morpheus will interact with his son through stories until that is insufficient but, by the time of Orpheus's wedding, Morpheus is deeply submerged in his role and as utterly aloof as his narrative requires. The consequence of this is that, on the death of Orpheus's wife Eurydice, Morpheus is unable to comfort his son, or make him heed the advice he does offer. Distraught and defiant, Orpheus has Death make him immortal, tries and fails to resurrect Eurydice, and in his grief-fuelled passivity is finally torn apart by the bacchantes.

Since Orpheus is immortal, however, he survives this attack, to live out several millenia as a bodiless head. For his part, though Morpheus arranges caretakers, and later, in 'Thermidor', a rescue, he rules out any further personal interactions between Orpheus and himself.

This behaviour may seem callous, but I would argue that Morpheus avoids his son precisely because he does care about him: if he wants to save Orpheus from his predicament, the only way in which he can so is by killing him. However, the Endless are forbidden to 'spill family blood', and to do so incurs the wrath of the Kindly Ones – who will, as demonstrated when Morpheus finally does kill his son, do terrible damage to what Morpheus sees as his definitive responsibility, the Dreaming. Here, personal and professional obligations are irreconcilable, and as always, Morpheus defers to the professional. Finally, however, Morpheus does kill his son, putting his personal responsibilities, and personal emotions, over his role as King of the Dreaming.

Inevitably, after he does so, the personal self that Morpheus has kept hidden begins to expose itself to others. In *The Kindly Ones* he lets himself show self-doubt to Gilbert, regret to Thessaly, and his appreciation of Hob Gadling's friendship – all emotions he has denied on other occasions. However, this contact is two-way. For Morpheus, coming to respect his own individuality also means coming to acknowledge other individuals. For the Prince of Stories, in a world of narratives, this must involve interacting with the narratives of others. As part of his maturation, Morpheus, at first completely indifferent to the fact that others think and feel, must confront the fact that, not only do they have minds of their own, but that their opinions about him matter.

There is a version of Morpheus for everyone who gives him a role in their own story. Lyta Hall is a former superhero, whose paradigm contains clear-cut, unadulterated villians, and heroes who must act decisively against them. Because Morpheus has not bothered to correct her, she thinks of him as the villain who killed her husband and threatened her son, and when Daniel does disappear Morpheus becomes the target of her misdirected revenge. Thessaly has survived millenia by making a credo out of self-preservation and revenge against those who try to hurt her. Because her version of Morpheus is an ex-lover she has told herself she no longer cares about, she has no compunction about agreeing to help the furies destroy him, in exchange for more self-preserving life.

Morpheus finally confronts the fact that the rules he believes in so strongly are simply narratives. Loki is motivated to act against Morpheus because, whereas law-bound Morpheus believes in a system of favour for favour, Loki as trickster wants to benefit but resents obligation. Granted, it is unclear when Morpheus actually begins to plan his suicide, but he seems to free Loki in good faith. The question may even be moot – Morpheus's narrative insists that debts will be repaid, and Morpheus has always acted strictly in accordance with his narrative. He has always acted as if behaviour in accordance with his own system of honour is forthcoming, even from such unlikely sources as the Dukes of Hell (*Preludes and Nocturnes*, *Season of Mists*). To "manipulate" Loki into abetting his suicide, however, Morpheus must acknowledge that Loki will be faithful to a different set of rules (*KO*, 13:8). Implicit in that acknowledgement is the acknowledgement that all individuals formulate rules of their own. This is a renunciation of faith in an objective system, and an acceptance of the fact that the system he relies on is a narrative.

Ironically, just as Morpheus is letting himself see his narrative as a construct, and his participation in it as voluntary, he finds that without it he cannot rule the Dreaming. The purpose of his narrative has been to divide the personal and professional aspects of his character; now his personal griefs are intruding on the domain it is his place to safegaurd. He tells Death, "Since I killed my son…the Dreaming has not been the same…or perhaps *I* was no longer the same" (*KO*, 13:6, Gaimans ellipses and italics) – the phrasing of this statement indicates both Morpheus's acknowledgement of his personal identity, separate from his responsibilities, and a lingering confusion about where the boundaries lie. For a being whose primary role is the creation of order, this is unacceptable. Morpheus is no longer the dreamlord he has striven to be. On a personal level he is grief-stricken and facing the trauma of long-resisted and undesired change; on a professional level, his ability is compromised. For these reasons, Morpheus 'dies', and lets Daniel take his place.

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There are so many levels to Morpheus that, on one hand, his death is a real one: the individual called Morpheus ceases to exist. On the other, it is a metaphor. As hinted above, it is more accurate to say that one aspect of the personification of Dream is discarded in favour of another persona. In terms of anthropomophic personification, aspects of the idea of dreaming are re-emphasised, and a new character is created. In terms of *The Sandman's* notions of identity, one identity narrative is being discarded, and another imposed over the same whole.

It is telling that a narrative shift can result in such a profound change: narratives in *The Sandman* are so definitive that they can completely transform the object at hand. This is the basis of the power that individuals have who take control of the narrative process.

By the time of this transition, Morpheus is in a state of crisis. Until now he has striven to ignore discrepancies in his narrative, but Orpheus has confronted him with situations to which his narrative has proved glaringly insufficient, and the results have been terrible. He can no longer commit himself to his narrative in good faith, but he cannot abandon it entirely because it facillitates his responsibilities to the Dreaming. Since his situation is now untenable, Morpheus's solution is to step aside, making room for a fresh conception of the dreamlord's identity, and a new narrative for his behaviour. This is an allegorical depiction of how humans can adapt and can revitalise themselves by changing their ideas.

Morpheus's transformation into Daniel is the most significant act in the myth of the Sandman, (here meaning the being himself, in both his incarnations, rather than the text as a whole). It is thus that Gaiman's central mythic figure becomes the embodiment of the shift from static, metanarrative thinking into flexible, postmodern *bricolage*. Lucifer embodied Gaiman's humanist morality, but the Sandman has to undertake the quest towards this morality, grappling with the moral and ideological issues that have shaped its formulation: the consequences and obligations of living in a community of intertexts and other people; the dynamics of personal power, personal responsibility, and the right to personal fulfilment; the Jungian drives of the psyche. The Sandman is the symbol of successful self-reinvention, a model that humans like Rose Walker could look to to inspire their own engagement with these philosophical issues, and their own reinvention. It is not

likely that a human consciousness could annihilate and replace itself that Morpheus does, but this is misplaced literalism: the Sandman is the embodiment of the idea of reinvention, not the protagonist of a how-to manual.

This development, however, has deeper implications for our concern with narrative. Essentially, what has happened here is that a narrative – the personified identity of the Sandman – is being used to describe an object – the concept of dreaming. By changing the narrative, we change our defintion of the concept and what we understand about it. In doing so, it is demonstrated that, while one narrative may limit us in how we approach a concept, and pose problems and paradoxes that may seem irresolvable, a modified perspective can offer solutions and a better understanding of the concept itself.

In the context of our concern with narratives, *The Sandman's* preoccupation with the theme of change has very particular implications. If our narratives are fallible, and the world they refer to is itself changeable, then in order to develop an effective narrative we need to reserve the right to review and adapt it. If Gaiman is empowering the individual, this is the most basic definition of the power with which he is investing them: instead of being subject to our ideas, we must accept the right to determine them, and the responsibility that right accords.

The inevitability of change is one of the recurring themes of *The Sandman*. As hard as Morpheus has worked at preserving his narrative, we know see that he himself has changed: he has tried to impose a static narrative over a dynamic self, and the discrepancy has only increased in time. Morpheus finds, as we saw at the end of the previous chapter, that an interpretive narrative needs to be dynamic. His new avatar will be a younger, unformed boy, able to adapt and grow.

Daniel has internalised all the lessons Morpheus has learnt over the course of the cycle. Morpheus has always denied his ability to change; when Destruction tells Daniel that things change, Daniel simply replies, "Yes, they do" (*Wake*, 3:9). To avoid contaminating the collective nature of the Dreaming with his own preferences, and thus preserve the ability of others to have identities of their own, Morpheus has had to repress and isolate himself. Daniel allows others to have identities by respecting those identities. In contrast to Morpheus's isolation, Daniel, through his art, expresses an empathy. He has a sense not just of what he requires from a dream, but what it is and wants in its own right. Morpheus is shown directly sculpting dreams, but Daniel has enough of a sense of Merv Pumpkinhead's nature to let him grow independently from a seed. Morpheus's confrontation with the Corinthian in *The Doll's House* is remarkable for the way he denies the Corinthian any independent agency: even faced with all the horror the Corinthian has 'achieved', Morpheus casually dismisses his endeavours as "my fault" and uncreates him (*DH*, 5:22). In contrast, when Gilbert refuses Daniel's offer of resurrection, and when Matthew threatens to leave the Dreaming, Daniel is willing to respect their choices.

Thus, Daniel is at home with the conditions of *The Sandman's* universe, able to cope with the heteroglossia of a range of different people and intertexts, and with different points of view. Like Rose Walker, his strength lies in respecting and communicating with other people. Daniel is equipped to be a good *bricoleur*.

At the same time, even at this early stage he is feeling out an identity. He tells Cain "I do not believe…I take well to threats" (*Wake*, 1:11, Gaiman's ellipses). Daniel displays both Morpheus's regal habits and a new, gentler aspect that is entirely his own. His behaviour indicates that Morpheus's isolation, callousness and stubborn insistences have

been remedied, while his virtues – dignity, industry and the authority so necessary in administering the Dreaming – have been preserved.

Gaiman uses the theme of artistry to demonstrate the continuity of the relationship between Morpheus and Daniel. Daniel demonstrates that he has assumed Morpheus's responsibilities to the dreaming by the restorations he makes after the damage done by the Kindly Ones. Significantly, he does this by re-creating Morpheus's creations, adopting Morpheus's legacy rather than substituting new creations of his own. As well as being a case of good *bricolage*, this more than anything implies the continuity between the two incarnations of the Sandman. However much Morpheus and Daniel differ as individuals, the immortal aspect of the Sandman, the relationship with dreams of which artistic creation is one expression, has remained constant between these two 'aspects'. The development of the Sandman has been an evolution, not a revolution, and his story comes to a satisfying close.

In his own right, Daniel is Gaiman's model of a good narrator: taking personal charge of both his power and his subsequent responsibility; adaptive rather than committed to flawed ideas; a tolerant *bricoleur* and a sympathetic human being.

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As Lucifer found in the previous chapter, it is in ourselves, not our ideas, that power lies, and before we elevate any idea we must be true to ourselves. What Morpheus has had to learn is how to relate external pressures and obligations without sacrificing his own

needs. The corollary of this is empathy: by acknowleding and understanding his own needs and emotions, the new Sandman is able to acknowledge and understand those of others.

It is not accidental that Morpheus's journey has been a progression towards a greater humanity and a greater integrity of self. The theory that we mediate our contact with the world through narratives casts us as psychological beings, who, before we interact with the world, must marshall the narratives in our own heads. If we are not psychologically healthy, we cannot interact with the world in a healthy way.

The lesson Morpheus teaches us is that, though it may seem that we must adapt to the obligations which circumstances place upon us, it is possible to evolve a new strategy: instead of trying to find the 'ultimate' set of ideas, we must find the best way possible to interact with the range of ideas around us. Instead of a goal we can reach, we should be looking for a stratetgy we can follow: we may not be able to control the exterior world, but we can hone our skills as *bricoleurs*, equipping ourselves to handle its contradictions and profit from its multiplicity.

The previous chapter raised the idea of Gaiman's mythology as a dynamic semiosis, and that idea of fluctuating attempts at interpretation is again relevant here: given the obstructions that keep us from objectivity, given that the subjective narratives through which we interpret the world are not identical with the world itself, it is perhaps healthiest to constantly interrogate and adapt our narratives.

With this in mind, it can be proposed that Morpheus's problem cannot be pinned on any single flaw in his narrative, but on his insistence on its stasis in the face of a non-static reality. Morpheus's refusal to change cripples him, but his decision to allow an evolution resolves the problems that have plagued him throughout the series.

Conclusion

In *The Sandman*, Neil Gaiman has used the idea that humans interact with the world through stories to create an anthropocentric universe, determined by our priorities and the workings of our mind. In turn, this thought experiment can help us understand our priorities, and the way our minds work. Thus the question is: having tracked these trends through the various levels of Gaiman's text, what conclusions can we ultimately draw?

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It is impossible to really understand the philosophy of *The Sandman*, its context and how Gaiman develops it, without understanding *The Sandman* as metafiction. Gaiman's achievement has been to create a work whose every aspect is permeated with his engagement with the theme of story: it is encoded in its structure and the subject of its plot. Indeed, *The Sandman* chronicles an entire universe in which story is the most fundamental of phenomena. It cannot be forgotten that *The Sandman* is a story about stories.

This has practical implications: in its exploration of the relationship between reality and idea, *The Sandman's* sub-creation leans heavily on the conflation of reality and idea. At the risk of sounding trite, the reason Gaiman can do this at all is because he is telling a story. His sub-creation conflates reality and idea on the basis that both are narratives, and, in practical terms, that is exactly correct. From our perspective outside the text – as readers and writers – everything in *The Sandman*, no matter how diverse, is part of the same story.

That diversity, however, is telling: we have seen that *The Sandman* sub-creation strives to accommodate a range of memes and paradigms. From our readerly perspective, we can appreciate just how broad this range is, encompassing the myths of several cultures, literary modes ranging from the fantastic to the realistic, and accounts of the past ranging from the fabular to the historical.

The important thing to realise is that a story can range between different paradigms with ease, and while we are willing to attend to any amount of stories, the interpretative narratives that phrase reality tend to take their own exclusive validity for granted, if they do not insist on it. We approach the two in different ways, and in asking us to consider metanarratives as stories, Gaiman is asking us to tolerate the possibility of different interpretative narratives in the same way that we accept, even enjoy, the multiplicity of stories. He is also asking us to treat stories and metanarratives in the same way: as constructs, and as options which we can select from a range of alternatives. In essence, instead of a dominant ideology, Gaiman is offering us the possibility of intertextuality.

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Fantasy world-building is a highly nuanced undertaking: the details of the world itself are entirely subject to the writer's preference, and thus imply the writer's opinions, including the ideological basis on which the world's cogency is based. In the case of *The Sandman's* universe, we see Gaiman's postmodern background in its heteroglossia, subjectivity and intertextuality, and we also see the influence of Jungian psychology and the Jungian conception of mythology. In combining the two, however, Gaiman is not just internalising

these ideas, but actively engaging with them, using them to critique and stabilise each other. Ultimately, *The Sandman* has synthesised these two approaches into a way of approaching and interacting with the modern world.

Postmodernism and post-structuralism underlie Gaiman's notion of an intertextual universe, in which texts exist, merge and multiply, and all discourse is *bricolage*. More specific, and more central, is the postmodernist idea that our conceptions of the world are inescapably subjective. We have seen that Gaiman has internalised this idea, and used it to create a universe which is, essentially, all about us. The original idea proposes that we interact with our conception of the world rather than the world itself; in *The Sandman*, the universe at least partially conforms to our conceptions of it.

As this thesis has progressed, however, we have come to understand that there is a rather more complicated dynamic at hand. At first glance, this model seemed to imply a solipsistic universe, in which the individual's perceptions of the universe become fact, but that is not the case in *The Sandman*. In Chapter Three, we realised that *The Sandman's* universe was subject to a consensus of narratives: when enough people agree on an interpretation, it becomes dominant. This explains the existence of an external, physical reality with which the individual must interact, and over whose dynamics they have little practical power, yet which is amenable to the influence of a large number of individuals thinking and acting in concert.

More precisely, the cosmology of *The Sandman* does not posit that the real world does not exist, only that its nature is dynamic rather than static, and that human interactions with it have to be just as flexible. Since Chapter Two, we have been aware that a similar conclusion can be reached about the narratives that people tell about themselves: they

impose a stable narrative, an identity, over their own complex, ineffable and dynamic psyches.

With enough support, *The Sandman's* universe will literalise the narratives humans use to interpret the world: the most prominent example of this is *The Sandman's* myths. Gaiman uses Jungian theories of myth to advance his own answer to the postmodern crisis over the validity of meaning: if meaning is not a product of the external world, if significance is a construction of our minds, then it is our minds which are significant. Gaiman's myths flaunt their anthropomorphism, demonstrating that some of our most valued statements about the universe begin as reflections of ourselves. We are the subject of our own discourse, and when we are talking about the external world, we are talking about our own relationship with it.

In a time when we have ceased to accept myth's value as a depiction of the cosmos, Gaiman is reclaiming and remaking it as a reflection of our own subconscious minds. Alongside the postmodern proliferation of meaning, however, a touchstone of certainty is provided by the Jungian theory of the archetypes, the idea that as much as people may differ, their minds are all built on the same subconscious blueprint. This both stabilises and enables a relativist position, whereby all the variant cosmologies available are valid attempts to understand the same basic truths.

However, to say that *The Sandman* champions the co-existance of different value systems is not to say that it does not encode values of its own. For better or for worse, *The Sandman* is liberal in the sense that it champions tolerance, humanist in its anthropocentricism, individualist and consequently democratic. Thus it is rooted in a

heritage of Twentieth Century Western culture – we might call these ideas Gaiman's own metanarrative, against which he is adjudicating the validity of the claims he makes.

Ironically, then, Gaiman finds himself ensnared in the same metanarrative structures as his characters: from a post-colonial perspective *The Sandman* is too stubbornly Western to be perfectly inclusive – for example, a true believer in spirits or gods would be insulted by an attempt to explain them away as Jungian symbols. However, to look to *The Sandman* for information on 'the right way to think' is a misreading. Working from within the structures of his own narrative, Gaiman is not prescribing a 'correct' ideology, but developing an etiquette to facilitate the search for one. An engagement with narration and *bricolage* are steps in that process: first we acknowledge that our ideas are ideas, rather than objective truths. From there, we can open ourselves up to assessing, probably discarding more often than we accept, new ideas.

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The Sandman's emphasis on narrative begins in Gaiman's interest in story-telling, but these are the ideas which determine his conception of how narratives work, and the direction which his engagement with narrative takes. Gaiman's conception of interpretive narratives, which we impose on the world as a way to order and understand it, and with which we are interacting when we think we interact with the world, is a direct legacy of the postmodern idea of the world as an intertextuality, a plethora of information. In his fantasy world, Gaiman has taken this idea further than philosophers like Hayden White, who treat this model as rhetorical, and he has modified the original model of these narratives

proposed by Jean-François Lyotard. Lyotard's metanarratives were static and implicit, but Gaiman's have internalised his postmodern awareness of intertextuality and relativism, and become *bricolage*.

Theoretically, metanarratives, and intepretive narratives in their turn, do not effect reality by conforming physical reality to themselves; their effect is more subtle, in the way that they determine how the individual will effect reality through their behaviour, and how they will process its effects on them. By literalising narratives, removing the distinction between them and reality, Gaiman has shed important light on the way human beings perceive the world.

However, we also see him reverse the process, making the distinction between narrative and world clear again, and examining the challenges that this division raises for the human relationship with the world. What Gaiman portrays is a succession of individuals – Morpheus, Lyta, Urania Blackwell, Robespierre – who try to regulate the way in which they interact with the world, and find that the world is simply too complex, that it refuses to act as expected, and primarily, that they have sabotaged their own ability to cope by limiting their strategies and resources. This is the simplest message underlying *The Sandman's* treatment of interpretive narrative: our preconceptions limit us.

Above, it was specified that the reality of *The Sandman* conforms to narratives: that is to say, it is not created by narratives, but shaped by them. Out of infinite possibilities – the existence of fairy-tale creatures or figures from Greek mythology, a world ruled by cats, an Emperor of the United States – the dominant narrative sets the parameters of what is possible, by including some and excluding others. In *The Sandman's* democratic sub-creation, however, this exclusion can never be definitive – dissent is always possible, and

deviation from the consensus does not invalidate a point of view. The more specifically we determine our opinions and expectations, the more likely it is that they will be challenged.

There are other characters – Lucifer, Rose, Destruction – who recognise their narratives as constructs, and as arbitrary, and take back the power they invest in them, making changes. For the individual in question, this is liberating and empowering. This liberation and empowerment is the advantage of the postmodern dissolution of certainty, and the disempowerment of authority.

Yet, as Rose finds, while one can change one's narrative, one cannot escape the need for a narrative of some sort. Once one acknowledges the fallibility and inadequacy of narratives, one is in for a constant, arduous effort to adjust and re-adjust one's own parameters – by their nature, no narrative is perfect. Gaiman can offer no better strategy than this torturous process of constant self-assessment. Establishing truth and falsity is a difficult, dynamic process rather than an objective assessment, and the validity of narratives is a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

In addition, if we have no authority to which to cede responsibility, then all responsibility is our own. In turn, if one does not take responsibility for one's own beliefs and actions, one leaves oneself open to be manipulated by other individuals. One can even do harm by perpetuating the wrong ideas: at best, these will simply hamper the individual; at worst they will cause behaviour harmful to the individual and others.

Thus, to concieve of people as narrators in the way that *The Sandman* does is to accord them huge power and potential, while at the same time negating the power of any external authority to countermand that power – under these circumstances, a democratic view is inevitable. Gaiman is adamant that individuals must respect each other's power and

potential, even if they do not share or even understand each other's points of view – thus, a liberal view is essential. At the same time, Gaiman is depicting a subjective humanity, which does not interact with the world itself but with its own perceptions and projections – humanism, here, is not only the only way to completely understand our worldviews, it is an unavoidable part of practically any thought process.

This then is the dilemma that faces *The Sandman's* characters: though their opinions are fallible, they need to have opinions, and they need to take responsibility for the consequences of those opinions. Concurrently, the reward for their flexibility is countless opportunities for enrichment from interactions with countless different sources. The exchange of ideas has the potential to be a saving grace: it helps human beings maintain equilibrium, correct our mistakes, adapt and change.

In this case, Gaiman's engagement with the relationship between his characters and their universe reflects directly back on real people and their interaction with the real world. If humanism lies at the centre of *The Sandman*, the cycle culminates as a meditation on how to (self-)create a good human: Morpheus's struggles culminate in the ascension of Daniel, who has sympathy and empathy, flexibility and humilty, who can accept his own limitations and the inevitability of change – who is, in short, a good *bricoleur*.

Rose's struggle for an accurate perspective was irresolvable, but Gaiman is not asking us to find an accurate worldview; he is asking us to find the strategy that will best equip us to interact with the world. His narratives are dynamic interactions with a complex, intertextual community, not static formulae.

This does not meand that we should have 'no' values, but that we should have ones which best equip us for this interaction. Our goals should be insight, sympathy and

psychological equilibrium: these will only be available if we respect the people around us, even if they differ from ourselves, and their ideas, even if they differ from our own. Tolerance, sympathy and respect may arguably be virtues in a 'way to be good', but they are certainly virtues for a good *bricoleur*. Whatever moral conclusions we may eventually draw, these are the qualities we need if we are to draw them responsibly and reliably.

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Essentially then, Gaiman's work is internalising a particular conception of the world: the post-modern model that locates meaning in the human mind, deconstructs traditional authorities, and presents an intertextuality of multiple, cross-polinating ideas.

Instead of taking these destabilising ideas as a crisis, Gaiman has used to metafiction to incorporate them with Jungian ideas, and used the new whole as the basis for a humanist cosmology. In turn, he suggests new strategies to cope with this cosmology and new obligations imposed by it. This new cosmology emphasises the individual, but while it offers liberty and empowerment, the price of these is an increase in responsibility. In turn, this cosmology prioritises the complex relationship between the individual and the world around them.

Finally, then, we may feel justified in calling *The Sandman* a modern myth, expressing our conception of ourselves and of the modern world, and primarily, the relationship between the two. Not only is *The Sandman* saturated with the contemporary

gestalt, but Gaiman actively wrestles with its problems, and uses it as the basis of his own vision.

At last, Gaiman's greatest achievement is this: he devises a strategy for living in the modern world which helps us glory in the *jouissance* and possibility of the postmodern worldview, which simultaneously maintains our connection to our deepest selves and most fundamental values – and which, above all, champions our humanity.

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