DREAM OF A THOUSAND HEROES: THE ARCHETYPAL HERO IN
CONTEMPORARY MYTHOLOGY, WITH REFERENCE TO
THE SANDMAN BY NEIL GAIMAN

by

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DECLARATION

"I declare that

DREAM OF A THOUSAND HEROES: THE ARCHETYPAL HERO IN CONTEMPORARY MYTHOLOGY, WITH REFERENCE TO *THE SANDMAN* BY NEIL GAIMAN

is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete reference."

ABSTRACT

DREAM OF A THOUSAND HEROES: THE ARCHETYPAL HERO IN
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by Mario Landman

Twentieth century American fiction assimilates archetypes of traditional mythologies, in particular the hero archetype, to create a contemporary mythology which relays social issues relevant to its age. This is first approached by creating a theoretical framework, which primarily consists of both Jungian theories of the collective unconscious and the model on which Joseph Campbell based his conception of the archetype in what is known as myth criticism. The theoretical framework also introduces and describes the graphic novel and its use of characterisation distinctive to post-modern fiction.

The Sandman, which is the subject of this study, is then contextualised against the backdrop of the evolution of the American comic book, with its influence of folklore, mythology and visual presentation. Through an overview and analysis of *The Sandman* series as a whole, as well as a reading of its pivotal narrative, *The Kindly Ones*, this thesis explores the way in which The Sandman fulfils its purpose of integrating an archetypal hero into contemporary mythology. This is achieved by validating claims proposing the existence of a contemporary mythology through an analysis of Morpheus, *The Sandman's* protagonist and his unique heroic journey. The conclusion reached is that *The Sandman* indeed represents a contemporary mythology that contains a new form of social commentary, incorporating archetypes from traditional mythology and re-evaluating the role of the hero in this day and age.

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COLLECTING THE UNCONSCIOUS

A Theoretical Overview

1.1   Introduction

When considering literature or fiction in general, the majority of the general public wouldn't hesitate to refer to their favourite male protagonist, of page and screen, as 'hero'. This begs the question: has the term 'hero', once the exclusive epitaph of the most fearless and brave in classic mythology, severed its roots and simply become the moniker of any leading male character? If one harbours the notion that a remnant of the archetypal hero from ancient mythology is still alive in our contemporary fiction, does he have a mythology to propagate the tales of his exploits?

Given the immense rise in popularity of books like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and movies like *The Matrix,* with their resemblance to, and incorporation of, traditional mythology, the existence of a contemporary mythology does not seem so far-fetched. And, with the iconic faces of our contemporary heroes posted on every imaginable form of merchandise, one cannot help to see a resemblance to the archetypal heroes of the ancient world who also found themselves the stock of written, oral and visual representations. The aim of this study is to discuss these issues by analyzing one of this proposed contemporary mythology's most prominent works, Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman.* This discussion rests primarily on C.G. Jung's psychoanalytic theories and their subsequent application in the myth-analysis of Joseph Campbell. As a study it sets out to prove the following hypothesis:

> The archetype of the hero, as first encountered in the mythologies of the ancient
> world, has been incorporated in the postmodern literature and graphic narratives
> of 20th century American fiction. This has resulted in a contemporary mythology
> of sorts, which articulates critical views on social matters, particularly on the role
> of the archetypal hero in contemporary culture.

This discussion on the archetypal hero and *The Sandman's* role within a contemporary mythology is structured as follows:

Chapter 1 sets out the theoretical framework of this study, which is based on both Jungian theories of the collective unconscious and the model from which Joseph Campbell's archetype and myth criticism are derived. It also deals with the genre of the graphic novel and characterisation in post-modern fiction.

Chapter 2 attempts to contextualise Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* by considering the historical development of this work against the backdrop of the evolution of the American comic book. It also looks at the influence of folklore and mythology on *The Sandman,* and the visual representation of this particular graphic novel.

Chapter 3 is an overview and analysis of *The Sandman's* entire series, as well as a reading of *The Kindly Ones* and an examination of the main characters of the series.

Chapter 4 looks at contemporary mythology, particularly *The Sandman*, and how it interprets and presents the Hero archetype in its present-day application.

Chapter 5 further evaluates *The Sandman* vis-à-vis its evocation of a contemporary mythological Hero as he undergoes an unconventional Hero's journey.

Chapter 6 serves as a conclusion.

1.2 Carl Gustav Jung and Psychoanalysis

The following overview has been adapted from Sigmund Freud's *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis* (1986) and Carl Jung's *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959).

1.2.1 Jung as reaction to Freud

Psychoanalysis contends that access to a patient's unconscious is gained primarily through the patient's dreams. Analysing dreams provides the therapist with a privileged glimpse of the unconscious mind at work. Dreams, for Freud, are essentially symbolic fulfilments of wishes and desires expressed by an individual's unconscious. These are presented in symbolic form as it is believed that if this material were to be expressed directly, then it might be too shocking to allow undisturbed sleeping. To allow us to get some rest, the unconscious conceals, softens and distorts its meanings so that our dreams become symbolic texts which need to be deciphered. The unconscious, together with the ego and other modes of functioning, condense together a whole set of images into a single 'statement'; or it will displace one object onto another somehow associated with it. Even though Freud identified certain 'patterns' within the dreams of his patients that allowed for a more structured approach to their treatment through analysis, it was Jung who collected these patterns into more 'stable' and definable archetypes. Vastly simplified, Jung's archetypes could be considered to be the patterns or recurring images responsible for, or underlying, those identified by Freud.

The theoretical contribution that sets Jung apart, however, is not to be found in his work done on the personal unconscious (dreams or memories that have been suppressed by the individual's mind) but rather on the collective unconscious or 'psychic inheritance'. The collective unconscious may be understood as a reservoir of the combined experiences of the human species, an inherit knowledge we are all born with. Although this psychological residue is at the heart of all experiences and has a profound influence on our physical and emotional behavior, we are unaware of its presence. All we know about the collective unconscious, we have learned indirectly by observing the influence it has on our actions.

1.2.2 The Archetype

The archetype is defined by Jung (1959:6-7) as being the first original prototype from which all other similar images (characters, narrative patterns etc.) are derived, copied, patterned or emulated. William Shakespeare has been widely noted for not only making the public aware of certain archetypal characters but also popularising them. He did this not by being the first to define these characters on

paper, but rather, by defining and constructing their roles against the backdrop of a complex social and cultural literary landscape. The characters therefore stand out as originals, in contrast to earlier characters in drama, even though many of Shakespeare's characters were based on previously garnered archetypes (it is well known that Shakespeare's work was heavily based on historical events, fables, mythology and magical practices).

The archetype is, of course, a psychoanalytical term used by Freud and re-used by Carl Jung in his work on dream-analysis. In the particular context of Jung's work, archetypes are innate prototypes for ideas, which may become involved in the analysis and interpretation of certain observed human behavioural phenomena. A group of memories and interpretations directly associated with a particular archetype is referred to as a 'complex' and is named after its central archetype (for example Hero Complex). Jung perceived the archetype as being a 'psychological organ' mystically related to our somatic organs as both are morphological givens of the human species and both arose, to an extent, through the processes of evolution. Jung (1953:67) often used 'myth' or 'mythologem' for narrative expression at the 'ethnological level' of the archetypes. He described archetypes as being patterns of psychic energy, originating in the collective unconscious and finding their 'most common and normal' manifestation in dreams (1953:287).

Even though Myth Criticism and Archetypal Criticism are closely associated, only the criticism that is the direct result of Jung's analytical psychology is termed Archetypal Criticism and is distinctly different from Myth Criticism (a further outflow and logical expansion of Archetypal Criticism, but focussing on the analysis of patterns in mythology, as opposed to the individual archetype). Jung said that the 'Archetype is an explanatory paraphrase of the Platonic eidos' (1953:4). However, he differentiates between his term (and its subsequent uses) and that of philosophical idealism by claiming that it is more empirical rather than metaphysical – even though most of the empirical data that he appropriated were found in the metaphysical world of dreams. He also redefined, modified and expanded his terminology over the extent of his career, often insisting that 'archetype' referred to a process, a point of view, and not the content, although the flexibility of the term has been somewhat lost in the interpretation, codification and normalisation of its many applications (most notably, myth and archetype criticism). There are eight prominent archetypal forms, as established by Jung in *Man and His Symbols* (1968:56-71) for the purposes of psychoanalysis. It should be noted that

archetypes mentioned further on in this discussion have been modified for myth analysis, being indirectly derived from and subsequently differing somewhat from the purer forms discussed below.

i. The Self

The Self, as applied in psychoanalysis, holds no direct implication for myth analysis and could be considered to be the equivalent of the Hero.

ii. The Shadow

As part of the human unconscious mind, The Shadow is in an indefinable and often offensive, but also intimate, relation to the conscious mind. The Shadow may be the essence of the original self (Hero), which has been replaced during a child's early development period by the rational and socially conformed or adapted conscious mind. Repressed memories from the conscious mind are also transferred to the unconscious mind or the shadow-self that acts as an abstract mental storage device. The Shadow does not function on a rational level like the conscious mind, but is rather characteristically instinctive and irrational. Despite its overtly primal 'appearance', the shadow is not necessarily evil, even when it may seem to be. It has the ability to manifest as both ruthless and reactionary, but also empathetic when emotionally inclined. The Shadow is important for its intuitive value, for its understanding of the individual's and character's more enigmatic behavioural traits, attitudes and reactions to outward stimuli. In general, the Shadow provides information on the troubling aspects of one's personality, but also, in the context of the collective unconscious, provides information on aspects of social illnesses.

The Shadow appears in dreams and visions in various forms, often as a feared or despised creature or monster, and may act as either enemy or ally. In general, where gender is applicable, the Shadow will be of the same sex as the Hero. The Shadow may appear cloaked or carrying a darker presence than the Hero, since it represents an old ancestral aspect of the mind. The finer details of the Shadow's appearance and role are largely dependent on the idiosyncrasies of the individual. The reason for this is that the Shadow is initially born into the mind of the individual and not simply absorbed into what is referred to as the collective unconscious.

iii. The Anima

The feminine side of the male individual's or character's unconscious. It may be identified as all the unconscious feminine psychological qualities and behavioural traits exhibited by the individual or character.

iv. The Animus

The masculine side of the female individual's or character's unconscious.

v. The Superman (Übermensch)

In his book, *Thus spoke Zarathustra (1961:49-111)* the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, explains the three steps the Hero must go through to attain 'Superman' status.

1. An urge for destruction, that is for, breaking out of idealistic norms.
2. By re-evaluating and destroying old ideals, the Hero denies religion and has to invent his own moral ideals.
3. Overcoming nihilism, which consists of three phases:
   a. Immoralist
   b. Free thinker
   c. Superman

vi. The Wise Old Man

He represents the virtue of living ethically, of a lifestyle that will save you in threatening situations, allowing you to grow old and attain wisdom. Also referred to as The Sage.

vii. The Trickster

In myth, a Trickster refers to a good spirit or human hero who opposes the rules and wishes of the gods or nature, often maliciously but with ultimate positive effects. His rule-breaking usually takes the form of trickery and thievery. Even though tricksters usually appear as being foolish, they may also be quite cunning. In general, the Trickster may appear as quite a comical character.

In many cultures, particularly Native American Indian mythology, the Trickster is a mere character fragment that forms part of the Hero's psyche. In Indian mythology, the coyote -spirit (a traditional

hero figure) stole the fire of the sun and stars, triggering the surfacing of the Trickster's character as part of the Hero. The Trickster figure often represents the variable nature of gender, as the gender roles change and humans participate in same-sex activities. A modern variation may be found in 'the Fool' (*tarot*) and the Joker (*Arthurian legend*).

viii. The Deity

A god worshipped by humans and endowed with values like 'divine', 'holy', etc. A postulated preternatural being that takes many diverse forms, but is often presented in human or animal form. Deities are immortal and are considered to possess an individual personality, as well as consciousness, intellect, desires and emotions, mirroring those of the mortals over which they preside.

The above psychological symbols or archetypes represent only the major forms. There are numerous lesser archetypes like the Zyzygy (divine couple), the Child and the Great Mother, to name a few.

1.2.3 Jungian Heroes

Mythology makes up an integral part of the cultures of ancient Roman and Greek societies. It also features prominently in the literature of Europe in the Middle Ages, as well as in Far Eastern tales in the fantasy fiction of modern man and, of course, in dreams. Even though myths may vary in detail, they are structurally very similar and follow a universal pattern despite their individual development in different cultural contexts. The most common elements of the Hero myth may be summarised as follows:

1. The miraculous and humble birth.
2. Early proof of superhuman abilities.
3. Rapid rise to prominence and power.
4. Triumph over evil and the devotion to the combat of evil.
5. Fallibility to the sin of pride (hubris).
6. Fall through betrayal or 'heroic' sacrifice that costs him his life.

In Jungian neo-psychoanalysis, the Hero-pattern had significant psychological meaning for the individual by opening a channel through which the individual could discover and assert his own identity. Similarly, the analysis of a particular Hero myth (the result of a social unconscious collective) may provide valuable insights into the cultural identity (collective unconscious) of the particular society that produced it.

In many mythical Hero stories, the apparent 'weakness' the hero displays at the beginning of the tale is usually balanced out by the appearance of strong guardian figures that aid him to perform certain tasks. Examples of this are apparent in the myths of ancient Rome and Greece, where Theseus has Poseidon, Perseus has Athena and Achilles has Cheiron. Godlike figures that came to the aid of Heroes are symbolic representations of the human psyche as a whole. The presence of the god (a larger and more comprehensive identity) provides the strength that the personal (Hero) ego lacks. In psychoanalysis, the role of the Hero (also his subsequent journey) represents the development of the individual ego consciousness. This makes the individual aware of his own weaknesses and strengths that will equip him to perform his life tasks. However once the individual enters maturity, the Hero myth loses relevance, that is, the Hero dies once the dreamer reaches maturity.

J.L Henderson (1968:103-107) differentiated the following 'Hero Cycles' from the mythologies of the Native American Winnebago Indians. These Hero cycles, or stages of the Hero evolution, represent the stages of human personality development (or character development in narrative analysis):

The Trickster

This is the least developed period. Short-term gratification dominates the Trickster's behaviour as he lacks purpose and motivation past the fulfilment of his primary needs. *The Sandman* (from Neil Gaiman's work of the same title) often takes the form of an animal, symbolising that an element of his character is still infantile. The Trickster is usually presented as a young man transformed into the body of a small animal (usually a rabbit in Indian mythology). He occasionally morphs into a man-like figure and prolonged periods in this state signifies maturity.

The Hare

Also a transformer or a shape shifter like the Trickster. It seems, though, that the Hare's transforming abilities are less involuntary and more controlled. In this aspect, he represents a significant departure from the infantilism of the Trickster.

Red Horn

The youngest of ten siblings, he was elevated to the status of archetype by winning a race through the use of his apparent superhuman abilities. The Red Horn has a Thunderbird as a companion which complements and assists him. The Red Horn cycle signifies the arrival of male maturity.

Twins

As legend tells it, the twin sons of the Sun. Primarily human, or rather two sides of a human, they only constitute a single person when combined. Even though they belong together, they are nearly impossible to reunite. They represent the two sides of man's nature and are named 'Flesh' (mild mannered, quiet and without initiative) and 'Stamp' (rebellious and ambitious).

1.2.4   Joseph Campbell and Archetype / Myth Criticism

According to Carol Rupprecht (2005:1) Campbell's understanding of the term, archetypes are normative or typified story elements found in any literature, but they are most commonly encountered in mythology. Archetypes may find their way into narratives in the form of a typical character, story line, plot, imagery or themes and through their interconnectedness provide a platform for analysis. The study, of how and why these typified narrative elements correspond between different literary works and transcend the limits of time and culture, is known as Archetypal or Myth Criticism.

According to Rupprecht (2005:1-5) archetypal critics, the most prominent of these probably being Joseph Campbell (1972), claim that shared themes and images (and by implication, shared character identities) are the main determinants of notable literary works. This view automatically negates the creative role of the author and has suffered some severe criticism, the main critique being that Myth Criticism examines literature according to a few worn-out narrative patterns, often forcing or superimposing these patterns onto narratives where they seemingly do not fit. The aim of Archetypal

and Myth Criticism is, however, not solely to view the role of the author and his work in a reductive manner, but rather to contend that the literary text gives imaginative focus to pre-existing social forms of representation and meaning, and that instead of mirroring the world, literature actually mirrors other significant works of literature. Archetypal critics believe that art along with all other modes of human expression, serves only as a duplication or imitation of other cultural-aesthetic products and their constituents. Whatever connection a literary work may show to parts of life and reality, Archetypal critics do not acknowledge these sources as origins of these works.

Wimsatt (1957:709) stated that this form of criticism is based on the psychological theories of the founder of Analytical Psychology, Carl Gustav Jung. He argued that the human subconscious comprises two levels: the 'personal', which serves as a container for the repressed memories of the individual that are part of his or her psyche, and the 'archetypal', which comprises the racial memory of a *collective unconscious*. It is from this collective unconscious, a virtual warehouse of images, patterns and vestigial traces inherent in all humans, that the symbolic expression of all human aesthetic objects is spawned. The main proponent of Myth Criticism analyses the fabric, function and significance of these primordial constructions or Archetypes. However, where Jung focused on the origination of these Archetypes in mythology, Archetypal critics like Joseph Campbell (1972) and Northrop Frye (1957) concentrated primarily on the analysis of these archetypes, what purposes they serve and how they are interconnected. Frye defined an archetype as being a repeated symbol, image, character or story element that recurs often enough to become a recognisable element of the individual's collected literary knowledge. He also contended that the origins of myth are unimportant to the literary critic who, according to Frye, should focus solely on the critique and analysis of these archetypes.

Joseph Campbell expanded on Frye's work in his own work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1972), which is considered to be the most significant theoretical and philosophical work of this particular school of criticism. To Campbell, myths are manifestations of a collective human need to comprehend and relate reality, and are expressed throughout the world. In *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*, which compares elements of mythology in different periods and culture, Campbell comes to the conclusion that all myths not only share common elements, but are in actual fact the same myth – that is a *monomyth*. This also implies that all heroes are one, hence the title of his work. In one of his other main works *The Masks of God* (1968), Campbell analysed religion not as a unique and separate

existential element of the human experience, but as a myth. By applying the same logic to religion that he applied to myth, he concluded that because religion is myth, all religions are the same.

I have included in what follows a list of archetypes that is roughly adapted from the combined works of Campbell (1968, 1972) and Jung (1938, 1959, 1968), and used some popular characters from literature and oral myth to represent the archetypes.

It should be noted that most of the characters listed may not 'fit' their slot perfectly, and their placement is certainly open for dispute (hence the main critique against Archetypal Criticism). They are listed here to simplify the connection between the archetype as an idea and the archetype as an application or representation. Also, it should be understood that Jung identified or isolated these Archetypes and can therefore solely be credited with their 'creation'. They were, however, initially intended for use in the psychoanalytical treatment of patients and the interpretation of their dreams, and were not intended for an application in the study of mythology, literature, films, etc. It was Campbell who identified the applicability of these archetypes to other disciplines (particularly mythology) and I therefore attribute the following archetypes to both Jung (1959) and Campbell (1972).

The Hero and his Journey

As protagonist, the hero progresses through the story line, a progression which may be overtly or subtly manifested as a journey of some sort. This journey often takes the Hero from childhood to adulthood, ignorance to enlightenment, or from evil to good or less evil. Regardless of the detail concerning the journey, the Hero is always introduced along with his normative circumstances which inevitably change (through the introduction of an antagonist or antagonising event or otherwise) and spark a quest (an overt attempt to re-establish the norm by 'vanquishing' the proverbial stone that caused the ripple in the pond). This quest inevitably brings about character development in the Hero, and ironically, also an inability for the Hero to return to the 'norm'. Even though the Journey is a metaphorical expression signifying non-literal notions of personal growth, it often coincides with an actual journey from one physical place to the next. Heroes are conventionally and usually male. Superman (comic-book hero), Robin Hood (English folk tale), King Arthur (English folk tale), Achilles (Greek mythology) and Luke Skywalker (*Star Wars*) are some popular examples of the Hero archetype.

Death

Often personified through the antagonist's character, whose involvement prompts the Hero's journey. His attempts to intercept the Hero's journey and thwart his plans are done for the greater purpose of completely destroying the Hero and all he stands for. The antagonist opposes the protagonist in every way, and is often the polar opposite of the Hero with reference to character, morals and ethics, motivation and pursuits. Some prominent antagonists are Darth Vader (*Star Wars*), The Joker (*Batman*) and The Devil (*Gospel of Mark*).

Shadow

The Shadow represents the darkness or evil concealed within the hero. It takes the form of an internal conflict or struggle with temptation; this suggests that the Hero is not only engaged in battle with his enemy (the evil outside), but also with his base nature (the evil within). This returns to the notion that the Hero must change during the course of the journey, or rather, that it is the journey that forces him to confront the evil in himself and evaluate his own weaknesses, which in turn will prompt a change in his personality. The Shadow is not usually represented as a separate character, but fantasy fiction has come up with some novel ways to overcome the obvious problems in presenting the character as being of dual nature by creating interesting variations on the 'devil on the shoulder' routine. It is not clear if Jung considers the polar opposites in the Hero as separate entities or simply the representation of the internal human struggle. An example of this anomaly is to be found in the character Constantine from the DC Vertigo graphic novel *Constantine: The Hellblazer*. As an exorcist that has been denied entry into heaven - regardless of his dedication to 'godly work', due to a suicide attempt; Constantine represents the synergy of good and evil. He is a vivid personification of the battle we supposedly wage against our own evil and inhumane nature.

Patriarchal and Matriarchal Figureheads

They often serve as 'markers' on the Hero's Journey, making him aware of the internal dispute in his soul and supplying him with much-needed wisdom. Parents (actually all close family members) may serve as motivation for the journey, be it to find them and to re-establish a long-severed bond or, in the case of their death, to seek out the villain responsible and avenge the Hero's lost family, which would bring about a measure of 'sedation' to the conflict within his soul.

Sage

The most prominent aspect of the Sage is his wisdom and mild-mannered behaviour, which serve as a counterpoint to the often impulsive and drastic actions of the young Hero. Through this binary opposition of young against old or rashness against patience, the Hero is made aware of his own shortcomings and the length of his journey to obtain the supposed enlightenment of the Sage. A perfect example of such a character is to be found in the characters of Obi Wan Kenobi (*Star Wars*) and Merlin (*Arthurian legend*).

Object of Affection

The love interest or damsel in distress represents a vital element of the Hero's journey. The 'great love' (usually female and heterosexual due to cultural convention) often distracts the Hero from his journey (a narrative convention that brings the Hero's priorities into question or tests his loyalty to the quest). She may also serve as strong motivation for the Hero since as the promise of eventual happiness with his love interest may prove the strongest driving force of all. Many such characters exist in popular fiction, most notably Lois Lane (*Superman: The Man of Steel*) and Princess Leia (*Star Wars*).

Accomplice

The Accomplice often takes the form of the Hero's sidekick; he is a noticeably lesser character that often frustrates the Hero. The sidekick represents 'everyday man' and is noticeably devoid of the attractive features or abilities of the Hero in whose shadow he exists. Regardless, however, of his supposed 'lesser' status, he often proves an invaluable resource to the Hero. Sidekicks are often portrayed as quaint and awkward creatures with a predilection towards humorous exploits, emphasising the lack of dignity they radiate as opposed to the often indifferent coolness of the Hero. The list of famous sidekicks is endless, with some prominent examples of the character type to be found in Dr. Watson (*Sherlock Holmes*), Robin (*Batman*) and Matthew (*The Sandman*).

Certain themes also find prominent expression through archetypes. I have listed some of the most significant below:

- War between good and evil; light versus dark.
- Inability to conform socially (the rebellious hero or the archetype of death).

- The interpretation of dreams, clairvoyance, fortune telling, communication with the spirit world, the insights of an oracle, etc.
- The dead returning to life or even communicating with the living to offer advice, insight and/or warning.

The last two themes mentioned suggest scenarios in which the Hero has access to often unconventional help and guidance. This, along with the support of loved ones and sages, gives the Hero a significant advantage over the forces that oppose him. The Hero's access to this advantage and other valuable recourses qualifies him as worthy and good, and his journey as being an honourable pursuit, thereby following the convention that good must triumph over evil.

The main archetypes I identified can nowhere be applied as perfectly in the realm of fantasy fiction as in George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga. As *Star Wars* is a series of films (there exists a strong relation between film and graphic novels), and the main focus of this thesis is on the contemporary mythology of Neil Gaiman's graphic novel series *The Sandman*, I wish to very simplistically apply some of the Campbell-Jung Archetypes to it as an example. It is, however, worth noting here that George Lucas wrote *Star Wars* with the specific intention to create a 'modern mythology'. It is therefore not suitable as a study subject for Archetypal Criticism due to the fact that the character types cannot be extracted and applied to archetypes, because they were created within the very moulds of those classical archetypes. They do not comply with the notion that archetypal characters are a natural and automatic outflow of the 'shared unconscious'. They are used here because of their perfect representation of certain key archetypes. Archetypal Criticism often has to delve deep within the fabric of the literature to find and isolate archetypes; they are very rarely as obvious as in the example I use here.

Luke Skywalker is the classic archetypal Hero on a journey to find his father. En route he receives guidance from the ever-wise Obi Wan Kenobi and Yoda who both perfectly fit the archetype of the wise Sage. Han Solo (an anti-hero character attached to a secondary narrative) goes through an overt character development and transforms from money-hungry ruffian to a 'good guy' who focuses on social concerns rather than the acquisition of wealth. Darth Vader is a dual archetype: together with Emperor Palentine, he represents the archetype of Death, while he also plays the role of the Father who is unknown to his son (Luke Skywalker). The revelation that Vader is Luke's long-lost father is

in itself a typified archetypal event. The Force (a mysterious natural entity which can only be wielded by the Jedi Knights) consists of a 'Light' and a 'Dark' side, and because these opposing elements of good and evil both reside within the Force, it serves as a representation of the internal human struggle. The dark side conforms to the Shadow archetype that constantly plagues the Hero. There are many side kicks, most famously the comical robotic duo 'R2D2' and 'C3PO', who often prove indispensable allies to the quest. Naturally, there is also a love interest or damsel in distress to be found in Princess Leia.

With his pioneering work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1972), Joseph Campbell expanded on the ground-breaking work of German anthropologist Adolph Bastian, who first initiated the notion that myths from across the planet, spanning various periods and cultures, were built on the same elementary ideas. These elementary ideas translate roughly into Jung's, above mentioned, concept of archetype. The term, however, did not originate with Jung, who merely popularised the term through his work, *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1916), that appeared in English one year after the publication of the final volume of J.G Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (12 vols., 1911 – 1915). Frazer's and Jung's texts, being two allied but very different sources of influence, formed the basis of Archetypal and Myth Criticism on which Campbell and other Archetypal critics would build.

The term 'archetype' can actually be traced back to Plato (*arche* = 'original', *typos* = 'form'), who used it as a reference to 'ideas' or 'forms'. Jung believed archetypes to be the building blocks not only of the human mind, but also of the collective unconscious. He further claimed that everyone, despite their race or cultural heritage, is born with the same subconscious conception of ideas like 'hero', 'death', 'love interest', etc. This is considered to be the reason why fables and myths have a universal appeal and message that transcends all cultural borders. Jung developed the idea of archetypes primarily as a way of constructing the meaning of dreams and visions of his mentally disturbed patients.

According to Kristen Brennan (1999:1) Campbell's contribution to the field of Myth Criticism was to take the idea of Jung's archetype and use it to map out the common underlying structure behind religion and myth. It is from this comparative analysis that the idea of the 'monomyth' originated. Even though the concept of the 'monomyth' seems to be a rather feeble or simple deduction, 'it suggests an incredible ramification, which Campbell summed up with his adage 'All religions are

true, but none are literal" (Brennan 1999:1). What he meant was that all religions should be wary of mistaking the religious practice and tradition of a given religion for its true spiritual essence.

I include here Campbell's blueprint for the Archetypal Hero Journey, as summarised in Brennan (1999:1-2). This blueprint, or genetic pattern of narrative activity, comprises three main phases that the Hero goes through, namely: *Departure*, *Initiation* and *Return*. Each of these is, in turn, broken up into further individual phases. Campbell was convinced that this pattern was nearly universally applicable; he applied variations of it to a multitude of stories the world over throughout the course of his career.

1. The Departure / Separation: the call to adventure
   - refusal of the call
   - supernatural aid
   - crossing the first threshold
   - the heart of evil

2. The Initiation
   - the road of trails
   - meeting with the goddess
   - temptation away from the true path
   - atonement with the father
   - apotheosis (becoming god-like)
   - the ultimate boon

3. The Return
   - refusal of the return
   - the magic flight
   - rescue from without
   - crossing the return threshold
   - master of two worlds
   - freedom to live

The question, however, arises: what is the use of such a generic pattern? What was its purpose apart from emphasising the similarities between stories on which cultures and religions have been based throughout history? Surely highlighting what people share over disagreements is certainly a valuable goal on its own. Campbell's views stretched beyond such immediate goals.

According to Francis Gigot (2003:1) Christianity, in its mainstream forms, rests on the pillars of the *Four Gospels* (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Each of these stories relates the Jesus-tale, but from a slightly different perspective. The first three Gospels – Matthew, Luke and Mark – are referred to as the *Synoptic Gospels*, from the Greek word 'syn' for *together* and 'opsis' for *seeing*. They recount the story of Jesus in such a similar way that the three Gospels may be read side-to-side for comparison. The Gospel of John, however, tells the story in a rather different way from the other three. The point is that at the very heart of one of the most significant and singular narrative events in our human culture, we are prompted to compare and contrast. We are asked to look for the monomyth of Jesus.

Campbell, in a similar fashion, aimed to provide a context which would allow the world's religious and mythical stories to be considered as forms of Synoptic Gospels in their own right. We may juxtapose them and consider them as telling one story, the monomyth, despite the outward differences in their characters, organisation, symbolism and perspective. In doing so, we may perhaps uncover the story behind the stories: *the story of ourselves.*

1.2.5   The Contemporary Mythological Hero

The idea or concept of the hero has remained constant throughout the ages, as the hero, or the female heroine, still refers to the protagonist of a story, legend or saga. The individual traditionally possesses abilities far greater than those of the common man, which allow him or her to perform deeds that are both extraordinary and beneficial to mankind. These 'powers' afford the heroic individual a great deal of popularity and may manifest themselves in the physical, as well as mental exploits of the hero.

Traditionally, an individual achieves heroic by accomplishing an extraordinary feat or performing a praiseworthy deed. In general, acts like slaying terrible monsters or rescuing people or groups of people from certain demise conform to the idea of a heroic deed. The definitions of a 'good', 'noble'

or 'heroic deed' are usually determined by a culture in which the particular hero tale or myth originated. In literature, however, particularly in Shakespearean tragedies, the hero may also be plagued by serious personality flaws that would ultimately cause the downfall of the hero. The most notable of these doomed and tragic Shakespearean heroes is probably Hamlet. The flawed hero is typical of contemporary mythology and does not conform to the classic 'use' of the hero mythology in society. Society often finds a need for a hero in times of national doubt, when a virtuous role-model may restore society's faith in itself. This application of the hero myth has, however, not wholly survived in modern times and was more successfully applied within classical cultures. In our modern times, however, the hero- and hero-worship are often confused with celebrity.

At this point it should be clear that no linear or platonic conceptualisation and definition of the hero exists. It is, however, possible to identify several main hero types:

The Culture Hero

The hero from ancient mythology who makes a difference in the world through his discoveries and inventions. Typically, the culture hero would be credited, for instance, with the discovery of fire, a unique approach to agriculture or a particular tradition or religious practice. The culture hero is usually considered to be the most significant and important legendary figure in a particular culture and is often credited as the founder of the culture's ruling dynasty. In many primitive cultures, this particular hero is believed never to have died a mortal death, but rather assumed the shape of a star, a constellation or a spiritual being without a defined form.

In modern times, however, the term is used as a reference to prominent artists or writers in a metaphorical sense. These 'heroes' made a profound contribution to the establishment or promotion of a particular culture.

The Superhero

Where the culture hero referred to a true or fictional character from historical or contemporary mythology, the Superhero is a wholly fictional character confined to the realms of contemporary mythology. This type of character features prominently in most media of the modern age (films, novels, comics etc.) and, like conventional heroes, is noted for feats of courage and nobility. The

superhero's unique abilities are reflected in his or her own colourful name and costume – Spiderman, for instance, has spider-like abilities and a costume that carries the spider motif.

There is a range of abilities that are commonly associated with the superhero, but are by no means definitive. They are, however, mentioned here as they are 'inventions' of contemporary mythology. They might share some commonalities with those of classic mythology, but are, in general, unique to the modern hero.

- Extraordinary powers and abilities, masters of skills uniquely relevant to the modern world and a workable knowledge of technologically advanced equipment. Even though powers may vary considerably from one superhero to the next, the ability to fly, conjure superhuman strength and ability, and wield advanced versions of any of the five human senses are common superpowers. Some superheroes like Batman possess no notable superpowers, but have mastered skills such as martial arts and forensic sciences. Others have access to advanced equipment that mimic conventional superpowers.

- A willingness to risk one's own safety in the service of humanity without expectation of reward. Even though the classical mythological hero shares the modern hero's preoccupation with service to humanity, he often did so in search of personal glory and fortune. The truly selfless hero is arguably a modern invention with a singular, unique motivation such as revenge (Batman), a sense of responsibility (Spiderman) or a formal calling (Superman).

- A moral or ethical code of conduct that is more advanced and stricter than those abiding by conventional laws and those enforcing these laws. The upholding of, and lapses in, their ethical code are often related to self-motivation as well as internal struggle.

- A concealed identity that often allows the superhero to live a double life – as everyday citizen and as superhero.

- A destructive and flamboyant costume that masks the hero's identity and reflects the hero's individual name and theme. For instance, Batman's costume resembles the image of a bat.

- An arch-enemy and/or a collection of regular enemies that the hero fights repeatedly.

- Is either independently wealthy or has an occupation that allows for minimum supervision, so his whereabouts do not have to be strictly accounted for.

- A secret hideout, headquarters or a base of operations.

- An 'origin-story' which explains how the hero came in possession of his abilities, as well as motivation for being a superhero.

The Anti-hero

This is another hero-type that has exclusively been created for use in literature and film of contemporary mythology, and if Gaiman's Sandman could be easily categorised, this is the category he would fall under. An anti-hero is a protagonist or supporting character that has some behavioural flaws associated with villains. Wolverine from the the *X-men* movie series, for example, has a bloodlust and a tendency towards anti-social behaviour, but also has sufficient heroic qualities or intentions to gain the sympathy of the audience. Of course, the term 'anti-hero' does not serve to circumscribe the entire character of the hero, as this particular breed of hero may also display a vast array of traits. The most common of these, however, are awkwardness, obnoxiousness, passivity, obtuseness, and a notable lack of mercy and compassion. Whatever the group of traits possessed by the individual anti-hero character, it is important to note that all characters that fall into this grouping are fundamentally flawed and failed heroes. In this sense, the anti-hero is also referred to as the tragic hero.

The comic book medium appropriates the anti-hero more than any other medium. The heroes, also referred to as 'dark heroes', are typically characters fighting for good, but have a tragic flaw (*Wolverine*), a tormented past (*Batman*) or use questionable means to fight evil (*Spawn*). At this point, one can formulate a workable definition of the anti-hero: a paradoxical character whose label as hero

is only relevant within the context of a particular story and could readily be viewed as 'evil' or 'villainous' should he or she be placed in another context.

The anti-hero is a concept that has grown from a tendency of modern authors to lend more complexity and sympathy to villains whose motivations are not inherently evil and may, within the right context, even be viewed as noble. The line between the anti-hero and the villain is therefore blurred, and their positioning on either side of this line is dependent on the 'point-of-view' factor.

There are also several sub-types to the anti-hero character:

The Weakling: This type of hero is often portrayed as a 'nerdish' teenage male is effeminate in many ways. He feels helpless, unworthy of the task at hand, constantly questions his own abilities and masculinity, and distrusts conventional values. The sub-type is usually unable to commit to the ideals of the group or cause he has been recruited for and revels in his status as outsider. In modern science fiction, these characters are often referred to as 'cyberpunks', as they possess superior computer skills that have been used for selfish personal gain and are often portrayed as social outcasts (punk) who have somehow been forced to participate in a good cause.

The Optimist: This character's life seems to be one great long disappointment, highlighted with the occasional minor success. Despite his chronic bad luck, he persists and even attains a form of heroic success by steadfastly being fuelled by a deeply rooted optimism that promises success on the distant horizon. The optimist is, however, doomed to share the fate of the villain as he would ultimately fail in his quest. Jay Gatsby, the popular F. Scott Fitzgerald character, is an example of this character type. Gatsby's primary aim was to win the heart of a woman who moved in higher social circles than his own (Daisy). Through illicit means he obtains a fortune which would enable him to move up the social ladder and implicity be deemed a worthy prospect for Daisy. For a time, it seemed that he did attain his goal by engaging in an extramarital affair with Daisy, but his dream and his life are soon destroyed when his character flaws come into play. Through the whole experience, however, even after his affair with the love of his life is ended, he remains optimistic that he will one day have his way.

The Ethicist: Even though this 'anti-hero' has the same end goals as conventional heroes, his means are often questionable and his punishment often fits the crime. This character is a good example of this. This character type features prominently in comic books, and the Daredevil character is a good example of this. By day, Matt Murdock pursues criminals as a lawyer in a court of law, but at night, he dons a mask and exacts revenge on those who have slipped through the fingers of the judicial system as Daredevil.

The Chameleon: Western films liked to make use of a type of hero that initially has many unlikeble traits, such as being prejudices self-centered, immature, arrogant or having a single- minded focus on things like wealth, status and revenge. The hero is therefore introduced as a villainous character, but through the course of the story develops into a noble and likeable character. Well-known examples of this character type are Han Solo (*Star Wars*) and Clint Eastwood (*Fistful of Dollars*).

1.3   Graphic Novels as Literary Works

Since Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* − the reference for this study in contemporary mythology − is a graphic novel, it is important that some of the conventions of the medium are explored and an attempt is made to justify this form of narrative as literature.

'Comic Books', as defined by Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* (1995:7), refers to 'juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer'. This definition may seem a little vague when one considers newspaper cartoon strips, which also seem to fit this description. To clarify the issue, I'd like to add the criterion that the term 'comic book' should refer to a publication exclusively dedicated to the deliberate sequence of images as described by McCloud. The conventional comic book consists of pictures (contained in 'frames' and separated by empty spacing referred to as 'gutters') and words (used to relate speech and description). The images and phrases in this juxtaposition do not, however, function separately or, as David Lewis said, 'this combination is an enhancing synergy, not some sort of bastardisation. Comics are not a rush mish-mash, ramshackle, shorthand, piecemeal, handicap or dumbing down of components.'(2000:1) Lewis also believes that comic books are a completely separate medium to that of newspaper comic strips or funny pages, and that they

represent a medium with 'capacity for intelligent, aesthetic content (that) can even rival accepted literature's own influential values.'(Lewis 2000:1). These views may seem rather lofty to those not thoroughly initiated in the medium, but a worldwide comic culture is emerging that believes the medium to have power, depth and intelligence. Even though I believe the medium to have the capacity for true literary value, this valuation will not be achieved by the simple synergy of pictures and words. This is where the graphic novel is set apart, as it contains a synergy of art, instead of simple images, and literature, instead of a sequence of choice 'power words'. In this sense, the marriage of graphics and the literary word creates a product that is greater than the pure written word or pure imagery could achieve alone. While this may imply that the graphic novel is a development of pure literature or fine art, it is not the case. It simply means that in combination, these two mediums may 'achieve' more by reaching a wider audience not initiated in either medium on its own.

The reality of the medium is that it is the one creative field capable of perfect synergy for a storyteller. In support of this, David Lewis claimed that 'comics by definition accomplish synergy on every panel … they manage to mesh together two alternate avenues of communication into an amalgamated, comprehensible and complementary package.' (2000:2). This interplay is never completely absent, not even in the most simplistic or infantile comic book, as it is the natural outflow of the structure and the nature of the medium.

In *Understanding Comics* (1995:161-196*)*, Scott McCloud developed a naming system in an attempt to catalogue the different ways in which words and pictures interact in a panel. These 'modes of interaction' are summarised here:

- Word specific – The pictures serve only to illustrate the content of the wording.
- Picture specific – The words are insignificant and serve only to support the image. This type of interaction is often used in Superhero comics where the words depict the sound of the action.
- Duo-specific – Both image and words convey information of equal importance.
- Parallel – Words and images form seemingly separate communication channels with their own message/content.

- Montage – Words become images in their own right.
- Interdependent – Words and pictures combined in a panel relate the true meaning or subtext of the story.

Lewis (2000:3) stated that in even the most simplistic comics, words and images provide a versatile array of possible interactions. These interactions and their vast amount of applications are the tools of a graphic novel storyteller, never requiring him or her, as either an artist or writer, to focus solely on one restricted mode of communication. In addition to this, the storyteller does not have to maintain one mode or representation throughout a book or even a single page as the 'synergistic palette is diverse with many interchangeable techniques'.

McCloud (1995:66) defined the 'gutter', as used in comic book terminology, as the term for the space between each frame or panel, and often implies a transition in space and time from one illustration to the next. McCloud (1995:66-68) explains:

> Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea. Nothing is seen between the two panels, but experience tells you something must be there! Comics panels fracture both time and space, offering a jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments. But closure allows us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality.

According to Lewis (2000:4) the comic book reader is required to have an active imagination, and it is therefore his/her imagination that fills in the gutters by supplying the connective content between panels. Time is a deeply complex issue in comics and is the responsibility of the writer to decide and the reader to translate. Lewis explained the time-translating complexity by comparing the frames in a comic book to Morse code and musical notation: 'a casual, understood system of time's progression from one panel to the next is struck between the creators and the readers … like a jump-cutting movie or slow-moving animation.'

McCloud also identified that connecting two frames or panels, both spatially and logistically, is an essential aspect of reading a comic book. McCloud (1995:70-74) claimed that there are many

different ways to 'jump' or understand the transition between panels. These transitions from panel to panel can be placed in 6 distinct categories.

1. Moment-to-moment – requires little involvement from the reader to form meaning.
2. Action-to-action – features a single subject in distinct progression.
3. Subject-to-subject – switches between ideas within a single scene and requires great reader involvement to produce meaning.
4. Scene-to-scene – deductive reasoning is required on the part of the reader as he/she is transported across 'significant distances of time and space' (McCloud 1995:71).
5. Aspect-to-aspect – presents a view on different aspects of a particular setting, idea or mood.
6. Non-sequitur – offers no logical relation between panels and is almost completely dependant on the interpretation of the reader.

These different ways of making transitions from one panel to the next holds the following implications:

- Active interpretation is constantly, although to varying degrees, being performed by the reader from one panel to the next.
- Different artists and cultures employ varying mixes of 'gutter-jumps', providing 'an extensive stylistic sub-categorisation that might equate with the 'missing' mood' (Lewis 2000:4).

Like the use of the standard cut-away shot in a movie (in the classic 'Shower Scene' in the movie *Psycho*, for instance, the murderer kills the victim while the viewer sees only the blood flowing down the drain), understanding a comic goes cognitively far beyond the reading of words and the translating of images.

At this point, it should be clear that comics are incredibly creative and complex, and while attributing the medium with literary value may never convince all literary scholars, it should at the very least be deemed worthy of scrutiny, analysis and deconstruction.

1.3.1   On the Graphic Novel

According to the Wikipedia entry on the 'Graphic Novel' (http://en.wikipedia.org /wiki/Graphic_novel) the term 'graphic novel' refers to the comic book published in long form, usually containing extensive and multifaceted narratives, and often aimed at the more mature reader. The term can also include a short story collection, or collected issues of previously published comic books republished in a single large volume. *The Sandman* conforms to this understanding of the term, as the 10-volume graphic novel series was first published in the single comic book editions. It is important, however, to realise that the 75 issues were roughly divided into 10 storylines that differed greatly in narrative style and visual or artistic representation. These 10 'sections' to the series were bound together in the graphic novel format after the discontinuation of the series in 1996. Since the 10 volumes generally contain a single narrative string in one volume, it is closer to the term 'original graphic novel', which refers to a graphic novel that was initially conceived in that format with a single narrative.

The term 'graphic novel' is an evolving one and cannot be strictly defined. It is sometimes rather controversially used to imply subjective distinction in artistic quality between graphic novels and other kinds of comics. It is commonly used to dissociate works from the juvenile and/or humorous connotations of the terms 'comics' and 'comic books', implying that the work is more serious, mature and more literary than traditional comics.

Even though the term has been loosely applied to works since the early 1970s, graphic novels only gained wide acceptance in the 1980s. Works that firmly secured the future of the medium and coined the phrase 'comics for grown-ups' are Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986), Frank Millers' *Batman − The Dark Knight Returns* (1986) and Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (1987).

1.3.2   A note on post-modern literature

The Sandman and the general medium of the graphic novel can be classified as 'Post-modern Literature'. The Internet article 'Post-modern literature' (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/ postmodern_literature) describes the term as referring to the literature which developed out of a

series of styles and ideas formed during the Second World War period and is considered a reaction against the perceived norms of modern literature. In general, however, post-modern literature was a continuation of many fundamental techniques and assumptions of modern literature.

According to Roger Webster (1996:122-128), modern and post-modern literature together represent a departure from 19th-century realism, in which stories were recounted from an objective or omniscient viewpoint. In characterisation, both modern and post-modern literature explores subjectivism, turning from external reality to examine inner states of consciousness. This is particularly the case in *The Sandman* which almost exclusively deals with the inner consciousness of the protagonist, as well as the other main characters, in a style that resembles the stream of consciousness styles of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. *The Sandman* is also unique in this sense due to its thematic preoccupation with 'dreams', which it explores through fluid narration. This often entails utilising free indirect speech and boundless fragmentation in narrative and character construction, true to modern and post-modern conventions in literature.

Unlike post-modern literature, modernist literature considered fragmentation and extreme subjectivity as an existential crisis or a Freudian internal conflict. This is not the case in post-modern literature as the troubled and isolated anti-heroes of modern literature opened up avenues for self-consciously deconstructed and self-reflective narrators in works like *The Sandman*. Literature in the post-modern era does not set itself against modern literature as much as it develops and expands on the style, making it more self-conscious and ironic.

Further, the post-modern position on the style of a novel, by implication also graphic novels, is that the style of the work must be appropriate to that which it depicts and represents – the fluidity and the form of literary and visual representation in *The Sandman*, for instance, supports the novel's dealings with the dreams and the subconscious. This stylised approach to literature is often viewed as being disorganised, sterile and brimming with clever language play for its own sake which negates the work's value as narrative and therefore also as a novel.

Post-modern literature has spawned some of its own unique hero archetypes that often serve to explore the blurred boundaries between self-destruction and self-exploration and to present a critique of the cold, numb, soulless consumer society in which they live. Here are some of the

archetypes exclusive to contemporary mythology, as identified by Dominic Sagolia (2005:1-4) in 'Archetypes in Modern Mythology'.

Hacker Archetype

Sagolia (2005:1) stated that 'Because the advent of new and incredible technologies is essential to futuristic fiction, there must be architects of such technology.' Almost every protagonist in science fiction has remarkable access to the most up-to-date technology and an unrivalled ability to utilise it. As Webster defines the hacker hero, he serves to 'unfold a part of the world view of a people or explain a practice'. The hacker is not that much different from his counterparts in classic mythology; he simply wields the 'magic' available to him and battles monsters with the tips of his fingers.

Rebel Model Archetype

With the possible exception of the *Star Trek* saga, every popular science fiction/fantasy setting relies upon a rebellious splinter group seeking a better life. The *Star Wars* conflict between the rebel alliance and the oppressive empire is a classic example of this archetype.

Oppressive Order Archetype

Within the history of the *Star Wars* universe, one encounters the 'Old Republic', with an overtly democratic council, which was usurped by the 'New Order'. This tyrannical empire of fear and autocracy was replaced by the New Republic after the events contained in the 'Return of the Jedi' instalment. As each new administration comes into power, they are soon identified as an oppressive order which in turn spawns a new rebel group in response. The oppressive order represents history and tradition, and features prominently in science fiction classics like *Dune* and George Orwell's *1984*.

Family Bond Archetype

Many works of science fiction/fantasy have carried a strong message relating to the value of the Family Bond. Again, *Star Wars* serves as a suitable example here. We learn about Chewbacca's Life Pledge to Han Solo, and how his pledge extends to include Leia and her family. Historically, Luke and Leia couldn't have defeated the evil Emperor without the help of their father (Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader), who is the ultimate example of the 'Myth of Transformed Evil'.

Transformed Evil Archetype

Like the family bond, transformed evil is a prevailing theme in contemporary mythology. In a legacy of evil, first Anakin Skywalker, then Luke Skywalker, are seduced by the Dark Side,. Then having come to their senses, they return to the light. Even Luke's 'padowan' learner, Kyp, must endure straying to the Dark Side in order to see more clearly the difference between good and evil (Kevin J. Anderson's *Jedi Academy Trilogy*).

Without delving further into the very complex theoretical concept of post-modern literature, it should perhaps be explained that one of its key characteristics is metafictionality – an extension of modernist self-reflexivity. The term 'metafiction' refers to a fiction that is about fiction, and in which the fictions proliferate. In this respect, *The Sandman* speaks loudly of metafictionality as it not only incorporates elements of classic literature and mythology, it also cross-references and superimposes unique elements of *The Sandman* on those that it incorporates (creating a fiction upon a fiction, upon a fiction). For example, Morpheus (*The Sandman's* protagonist) finds himself as a character in classic retellings of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the tragic tale of Orpheus- while characters from these tales, like Robin Goodfellow, find themselves in contemporary tales of Morpheus' dealings.

As an overview, post-modernist literature may be associated with the following traits:

- More stylistic experimentation that gave rise to media like the graphic novel, along with the fragmentation of constructions in narration and characterisation. This, in turn foregrounds of linguistic effects rather than the psychology of characters or coherent, linear narratives. Hence, post-modern novels create characters that sometimes verge on the flatness of allegorical figures.
- A powerful interest in irony and satire. In *The Sandman*, for instance, satire is utilised to mock human vice and folly through humour, often carrying strong overtones of irony.

1.3.3   An approach to characters in *The Sandman*

In *The Sandman*, the reader encounters the concept of the 'fictional character' in every possible guise imaginable. Generally, the fictional character refers to a person or conscious entity that the reader

imagines exists within the world of a particular work. In *The Sandman*, in addition to humans, characters can be animals, gods, inanimate objects, aliens or even nonentities (Scholes & Kellogg 1981:160).

The approach of readers to characterisation, and how they understand or interpret fictional characters, varies enormously. *The Sandman* supports the most extreme ways of reading fictional characters; they could either be viewed as real people or as purely artistic creations that have everything to do with craft and nothing to do with real life. Readers of *The Sandman*, as well as other graphic novels by the Vertigo publishing house, are expected to adjust and vary their reading styles continuously throughout the text.

Here are some of the typical ways of approaching the reading of characters in a work of post-modern literature like *The Sandman* as set out in Rimmon-Kenan (1999:59-70):

- **Characters as symbol:** Certain characters are understood to represent a given quality or abstraction. Morpheus' family, The Endless, is best approached in this way, as each member represents an aspect of humanity (for example Destiny, Death etc.). The Morpheus character, apart from being an anthropomorphic representation of a dream, could also be read, like many other male protagonists in post-modern fiction, as a Christ symbol. Other characters in the work can be read as symbolising capitalist greed and the futility of fulfilling the American Dream and the notion of romanticism.

- **Character as representative:** Another approach to reading *The Sandman's* characters symbolically is to understand some of the characters as representing of a certain group of people or stereotypes. Even though Neil Gaiman tries to do away with certain stereotypes and their associative attributes, particularly homosexuals, many stereotypes are propagated, like the ignorant, hateful white American male.

- **Characters as historical or biographical references:** *The Sandman* often makes use of important historical figures (like Shakespeare, amongst others). Other characters may have consciously or unconsciously been based on prominent figures from contemporary society

or history. Morpheus, for instance is supposedly based on several prominent rock stars from the 1980s.

- **Characters as psychoanalytic patients:** Psychoanalytic literary criticism would treat the characters in *The Sandman* as real people in possession of complex psyches. A psychoanalytic approach to literary characters would regard them the way an analyst would treat a patient, searching their dreams and past behaviour for explanations of fictional situations.

In the particular case of *The Sandman*, especially with reference to its male protagonist, I would support a psychoanalytic reading, where the characters serve as mirrors for the audience's psychological fears and desires. Rather than representing realistic psyches, fictional characters teach us a way to act out psychological dramas of our own in symbolic and often hyperbolic form. This form of reading is especially popular in film criticism, and as film and graphic novels are similar in their presentation (for instance, shots in film correspond with frames in comics), this may be the most suitable approach to *The Sandman*. The feminist critic, Laura Mulvey, is considered a pioneer in this field and her groundbreaking article 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema, (1977), analysed the role of the male viewer of conventional cinema as fetishist, using psychoanalysis as 'a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form' (Mulvey 1977:1).

1.3.4 'Round' and 'Flat' Characters

The following discussion on character classification has been adapted from Rimmon-Kenan (1999:40-42).

Joseph Ewen, in his *Theory of Character in Narrative Fiction* (1971:7), suggested a classification of characters by making use of three axes – complexity, development and penetration into inner life. In making use of these axes and assigning specific positions on these axes to a specific character, the scholar can classify the character with relative accuracy.

A former mode of classification, proposed by E.M Forster (1963), simply divided characters into two categories, either 'flat' or 'round'. Forster saw 'flat' characters as caricatures or allegorical

constructs that are formed around a single idea and can therefore be easily defined. 'Round' characters, by implication, would be quite the opposite and would imply that a character is complex and constantly engaged in change and development. The problem with this system is obvious, as a character may be constructed around a single trait, but may still be prone to development and complexities in his/her behaviour. Even though the typical Hero character is often perceived as a simple character with obvious motivations and lack of depth, they cannot all simply be classified as 'flat'. The Greek hero Achilles, for example, may be exclusively presented in terms of one aspect of life (the emotion of anger), and should therefore need no further classification apart from being flat. But Achilles is a very complex character that is 'neither typical nor probable, neither inclusive nor detailed … from the invocation, when the poet asks the muse to sing of the anger of Achilles to the final moment when the funeral of Hector takes place through the forbearance and generosity of Achilles, his character is presented perpetually through the waxing and waning of his anger and through the quantitative gradations which anger assumes in him under various provocations'. (Scholes & Kellogg, 1981:161) Achilles experiences development within the limited spectrum of his one preoccupying character trait and can therefore not be viewed as flat or one-dimensional, but can also not be classified as being 'round'.

This is where the applicability of Ewen's system of classification is realised. The opposite poles of Ewen's complexity axis conform to Forster's simple idea of 'flat' and 'round'. On the one end, you encounter simple and static allegorical figures with only one noticeable character trait, and on the other end, you come across complex characters that are constantly evolving and are presented as being multi-faceted. It is important to notice that on this axis (and the other two) there are infinite amount of positions in between the poles, which allow for an infinite amount of classifications. The development axis, at its one pole, classifies minor characters serving a single function beyond themselves and at its other pole, a fully developed character. The last axis - penetration into the inner life - refers to the degree to which the character is involved with his/her inner mental, emotional or spiritual being. At the one end of this axis, you may find a cartoon character like Donald Duck, apparently completely devoid of an inner voice, and on the other end, Virginia Woolf's Mrs Dalloway, who for the better part of the novel, is steeped in conversation with her 'self'.

Like any other literary work, *The Sandman* consists of many characters that may find themselves in a combination of positions on the abovementioned axes. Since this study centres around Morpheus

and his role as Hero, only those characters with the most direct influence on his behaviour and journey need to be mentioned here. For Ewen, the least complex characters are those that are constructed around a single trait or idea and do not seem to develop overtly. Taken at face value, The Endless fit this description perfectly, for as a family of god-like beings, they are each the personification of a human 'trait' (like desire, despair etc.). However they cannot be grouped together as simple, non-developing characters preoccupied with one specific facet of life as they all vary considerably in their level of complexity, development and penetration into inner life. Here follows a short classification of The Endless members according to Ewen's model:

- **Destiny**: A linear, non-developing character, showing no inner monologue or spiritual experience. A simple, static character who features rarely in the series, but has a profound influence on Morpheus and his existence.

- **Despair and Desire**: These twins are slightly more developed characters, but remain largely singular in their obsessions and purpose. They also seem to manifest little or no penetration into their inner lives. Their slightly more 'rounded' presentation is due to their more frequent appearance in the series.

- **Destruction**: One of the few characters who seems engaged with his inner processes (proof of this lies in the part where he abandoned his post or 'trait'). His actions and decisions speak of a non-linear thinking mind that constantly questions and re-evaluates. Apart from Death and Morpheus, he is the only other character that is defined by preoccupations apart from his assigned primary role – the destruction of mankind.

- **Death**: A slightly more complex character than Destruction, mainly due to her frequent appearance in the series. She is, however, not presented as a character prone to developing or engaging in inner monologue.

- **Morpheus**: Where the rest of his family find themselves in varying positions on Ewen's scales, Morpheus is placed firmly on the maximum placement of these scales. Incredibly complex and not at all defined by his role as 'dream king', he is constantly changing and

developing (the main trait that sets him apart from the rest), and constantly interacting with his inner and spiritual being.

1.4   Conclusion

Carl Jung's psychoanalytic archetypes, and their adapted versions as found in mythology and discerned by Joseph Campbell, will now enable us to evaluate contemporary mythology, including *The Sandman*, according to these patterns. They will also assist us in validating of a contemporary mythology, and by implication *The Sandman* as contemporary mythology, by offering fundamental elements whereby these myths may be analysed. The overview on post-modern fiction will also assist us in coming to terms with certain features of the graphic novel medium, as well as with post-modern characterisation. The discussion on the comic book and graphic novel as a medium also serves to familiarise the reader with certain conventions of this medium that may prove to be useful for an understanding of the following reading. Let us now turn our attention to contextualising *The Sandman* by considering the broader context of the American comic book and the application of Laura Mulvey's psychoanalytic theories to the graphic novel.

Chapter 2

CONTEXTUALISING *THE SANDMAN*

2.1 Historical Development of the American Comic Book

To place *The Sandman* in proper perspective with regard to graphic novels as a genre, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the development of the genre. *The Sandman*, as well as the medium of American comic books, may be very loosely divided into four phases or historical eras as set out by Les Daniels in two of his works, *DC Comics: Sixty years of the world's favourite comic book heroes* (1995) and *Marvel: Five fabulous decades of the world's greatest comics* (1991), and is summarised below.

2.1.1 The Golden Age

According to Les Daniels (1995:11), comic books developed from the earlier comic strips that first started to make their appearance in the newspapers of the late 19th century. In the 1920s and 1930s, these single newspaper strips were being collected in the form of pulp-style magazines. As the initial content and subject matter of these strips were overtly humorous in nature, the name 'comic book' was adapted from 'comic strip'. The name of this new medium has caused great confusion over time, since the term 'comic book' did not correspond with the type of content being published, but was rather a reference to the medium in general. This confusion also led to the societal notion that comic books were to be considered a somewhat lesser or insignificant art form and should under no circumstance be confused or associated with literature. The degradation of the medium caused frustration in many readers who have grown up with the medium and have not 'grown out' of their fascination with comics as they reached adulthood. This led to the coining of the term 'graphic novels', as well as the expansion of typical comic book content to allow for an older, more intellectual readership.

The first official American comic book, in the format we know today, has been credited to Max Gaines, who published his *Funnies on parade* in 1933 which contained simple fold-out reproductions of previously published comic strips. Some, however, feel the forerunner of the comic book is to be

found in a Belgian comic book published two years earlier depicting the very first adventures of Tintin.

In 1935, the American publishing house, National Periodical Publications, printed the first American comic book to consist solely of original story lines and characters. This first book, entitled *New Fun Comics*, was soon followed up by *Detective Comics* (which would later develop into DC). Both titles were characteristically heavy on adventure and detective fiction due to extensive pulp-magazine influences.

According to the article 'The American Comic Book' (www.en.wikipedia.org /wiki/American_comic_book), the most significant development in the existence of this new medium occurred with the publication of *Action Comics #1* and the introduction of the first single protagonist and superhero, namely Superman. Greatly influenced by the pulp-magazine title *Golem of Prague* and the novel *Gladiator* (by Philip Wylie), Superman fought crime in his now iconic bright blue-and-red costume, aided by superhuman abilities. This title also established the blueprint that would serve as the foundation for every superhero to be created after Superman - by creating archetypal comic elements like the secret identity, the secret hideout, the muscular appearance etc. The influence and impact of this title can never be fully calculated, as within two years many comic book companies made their appearance and sported a line of superheroes that were in some way or another reminiscent of Superman. The popularity of Superman was unprecedented, and with unrivalled popular appeal, he went on to become the most recognised character in all of popular fiction.

The period from 1930 to 1951 roughly constitutes what is now referred to as the Golden Age of comic books. In his article 'The Golden Age', T. Canote (1999:1) explained that this era of the genre was characterised by very large print runs due to its immense popularity as affordable entertainment during the World War II. The unpredictable storylines, the quality of the art and print work, and the jobs provided to a cross-section of the American public during the depression years firmly secured a medium that has remained strong to this day. The medium expanded rapidly after the war and spawned new genres such as teen humour (*Archie Comics*), animal comics (*Walt Disney*), science fiction, wild western, romance and humour. The superhero, however, reigned supreme, with an appeal and fan base unrivalled by other niche comic publications.

In 'The Golden Age' Canote (1999:1) further points out that the introduction of the comic book undoubtedly had a significant impact on the American society of the time. In the late 1940s to early 1950s, the medium was targeted by moral, religious and political heavyweights who blamed this new medium and its broad youth appeal for juvenile criminal behaviour, moral degradation, drug abuse and the overall poor academic performance and anti-social behaviour of young people. One of these crusaders, the psychiatrist Frederic Wertham, preoccupied with what he saw as overtones of sadism and alternative sexuality in comics, published *Seduction of the Innocent* (1955). This book raised anxieties concerning the effects of comics on the youth of conservative Protestant America. The book, along with a growing social awareness of the possible negative influences of popular media, created a wave of moral hysteria.

However, despite the fact that every possible religious and political organisation took a stand against this new 'evil' societal invasion, the horror comic (depicting graphic violence, occult themes and gore-filled art) and true-crime comic genres flourished. This was largely due to the development of better quality artwork and a movement towards a more literate sensibility by comic book writers. The overwhelming interest in the metaphysical and occult comic book content led to the establishment of publishing houses that aimed to specialise in this genre. One of these, EC Comics, was resented by many other, more 'wholesome' publishers, most notably National Comics and Archie Comics (one of the two biggest at the time). In 1954 these two comic industry players, with some others, founded the Comics Code Authority and drew up an official Comics Code in an attempt to monopolise the industry. This was intended to be the most stringent code in existence for any communications media. The Comics Code Authority was not a vehicle for moral and ethical protection as much as it was a conglomerate of 'wholesome' comic publishers who attempted to cut non-politically correct (but financially successful) publishers like EC Comics out of the business. The Code was carefully worded to boycott publishers of morally questionable material and deter others intending to pursue specialisation in similar content. With the support of government and notable moral representatives (religious leaders and Christian politicians), the strategic manoeuvre worked; and EC Comics abandoned this line of comic books and took up publishing *Mad Magazine*. This assault on artistic freedom delayed the re-emergence of the horror and occult comic genre until the 1990s, when society was finally considered liberated enough to absorb this apparently morally reprehensible type of comic book writing. The rise of this new 'genre' led to DC Comics dedicating

an entire imprint (Vertigo Comics) to exclusive content of this nature, with Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* as its flagship title.

2.1.2 The Silver Age

According to Les Daniels (1991:21), publishers felt it safe to experiment with the superhero formula once more in the late 1950s, seeing that enough time had passed since its first inception and the style of writing formulated to support it had rather stagnated. In 1956 National Publishers resurrected (then retired superhero) The Flash in *Showcase #4,* which kick-started the second wave of superhero popularity, commonly referred to as the Silver Age of American comic books. National Publishers proceeded, confident in recapturing the appeal of the superhero, to expand their line of superhero titles over the following six years. Competing publisher Marvel Comics gave the superhero a new spin by creating characters with human failings, fears and inner demons – a notable improvement on the one-dimensional super-brute of the Golden Age. This new incarnation of the classic hero held greater appeal as it found an audience among young readers (who still found the action antics appealing) and also young adults (who were drawn to the more intellectual themes). Marvel initially found themselves restricted in the number of titles they could publish because they were distributed by National Comics (now DC). This situation did not change until the late 1960s.

Marvel, Archie and National dominated the industry at this point, but smaller underground companies sprang up everywhere. The surge of independent comics continued up to the early 1970s and these were published completely independently of the major publications. This independence made conformity to the now obligatory Comics Code unnecessary as profits took a back seat to the accurate depiction of youth counterculture, drug culture and anti-political views of the time. These independent works were noted for their uninhibited and impertinent style that aimed to unravel the political/moral fabric of the social order at that time in history.

2.1.3 The Bronze Age

In the article 'The American Comic book' (www.en.wikipedia.org /wiki/ American_ comic_ book), it is pointed out that the Bronze Age is not so much an era as it is a period of concentrated changes to comic books that happened around 1970 (particularly in reference to DC and Marvel). Unlike the

Golden/Silver Age transition, the Silver/Bronze transition involved many continually published titles, making the transition less dramatic. It should be noted that not all the titles intended to be continued entered the Bronze Age simultaneously. One of the most notable transitions, also unorthodox and risky, was made to the *Batman* title. Being one of the original titles and the epitome of the wholesome, one-dimensional superhero, Batman defined the ultimate superhero. It was, however, decided to make him more dimensional, give him character depth (he now struggled with an internal evil) and, perhaps most shockingly, make him 'dark'. No longer was Batman the wholesome caped crusader, he was now the Dark Knight of Gotham.

2.1.4 The Modern Age

In the article 'The American Comic book' it is claimed that the inauguration of a non-returnable, direct distribution system of comics coincided with the spreading of book stores that specialise in comic books across America. These speciality stores set the stage for a more diverse voice and approach to comic writing, but also led to the marginalisation of comics in the public eye. Serial comic storylines were extended and became more complex, making titles more collectable and requiring readers to purchase more issues to complete a story. For the period from 1970 to 1990 the prices of comic books rose considerably due to a combination of factors: a nationwide paper shortage, increasing production values and the minimal profit incentives for stores to stock comic books. These factors are considered to be the primary reasons for the decline in comic book popularity in America.

According to Banks & Wein (1998:2), towards the end of the 1980s, two DC titles (*The Dark Knight Returns* and *Watchmen*) completely changed the way comic books were written. The profound influence and popularity of these two titles led to both of the major publishers, DC and Marvel, changing the format of their titles to a more realistic 'darker tone', which led to this particular period of comics being referred to as the 'Dark Age'. This change was underscored by the growing popularity of anti-heroes (most notably Wolverine, Spawn and the Sandman), as well as the discernibly darker tone in some independent publishers like Dark Horse Comics and Image Comics. For several years, comic books related tales of menacing mutants and dark heroes who set out to avenge, instead of protect, the innocent. This notion towards darkness and nihilism was also evident in DC's production of highly promoted comic book storylines such as *A Death in the Family* in the

Batman series (Batman's sidekick, Robin, is graphically murdered by the Joker), while Marvel's ever-popular *X-Men* title had storylines like *Mutant Massacre* and *Acts of Vengeance*. The initiation of the anti-hero challenged the previous model of the superhero as a positive humanitarian and set off a trend during the 1990s where the anti-hero became the rule rather than the exception. Fans, however, soon had their fill of the anti-hero and complained that many of them lacked even the slightest glimmer of an honourable agenda and were unlikable psychopaths with little depth and authenticity. It is believed that the rise of the anti-hero was tied to the cynicism of the 1980s, when the idea of a person selflessly using his extraordinary abilities on a quest for good was no longer believable, but a person with a psychological disturbance that led him to violently pursue criminals was. With the emergence of the anti-hero, villains also underwent some significant changes. Villains no longer were the personification of evil but rather 'victims' of misguided good intentions or inevitable forces, which made them by implication neither good nor evil.

This era also saw the resurrection of, as previously stated, the horror comic book genre, which incorporated elements of science fiction, traditional mythology and fantasy and, which strove towards a new standard -sophisticated suspense- in the medium. DC Comics specially created the Vertigo imprint in 1993 to cater for these titles, which most notably included *The Sandman*, *Swamp Thing*, *Preacher*, *House of Secrets* and *Hellblazer*.

2.2   Following in the steps of the Dream King

2.2.1 Introduction

Like many elements of popular universal folklore, the concept (or rather institution) of the *Sandman* is without a 'pure birth'; that is, it cannot be attributed to one singular source or any particular date of origin. I have, however, been able to plot out four distinct phases in the existence of the concept in question, namely: The Sandman of folklore, The Sandman of the Golden Age of DC Comics, The Sandman of the Silver Age of DC Comics and Neil Gaiman's The Sandman from the modern Vertigo imprint of DC Comics. These four phases could be considered to be wholly unrelated, and even though there might be slight correlations between the phases, they do not constitute a direct progression or follow in a logical developmental manner.

2.2.2 The Sandman of popular folklore

The most original version of the Sandman is to be found in numerous children's stories, which have been elevated to mythic status due to their timeless, universal appeal. The Sandman from these tales takes the form of a little old man who brings good dreams by sprinkling magic sand from his pouch onto those asleep. The tale, at this level, has many slight, and not so slight, variations which may be attributed to the fact that nearly every culture in the world relates to their young the tale of the Sandman in one form or another. In the culture of the Afrikaner people, for instance, we find the remnants of the old Germanic fable of 'Klaas Vakie'. This character induces sleep, and by implication dreams, by sprinkling sand into the eyes of boys and girls who are wakeful. Already in this local tale deviations (perhaps variations, since no original template exists) may be observed. This is the inevitable result of countless retellings through the ages and the tale migrating across the cultures of the world. The story, however, was not only contained in the great oral tradition of folktales; it has also made its way onto paper through the pens of famous writers. Hans Christian Andersen recounted the story of the Sandman and the different dreams he bestowed on a young boy in a rather obscure folktale entitled *Ole-Luk-Oie*. E.T.A. Hoffman wrote an inverse depiction of the normally benevolent character in a story called *Der Sandmann* (1991), which showed how sinister or evil such a character could be made. He did indeed sprinkle sand in the eyes of children, but not for the purpose of inducing sleep or dreams. The sand he put in their eyes made their eyes fall out, which he then collected and took to feed his children in their iron nest on the moon. Countless versions, some closer to the supposed original than others, exist in the written and oral folklore of the world's cultures, the simple connection I want to establish here is that the Sandman as character (and tale) has close connections to concepts like 'sleep', 'dream', 'myth', 'mystery' and several other, relating to the psychological and shapeless entities of the mind in its many states.

2.2.3 The Sandman of DC's Golden Age: 1939 – 1944

The multimillionaire, Wesley Dodds, would be the first character in the DC universe (a fictional realm made up of the individual settings from all the different titles of the publisher, DC Comics) to carry the alias the Sandman. He was first encountered in *New World's Fair Comics* #1 July 1939 and also simultaneously in *Adventure Comics* #40 July 1939 (Sacks 1997:1). Wearing a green business suit, a

fedora hat and a gasmask, Dodds would be one of the first costumed characters to emerge from DC Comics after the success of Superman. Carrying only a gas gun (a device he invented to force those exposed to its gas to reveal the truth) and a business suit (considered plain street clothes for that era), the Sandman faced and defeated mostly ordinary (that is, non-paranormal) perpetrators, in the form of extremely cruel and sadistic criminals.

The origin of the Wesley Dodds Sandman character was never revealed during its run in the Golden Age. The Sandman's motivation for being a crime fighter was also left a mystery. It was only when the Golden Age Sandman was resurrected in the pages of the 1990s series, *The Sandman Mystery Theatre*, that it was revealed that Wesley Dodds was haunted by the dreams of crimes that would not allow him to rest until the criminals were brought to justice (Sacks 1997:1). Interestingly, this 'paranormal' aspect was not even hinted at during the Golden Age, when readers simply assumed that he was a bored millionaire who took it upon himself to fight crime because he had nothing better to do. The fact that Wesley Dodds fought 'real' criminals, with conventional earthly means and a sober human agenda, makes a clear statement on society during that particular period of history. As stated previously T. Conote, in his article 'The Sandman' (1999:2), claimed that the 1920s and 1940s saw the American public faced with two world wars, exposing a society with very 'real' problems brought on by very 'real' villains and a need for a 'real' hero. The supposed metaphysical aspect of the character, and the notion that he contained part of the essence of the Lord of Dreams (Neil Gaiman's Sandman), is therefore in no way part of the Golden Age Sandman. Neil Gaiman's Sandman was created nearly 50 years after the original, in an age when humanity has shown a revived interest in the esoteric and the mystical. It is therefore clear that the reincarnated Golden Age Sandman should include a mythic/paranormal element as the title would not survive by identifying itself as parading as a 'pure' crime fiction action strip. The Golden Age Sandman and the modern version, to clarify and authenticate the Golden Age Sandman who is wholly unfamiliar to a modern audience.

Returning to the question of origin within the Golden Age context, it was established that Wesley Dodds was independently wealthy and also a chemist of sorts, having developed a gas gun to incapacitate criminals and force them to tell the truth (his mask serves a dual purpose – to protect himself from the gas and conceal his identity). After defeating a criminal, the Sandman would leave a calling card – a bit of poetry – to show that it was his handiwork. In his quest against crime he was

assisted by his equally capable girlfriend, Dian Belmont, who was the only one privy to his secret identity (Canote 1999:2).

The Sandman was one of the very first superheroes to feature in the comic book medium, with only Superman, the Crimson Avenger and Batman being older. Perhaps for this reason, writer Gardener Fox and artist Bert Christman drew heavily on the pulp magazines (similar to photo journals in which the story is told through a series of pictures featuring posed models) of the day for inspiration. The Sandman possessed only his keen detective skills, his gas gun (a rather simplistic contraption by today's standards), and his enigmatic demeanour (gas mask, chilling vocalisms and poetic messages) with which to battle crime. In this way, he closely resembles the original heroes of popular/fantasy fiction (those to be found in the pulp magazines of the 1930s) namely the Shadow and the Spider. The first script, for instance, did indeed call for the character to be dressed completely in black attire (just like the pulp heroes of the day). Despite the supposed popularity and popular demand of these masked heroes in black, in his first appearance, and in every one thereafter, The Sandman was presented as wearing a green suit and purple cloak.

Ultimately, however, the roots of The Sandman (by implication, also The Shadow and The Spider) can be traced back to Frank L. Packard's *The Adventures of Jimmy Dale* (1914 – 1915), in which a respected hero masquerades as a gentleman thief, 'The Grey Seal', in order to foil the plans of criminals. Like the heroes to come, Dale even sported his own hideout called 'The Sanctuary', which would later provide the blueprint for Batman's cave and The Sandman's secret laboratory. Throughout the series Dale, would adopt other dark guises and identities and even battle villains who had false identities, of their own. Together with other classic heroes like The Scarlet Pimpernel and Zorro, The Grey Seal can be considered the ancestor of all pulp heroes and superheroes to come.

In his article 'The Sandman', Canote (1999:3) contends that The Sandman was briefly popular when the medium of comics/graphic serials was new, appearing as a charter member of the Justice Society of America (commonly abbreviated to JSA) in 1940 and featuring in the following 29 issues of Adventure Comics (the previous trademark of DC comics). As new and more brightly costumed characters continued to appear, The Sandman started to look like an outdated relic of bygone years which inevitably led to the loss of its fan base. It was then decided that the character should be

revamped in an effort to modernise the title by providing The Sandman with more conventional superhero attire. He was now given a tight-fitting purple and yellow costume (to accentuate a more muscular and masculine appeal previously absent in the character), and his gas gun was replaced by a weapon called a 'wirepoon' (a gun that shot a spike with a length of rope attached to it, by which he could climb buildings). It was also thought wise, following the convention of the day, to provide The Sandman with an adolescent male sidekick called Sandy Hawkins (a.k.a. Sandy the Golden Boy). The change in the Sandman's appearance, coupled to changes in the story's content; resulted in the mysteries of the dark detective making way for action-packed (notably less intellectual and more visceral) adventures. The Sandman no longer appropriated his keen detective capabilities and a mystic demeanour; he was now a bold action brute. The new, though doubtfully improved, Sandman made his debut in *Adventure Comics #69* December 1941.

From March 1942 (*Action Comics* #72), the title was taken over by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby in an effort to sharpen the focus on raw action and expand the title by adding a distinguishable edge. Despite their efforts, however, their investment in the title proved fruitless as it became increasingly less popular. With a paper shortage during World War II, lasting from 1943 to 1944, the Justice Society of America had to drop two members from its line-up – Dr Fate and the Sandman. His last appearance during the Golden Age was to be in Star Comics #21 1944, although he still made some on-off appearances in Adventure Comics until issue 122 (March 1946). *The Sandman* was then dropped altogether to make way for more action-packed titles like *Green Arrow*, *Aquaman* and *Superboy*.

Despite the fact that Wesley Dodds spent a lot more time in his yellow and purple costume during the Golden Age than in his green business suit, since the Silver Age of DC it has been the pulp-style Sandman that has been able to continually grab the attention of both the readers and the comic book industry. When The Sandman made a surprise appearance in the Justice League of America/ Justice Society of America crossover in JLA #44 (August 1966), he once more wore his gas mask, business suit and cloak. Since then, every modern appearance of Wesley Dodds has been portrayed as he was originally envisioned. The fascination with the original Sandman holds, and the mystery and romance of the 1930s has proportionately increased for readers over the last 50 years. DC's adult reader imprint, Vertigo, decided to resurrect the Golden Age Sandman under the title *Sandman Mystery Theatre*, which debuted in April 1993. In 1995 Wesley Dodds was inevitably connected to Neil

Gaiman's Sandman during a crossover issue entitled *Sandman Midnight Theatre* wherein the two wildly removed characters finally came face to face.

One of the main points of Neil Gaiman's series was that Morpheus, Dream of the Endless, had been imprisoned for 70 years by Roderick Burgess (a supposed follower of famed occultist, Aleister Crowley), who actually attempted to imprison Dream's sister, Death. In his absence from his realm for the period of his detention, the worst tragedies of the 20th century occurred. World War I, World War II and the Holocaust, as well as Vietnam, all took place because dreams were out of control due to the loss of their ruler. One other side-effect was that some of the dream material from the Sandman's domain escaped and made its way into the minds of certain individuals who were sensitive to it. Among those was the Golden Age Sandman, millionaire Wesley Dodds. With this latter addition to the tale, a correlation and connection is struck between the old and the new.

2.2.4 Silver Age Sandman: 1974 – 1983

The silver age of DC comics gave rise to another Sandman, a unique character for an audience that had erased all traces of the Golden Age Sandman from their collective memories. He was a pure-bred superhero, of the now well-established DC universe, who lived in the 'dream dimension' and protected children from their nightmares, as well as malevolent influences from the waking world. This Sandman was created with a much younger audience in mind, with Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, once again at its creative helm. The Sandman made his first appearance on the pages of *The Sandman* #1 (1974).

The Sandman was initially intended to draw more closely from the actual Sandman of folklore and popular mythology so as to avoid any connections to the Wesley Dodds Sandman (Darius 2004:2). The Silver Age Sandman was, despite his superhero guise and action-packed adventures, said to be 'eternal and immortal'. The Sandman was assisted by two creatures (personified nightmares) named Brut and Glob, who are depicted as being minor pests whose actions hold little consequence for anybody. By using a magic whistle, the Sandman can enter the waking world, and by sprinkling dream dust from his pouch, he can induce sleep or a dream-state in anyone who crosses his path. The Sandman is preoccupied with evil monsters and protecting children within their dreams, particularly one boy named Jed Walker.

This version of the Sandman proved very unpopular, despite its formalic approach, and only appeared for a few issues, after which the title and its characters lay dormant for years. Silver Age Sandman would only see the light of day again in *Wonder Woman* #300 (1983), where it was to be revealed that The Sandman is actually Dr Garrett Sanford, a UCLA professor of psychology who became trapped in the 'Dream Dimension' while saving the life of a US president (terrified by a monster while being in a coma). In the same year, the Sandman also became the honorary member of the Justice League of America in *JLA annual* #3. In another title a few years later (*Infinity Inc.* 1987), it is revealed that Professor Sanford has gone mad/committed suicide and that the superhero Hector Hall (formerly known as the Silver Scarab) has now taken his place as The Sandman. In the 1990s, in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, it was further revealed that the Dream Dimension is, in fact, an imaginary universe inside the head of Jed Walker, created by two escaped creatures from the realm of Dream (Brut and Glob – assistants to the Silver Age Sandman). It turned out that Hector Hall had died some years before and his incarnation as The Sandman was merely a shell, which disintegrated when Dream of the Endless defeated the two creatures. Hector Hall's son, Daniel, would eventually become the new Lord of Dream when Morpheus died; that is becomes human at the end of his inversed hero's journey.

2.2.5 Modern Age Sandman: 1988 – 1996

In his article, 'Neil Gaiman's The Sandman' (2004:1-3), Julian Darius claimed that the growing 'mature' readership of titles like *The Sandman* and *The Swamp Thing*, titles aimed at readers in their late twenties to late thirties, led to the launch of the DC Vertigo imprint in January 1993. This imprint would publish titles exclusively for an older readership who were no longer   amused by one-dimensional superheroes, but preferred a more intellectual approach to their comics (which where now referred to by this elite audience as 'graphic novels'). Neil Gaiman was recruited by DC Comics, in the wake of Alan Moore's success with *The Swamp Thing* (DC's first adult title), in an attempt to bring more British writers and their sensible intellectual approach to the canon of superhero filled American comics. Gaiman was given the already existing Sandman title of the Silver Age, but decided to create a completely new mythology instead of simply updating the old character. On DC's request, Gaiman was to validate or simply acknowledge previous incarnations of the character, which he duly did in the early episodes (if only for the purpose of authenticating and establishing this

version and distancing others). Thereafter his title slowly severed ties with the DC universe. By 1990, Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* ceased to acknowledge previously associated titles within the canon of DC comics and established itself as a completely new re-imagining and in no way whatsoever a development on earlier 'sandmen'. The modern *Sandman* story would rather find its roots in the myths of the ancient world, most notably in the Sandman of folklore and the ancient Oneiros and Morpheus. The only remnants of the previous DC characters can be found in the gas mask-like head gear and the pouch with 'magic' sand that make up part of the Sandman's garb.

Known by many names such as Morpheus, Oneiros and other; this Sandman was fashioned to be the anthropomorphic personification of Dream and Story. The Sandman is a member of a family of beings, each believed to be the personification of a different aspect of humanity. He is usually presented as a tall, thin, pale-skinned man with black hair, who was noted to closely resemble three prominent rock music icons from the 1980s: Robert Smith (lead singer of The Cure), Peter Murphy (Bauhaus) and David Bowie. When interacting with humans, however, he takes on a guise appropriate to the period and cultural milieu. For instance, in the issue 'Tales in the Sand', he interacts with the ancestors of an African tribe and takes the form of a black man named Kai'ckul. He has also been depicted as a cat ('Dream of a thousand cats'), and whenever he meets with the Egyptian feline goddess, Bast, he takes the shape of a creature that is part cat, part human. In the story 'Men of good fortune', Morpheus is seen at different times over the last 100 years in a variety of authentic period costumes. They seem a bit more conventional than the wardrobe of the modern Morpheus, but still exude a distinct air of eccentricity. He typically dresses in solid black, except when wearing formal period costumes, which also incorporate shades of blue and purple, and sometimes a flame motif on his cape. He also has a helmet with an attached gas mask (one of the very few nods to the Golden Age Sandman), which he only wears on important occasions (the helmet is also his sigil). Morpheus resides in a palace at the heart of the Dreaming. The palace, the landscape and even the weather constantly change shape, colour and mood to complement his current disposition. It is also perhaps worth mentioning here that Morpheus is the only member of the Endless who populates his realm – many characters like Eve, Cain, Abel and Matthew live there. He also assigned servants and workers to perform roles concerning the upkeep of the realm; roles which he himself can effortlessly perform by will alone. This possibly points to the inherent loneliness in the character; a flaw that will eventually cause his proverbial 'fall from grace'.

Morpheus, as character, conforms to a degree with the idea of the noble, tragic hero, very much in the traditional style of Greek and Roman tragedy. He is sometimes a little slow and reluctant, unfamiliar with humour, occasionally insensitive or absent-minded, and often self-obsessed. The Dreaming's resident landscaper, Mervyn Pumpkinhead, once remarked when one of Morpheus' invariably disastrous romances ended: 'He's gotta be the tragic figure standing out in the rain, mourning the loss of his beloved. So down comes the rain, right on cue. In the meantime everybody gets dreams full of existential angst and wakes up feeling like hell. And we all get wet.' (*The Sandman*#42:5) On the other hand, Morpheus takes his responsibilities very seriously, those concerning his realm as well as those concerning others. In this respect he is both dependable and fair-minded. He shares a very close reciprocal bond of dependence and trust with his older sister, Death. Morpheus finds himself constantly striving towards an understanding of himself, human nature and the actions and lives of the beings around him. At the conclusion of the tale he is ultimately defeated by his most tragic flaw, his inability to willingly change himself and to become aware and accept the change that inevitably and unconsciously occurs in him. Lucien, the Dreaming's librarian, remarks in the final story of *The Sandman*, when asked by Matthew, the Raven, 'Why did it happen?' (referring to the death of Morpheus), 'I think sometimes, perhaps, one must change or die. And in the end, there were perhaps limits to how much he could let himself change'(*The Sandman* #71:59).

2.3   *Hellblazer, Swamp Thing* and *The Sandman* – The unique voice of Vertigo

According to Banks & Wein (1998:3) DC had to separate the body corporate from a 'malignant' growth that, through its very presence, threatened to tarnish the wholesome visage that secured its meal ticket. As previously mentioned, the 1980s and the dawn of the modern age of comics initiated a darker (though notably short-lived) approach to writing in this medium. Even though much speculation surrounds the cause of this 'accidental' and wholly unforeseen trend, some critics believe that it was an inevitable reaction towards an industry overflowing with unrealistic, one-dimensional (not to mention masculine, heterosexual and morally inclined) heroes that did not appeal to a growing and diversifying audience. The Dark Age of comic books, however, quickly became too 'dark' as it was wholly dependent on shock value, and writers were soon forced to make use of

previously taboo subjects like occultism, explicit and alternative sexuality, and pagan mythology. Where the medium was initially believed to show evidence of evolution through its pursuit of alternative (notably more intellectual) channels, it quickly turned into a simple display of 'bad taste'. The blame for this may be laid at the door of the conventional superhero writer who could not produce the intellectual and literary context in which these darker themes may have been justified and validated. While continuing to test the boundaries of the American Comic Code, DC made the controversial, yet strategic, decision to create a separate label to house this trend (now reduced to a marginal genre with a solid fan base) that contained 'utterances' that no longer had a place within the 'discourse' of the DC canon. With this stratagem, DC regained its mainstream (politically correct) readership, but also acquired a new, mature (a.k.a liberal) audience who would keep already existing titles like *The Sandman* from either being cancelled or suffering creative restriction in an attempt to make them conform to the main DC canon. With the epitaph 'For mature readers', Vertigo no longer needed to heed the comics code in plea for its validation, but rather single-handedly ushered in the newest metamorphosis of the comic book, namely the 'graphic novel'.

2.4   Traditional infused with the popular: Vertigo and mythology

Dundes (1965:136-142) stated that until recently academic circles have failed to take note of the substantial influence that traditional mythology and general folklore have on the medium of comic books. P.G. Brewster, in his article, 'Folklore invades the comic strip' (1950:97-102), contended that whether the artist drawing a comic strip has done research on folklore or whether he is simply adopting and adapting material from folklore that has been in circulation for generations and may still be used now, are not questions we need to be concerned with. For the purpose of this work of research, however, these are exactly the questions we do have to concern ourselves with. Identifying the degree to which comic book creators, writers and artists consciously employ traditional mythological research is crucial for our understanding of comic books as a contemporary literary genre. More importantly, we need to determine what the frequent use of certain mythological motifs in this modern genre reveals about its readership and the society in which it was created.

Let us now, for example, consider the three flagship titles of Vertigo, which were not only instrumental in the establishment of this publishing house, but also a unique sub-genre in this

medium. Banks & Wein (1998:2) claimed that an analysis of these titles – *Swamp Thing, The Sandman, Hellblazer* – establishes their heavy dependence on mythology and folklore in the main narratives, characterisation, style, reference of artwork, dialogue and narration. Vertigo writers do not simply find themselves influenced by these sources or making use of certain stock elements in their story telling; they often use these themes and motifs from folklore and myth without altering them in any way. In most cases, not even the context or setting is changed; the 'new' myth is simply added into unclear areas of the existing myth. An example of this may be found in *Sandman Special* #1, which 'retells' the story of Orpheus as it is popularly known, the only difference being the inclusion of the Sandman character as the father of Orpheus. By conducting an analysis into the use of traditional and contemporary mythic elements employed by writers of these comic book serials, it is possible to establish not only the extent to which these elements are used, but also the degree of universal appeal these themes and motifs hold for a modern audience.

The use of a vast shared resource - traditional mythology - by Vertigo titles provides an arena where readers and writers can interact (Banks & Wein 1998:3). Here they can experience a sense of belonging through their shared beliefs and history, thereby creating a 'Vertigo community'. Being indoctrinated and familiar with this community and its lifestyle creates a strong feeling of membership in a specific cultural reference group, a sense of sharing in exclusive esoteric knowledge and being empowered as participants in a continuously adapting and moving history. The writers of these titles together make up the Vertigo Literature Community. They react and interweave their narratives with those of other Vertigo writers, expecting their readers to show great commitment to the canon. This commitment allows them to follow the story patterns as they form part of the larger Vertigo realm and narrative structures. Comic book writers in general, but in particular Vertigo writers, base their work on the assumption that their readers have intimate knowledge of the title (its history and place within the larger comic book context) and its latest developments.

The most substantial incorporation and inclusion of traditional motifs is to be seen in the presence and use of various mythic elements with related beliefs, themes and characterisation. The continuous use and re-use of these motifs, often with a heroic and supernatural overtone, adds a sense of mysticism, enigma and otherworldliness to a medium that has often fallen victim to mundane one-dimensionality. In *Swamp Thing, The Sandman* and *Hellblazer* mythology and traditional beliefs are essential to the development and continuation of the narrative, and form the foundation of the

presentation and development of character. All three series initially belonged to the main DC canon, but soon became the motivation for the creation of the Vertigo line due to their similar and deviatory (with reference to the Comics Code) content, as well as their shared appeal to a 'mature audience'. The protagonist in each of these serials is characteristically introspective and wholly concerned with reflection on his past transgressions and the exploration of his identity. It is believed that this 'superhero' character anomaly found its origins in a specific incarnation of the Batman character featured in the series *The Dark Knight Returns* (circa 1980). He was portrayed as a man consumed by internal conflict, as opposed to the external material conflict of his superhero peers. Pamela Robin Brandt suggested in her article, *Infiltrating the Comics* (1991:90-92), that this form of characterisation has, while defining Vertigo, also become fairly commonplace in some mainstream titles. She also suggested that this may indicate that society in general is entering an era of self-inspection in which individuals question their own identities and roles within their communities.

Unlike the flat formula comics of the past 50 years, Vertigo has a lot to offer the inquisitive reader. While early television cartoons like *Looney Toons*, and their subsequent comic book counterparts offered an admittedly rudimentary knowledge of high art (opera, classical music, etc.) to their fans, the Vertigo reader is exposed to apparently unlimited content from the world of high culture and art which was previously the exclusive privilege of academic scholars. According to Banks & Wein (1998:4) the Vertigo readership is continually bombarded with archetypes from classical literature - and not only the common ones like angels, demons and faeries, but also those from lesser-known mythology. Among these one might encounter the triumvirate of hell (mentioned in the Kaballah and appearing in all three serials) and the demon Nergal (an obscure Sumerian netherworld deity). In *Swamp Thing,* two of the triumvirate of hell are referred to by name, Azazel and Beelzebub. 'Beelzebub' is a commonly used substitute for the 'devil', but Azazel, is only mentioned in the apocryphal books of the Hebrew bible as an angel fallen from grace and is indeed a unique reference. Equally strange is the inclusion of Lilith, the first wife of Adam as referred to in the apocryphal texts, in the *Sandman* series. Lilith is mentioned only once in the Kabbalah (Isaiah 34:14), and is only developed in the Apocrypha (additional/alternative texts) of the Kaballah and in the Aggadah (additional commentary on the Kaballah). It can therefore be deduced that the interactive creative process employed in the creation of a Vertigo title does not solely rest on the pillars of common cultural/folklore/mythic content, but on the personal research and study into relatively uncharted territories the individual author.

In Darius (2004:1) it is stated that even though the 1980s Batman is often credited as being a 'blueprint' for the principal characters in *Hellblazer, The Sandman* and *Swamp Thing* (also every other subsequent male lead in any of the Vertigo titles), the latter characters depart from their 'origin' by being given unearthly powers, whereas Batman had no powers apart from his heightened human abilities. The three protagonists of these three series are:

- Alec Holland (*Swamp Thing*) – He is the manifestation and personification of the vegetation element on the planet. He is a plant and can take the form of any organic matter.

- Dream, Morpheus, Lord Shaper (*The Sandman*) – He is the manifestation and personification of 'dream' and can also take the shape of any object or living creature imaginable.

- John Constantine (*Hellblazer*) – Even though he may appear to be a normal mortal, he is also a talented exorcist and magician who effortlessly moves through time and space with enough powers to outwit all the lords of hell.

On the surface, these characters may appear to be dynamic and novel but also one-dimensional and bearing the occasional reference to popular folklore. Underneath the commercial façade, however, they embody through their characterisation, plot development and storylines, a modified version of older archetypes. In addition to this, they also represent the advent of certain stock elements and an understanding of the collective unconsciousness of the social collective.

Nineteenth-century research on archetypes and the psychic unity explored and advocated polygenesis. These research theories claimed that only 'spontaneous creation' could explain the surfacing of similar tales and characterisation in widely removed cultures, where lines of transmission could not be traced. Carl Jung expanded on this theory, claiming that archetypes were not interdependent, but rather functioned independently from human consciousness and were, in fact, products of the collective unconscious. In the book*, Psyche and Symbol: A selection from the writings of C.G. Jung* (1957:15), Jung wrote, 'Mind is not born as a *tabula rasa*. Like the body, it has its pre-established individual definiteness; namely, forms of behaviour. They become manifest in the very recurring patterns of the psychic functioning (archetypes). The archetypes are by no means useless

archaic survivals or relics. They are living entities, which cause the pre-formation, numinous ideas or dormant representations.'

The study of these archetypes and the use of cross-cultural comparisons are often frowned upon and are considered greatly unworkable in academic circles. Despite this, works on these subjects (like those of J.G. Frazer, Andrew Graves, Andrew Lang and Carl Jung) have proven very popular among the writers and readers of Vertigo. Nevertheless, Neil Gaiman claims not to draw directly on established mythic archetypes and said in an interview ('Interview with the Sandmen', 1990:1) that 'there's a level on which you shouldn't be trying to do this stuff too consciously. There's a level on which you should know how it feels, on which you go by a gut feeling, and you know that you succeeded when the story feels inevitable.' The notion he is trying to propagate is that the story should not be forced or conscious in its pursuit of archetypal patterns, as the story would spontaneously or 'accidentally' follow the patterns anyway. This argument matches up with that of Jung and the development of characters from our historical unconscious.

An understanding and application of archetypes is clearly evident throughout the Vertigo canon, especially in *Hellblazer* by Jamie Delano. As illustration Banks & Wein (1998:5) quote a section of dialogue where John Constantine addresses a group of fellow magicians; 'The way I see it, the God that we're dealing with is an archetype of human consciousness. It's a response to an emotional stimulus - a race memory of a time when our brains worked differently, a time when gods were real, because we lived more in the creative right side of our brains than in the 'rational' universe of the left'. From this excerpt it is clear that *Hellblazer*, and Vertigo as a whole, are widely removed from the 'save the universe' mentality, with which comic books and their creators were traditionally associated.

It is, however, not important whether the creators of comic books and their respective audiences believe in the collective unconscious on a personal or even superficial level. What is important is that the writers make use of these elements in their stories, developing the enigmatic nature and mystical atmosphere of such an interpretation of 'psychic unity', and that the readers extract these elements from the texts they 'absorb'. The presentation of the character of Swamp Thing as the 'Green Man' of folklore (also Yeti, Big Foot etc.), the constant reference made to the 'trickster' in *Hellblazer* (along with another Neil Gaiman/Vertigo title, *Books Of Magic*), Dream's Hero Journey and the prominent

role of Hecatae in *The Sandman* clearly illustrate this point. While it is not clear if readers consciously comprehend these representations of characters and events as archetypal, they do, however, understand them at an unconscious level. Readers tend to expect certain events, actions and reactions from their archetypal heroes as is evident in the readers' written responses published in the comics on a monthly basis. The fact that fans are able to 'predict' or even suggest the occurrence of 'valid' events and narrative developments, suggests that the Vertigo comics canon creates characters that appeal to the collective unconscious of its readers by presenting storylines intertwined with references to universal concepts.

2.5 The Sandman and Visual Representation
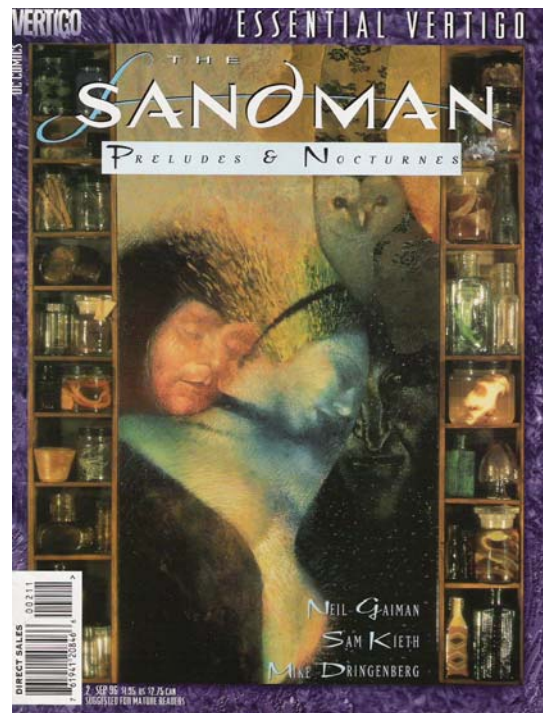
Fig.2.1 – Dave McKean's Mult-media cover art (The Sandman #2)

According to Hy Bender (1999), *The Sandman* series, created by British writer Neil Gaiman and illustrated by numerous artists with varied approaches, instantaneously finds itself isolated in the mash of mainstream American comic titles. Even though the use of many artists and visual mediums have been appropriated throughout the series, it has maintained a distinctive visual 'feel' attributable

to the recognisable depiction of characters, the unorthodox approaches to panelling (page layout) and the utilisation of 'multimedia' artwork.

The Sandman collaborators served to establish a series containing elements of visual and narrative representations previously confined to various mediums in the realms of high art. Visual effects encountered in this title boast techniques of representation exclusively appropriated in higher forms of art, such as finished pencilling, varied brush techniques, photography, *avant garde* multimedia (for instance, a mixture of layering techniques, photography and painting combined in one illustration), and literary narratives in Gaiman's distinctly high brow prose.

As Dream (the character and the act of dreaming) and his actions constitute the primary focal point of the series, it would be considered logical that the narrative would challenge and subvert the conventions of chronology and panelling (framing of illustrations and indication of plot movement).

Fig.2.2 – Dream

(www.sandman.tv/commision/McKean1.html)

The total *Sandman* experience, from the cover art to the illustrations and dialogue lettering, aims to mirror or mimic the effects of dreaming with all its illogical and confusing wonder. This follows the

general convention that in dreams time is fluid and notions like existence, truth and reality are both subjective as well as relative. Due to this rootedness in the dream world, the title is only marginally concerned with linear and chronological progression and the continuity of images and narrative strands. Consideration of the images as individual works of art enjoys primary emphasis (due to conventions in high art), with slightly less emphasis being placed on the image as part of a narrative system. It is this fact that drew not only many a literary critic, but also managed to draw and maintain the attention of many fine art critics who found the various art techniques utilised in the series worth noting. Comic book illustrations suddenly became the stock of museum exhibitions and seemed to re-awaken an interest in the ever waning world of fine art by presenting these previously exclusive techniques to a wide middle-class, culturally lacking audience. This 'renaissance' was led by *The Sandman* at the helm and other prominent DC Vertigo titles closely following suit. One of the most consistent contributors to *The Sandman* series, Dave McKean, a cover artist, literally invented a new multimedia technique which was dubbed 'found-object composition' especially for use in *The Sandman.* This technique is prominently displayed on the covers of 90% of the entire series and was later applied to an entire Sandman spin-off series called *The Dreaming*. McKean's mixed-media work basically consists of photographs of found objects (discarded objects sourced by the artist) merged with oil-on-canvas artwork (Fig.2.1).

Fig.2.3 – More Dave McKean covers
(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.1-10)

These incredibly detailed and complex works of cover art support the particular book's content and theme rather than supplying a summary or context for the tale to follow, as is traditionally the case in comic book covers. These haunting and often unsettling covers successfully illuminated the narrative, in ways that no conventionally drawn image could, by setting a mood and arresting the reader's attention for longer than the time it takes to turn the first page.

2.5   Laura Mulvey and Reading the Visual Language of *The Sandman*

2.5.1   Introduction

Continuing the contextualising of *The Sandman* takes us now to the reading of the visual aspects of *The Sandman* according to psychoanalytic principles that have previously been applied to other visual mediums, like cinema, which makes use of presentational devices, that are also utilised by the graphic novel.

Until now, psychoanalytical principles were only extended past their original context in the psychological treatment scenario to include an application in the analysis of literature and cinema. The application of psychoanalysis to cinema is attributed to Laura Mulvey and her two seminal essays on the subject, 'Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema' (1977) and 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1982). These two texts, and the Freudian/Lacanian position they hold, contributed a strong theoretical foundation for the application of psychoanalysis to film. One of the major theoretical insights contributed by Mulvey was that the cinema-goer derives two different types of pleasure from his/her movie experience. The first type of pleasure identified by Mulvey is that of scopophilic voyeurism, which refers to the function of sexual instinct and how the male viewer interacts with the female subject on the screen. The second type of pleasure identified by Mulvey is that of scopophilic narcissism, which is a function of the ego libido. This form of pleasure is rooted in the identification of the male viewer with the male subject on the screen.

Initially, Mulvey believed that her theory was only applicable to film due to the apparatus of cinema, but after revisiting and revising her initial theory in 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1982), she found it possible to expand her theory to include most popular forms of narration (film, oral/cultural folklore, mythology, etc.). The cinematic apparatus that initially limited

the applicability of Mulvey's theory generally refers to the special arrangements of the constituting elements of the cinematic theatre (position of the screen, the darkness, the arrangement of the sets, etc.). As the viewer sits in the dark, a sense of solitude sets in and as he gazes at the screen with the projector far behind, the narrative unravelling on the screen becomes significant. The screen not only displays people who are apparently 'unaware' of the voyeuristic spectator, but also, as Dave Mockaitis (2005:2) 'the physical projection of the image mirrors the psychological process of projecting repressed desires onto actors within the diegesis'. The term *diegesis*, according to Plato, refers to an act of narration in which the author (propagator of the speech act) does not make an attempt to conceal the fact that it is he himself that is committing the speech act. In film theory, it refers to the fact that the viewer is subconsciously (at times also consciously) aware of the falsity of what he/she views on the screen; that is, the film is viewed as a direct purposeful presentation. In 'Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Mulvey places less emphasis on the diegesis (the physical and intentional displaying of the film) and aims to expand her argument to interrogate the structure of the film's narrative itself. Initially basing her theory on a close reading of Freud's *Theory of Femininity* and Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, she moved her theoretical reading closer to Freud's metaphoric opposition of the active/passive. This shift allowed for women to not always be dominated in cinema, as it was now possible for them to also relate to the male protagonist and resist the conventionally fetishized representation of the female.

With this reapplication and reformation of her theory, Mulvey opened up a wider field for the application of psychoanalytic film theory. Mulvey's contribution to psychoanalysis in film, and her adaptation of fundamental Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, is to be found in her attendance to notions like visual media and the processes of identification and fetishisation. Her revision in 'Afterthoughts …', therefore opened up the application of her theory for the analysis of comic books, which share many of its conventions with the cinematic medium. The most noticeable parallels between these two seemingly removed mediums relate to the shared processes of framing and identification, or scopophilic narcissism. The workings of cinematic framing can, however, only partially be applied to the psychoanalysis of other visual social texts due to the diegesis of the film medium.

2.5.2   Scopophilic Narcissism in *The Sandman*

The Sandman and other prominent Vertigo titles of the time were the forerunners of the graphic novel – a trade paperback publication combining an entire story arc (usually eight comics) in a single volume. This rid the narrative of its abrupt interruptions imposed by the individual comic's 20-page constraint and allowed the story to unfold slower and more fluidly. This according to Mockaitis (2005:2) imbues 'the characters with more depth than traditional comics and gives the writers and artists the ability to create vast, sprawling worlds.' The graphic novel also made it easier to draw comparisons between the comic medium, and the cinematic medium, as it contained complete (or at least partially more complete) narrations, as opposed to the fragmented story lines characteristic of individual comic publications.

The first trade paperback collection, comprising the first eight issues of *The Sandman*, is titled *The Sandman: Preludes and Nocturnes*. This collection initiates the narrative and introduces the reader to the main protagonist of the series, Morpheus (a.k.a. Dream of The Endless). A close reading of the first issue, with Laura Mulvey's theory in mind, reveals many instances of scopophilic narcissism. In the case of the comic medium, this type of pleasure comes from the reader identifying with the idealised image of the character on the page. As Mockaitis stated: 'This form of narcissism is closely related to the Freudian pre-Oedipal phase or the Lacanian Imaginary, a state that precedes the formation of one's subjectivity and is understood as a time of fullness and completeness, what Derrida terms the metaphysics of presence' (2005:2). Mulvey perceived this to be a function of the ego libido and related this mode of viewing with how the male viewer sees the protagonist on the screen, or in our case, vividly illustrated on the pages of a graphic novel. Not viewing the male protagonist as a threat, competition or an object of sexual desire, the male reader or viewer sees him as an idealised version of himself – an embodiment of all his perceived and desired physical or mental or spiritual attributes. In this respect the Sandman is a truly unique character for a Mulvey-type analysis due to his androgyny. He is a world removed from every convention of masculinity and the traditional superhero appearance and behaviour: he is deathly pale, frail looking, frightfully thin and fashionable (at least in some more obscure circles). So why would a male reader choose to associate with such a character? Being completely devoid of any traditional masculine attributes, how has Morpheus (and others like him) become idealised by countless male readers the world over? Perhaps these questions may partly be answered when one considers the period of time (late 1980s to mid- 1990s) in which

The Sandman gained its greatest popularity and the incidence of a prominent sub-culture, fashion trend or music culture, simply referred to as 'Gothic'. As stated earlier, Morpheus as visually represented is believed to be a composite of Robert Smith (*The Cure*), Peter Murphy (*Bauhaus*) and David Bowie. All three of these celebrities reached iconic status during this period and played an important role in the establishment not only of Gothic Rock and the Gothic cultural movement, but most notably in the establishment of Gothic fashion.

Fig.2.4 – The Fathers of Goth – Bowie, Murphy and Smith
(www.guitarpart.fr)

Greatly simplified, the 'Gothic look' can be described as comprising a black hairdo (usually long and unkempt), black clothing (with a preference for leather, lace and PVC), pale skin accentuated with black make-up (for both male and female Goths) and a predilection towards a deathly thin or anorexic body. At a glance, male Goths appear much more feminine in attire and general appearance than their peers. The stark appearance of members of the Gothic movement earned them the title of 'coffin children' and associated them with every societal taboo from Satanism to child abuse. Even though the movement has waned in latter years, at the 'birth' of *The Sandman* it was at its pinnacle and readily embraced by young males who did not find a place among the more masculine, conservative and culturally unversed males of society. The Gothic movement became a haven for those rejected by mainstream society due to their 'alternative' appearance and dark interests. Morpheus became the embodiment of the ideal male Goth and was assured mass popularity among those who overtly or secretly associated themselves with this movement. Morpheus, as an effeminate character, also drew the support of female readers who did not have to shift, as Mulvey stated, 'restlessly in borrowed transvestite clothes', as Morpheus' brand of masculinity is not threatening or strongly idealised (Mulvey 1978:1). There are no simple reasons why the Gothic movement and the

often androgynous appearance of its male followers became so popular during this period. The movement seems to be a reaction and a subversion of the rigid traditional views on masculinity, similar to the way the Hippy movement of the 1960s was a reaction to societal conventions at the time. It is not important for our discussion to know how these sub-cultures originate, however, only to realise that it had a significant impact on the reception of a character like Morpheus, who is the embodiment of the 'anti-masculine hero'. Even though Neil Gaiman never openly aligned himself with the Gothic movement, its influence in *The Sandman* as a series cannot be denied as characteristic and stylistic elements of Gothic art and fashion prominently appear throughout the series.

Fig. 2.5 – The distinctive Gothic influence in The Sandman
(*The Sandman* #69:10)

Mulvey differentiates between two ways in which scophophilia (of the voyeuristic variety) is rendered in cinema, by making a distinction between two dimensional types of representation. The first type of representation is referred to as a 'fetishising shot', which tends to be one-dimensional and reduces a female subject to her constitutive parts. The second type of representation uses shots that have more depth and dimension – this type of representation aids processes of identification. Shots used in the latter mode of representation require more depth due to a need to create a scene which more closely mirrors reality, which in turn creates a stronger capacity for identification among spectators. In 'Sleep of the Just' (*The Sandman* #1), we encounter drawings that are similar to these shots, which increase the chance of the reader identifying with Morpheus. Even though at this stage the reader is still wholly unfamiliar with the character and his milieu, he is instinctively identified as the protagonist (by implication also a 'good guy'), because he is presented with both depth and dimension. In this first issue we only encounter Morpheus on p.7. Up until that point, the story revolves around a rich occultist named Roderick Burgess, who summoned Morpheus in a botched ritual which was intended for his sister, Death. It is striking that once the reader encounters Morpheus on p.7 (Fig.2.6), he realises how two-dimensionally the other characters have been presented up to that point.

This juxtaposition helps establish Morpheus as the lead character and similarly attributes to Roderick Burgess and others who experienced the roles of secondary, and by implication, evil or opposing characters. These characters are flat and one-dimensional in their representation, with little movement and facial detail depicted.

Fig.2.6 – Morpheus makes his entrance

(*The Sandman* #1:7)

The first scene to really make use of dimension and movement is the scene in which Morpheus emerges from his circle of captivity with his cape blowing around him. This dramatically powerful 'shot' is emphasised by the appearance of violent lightning which promotes a sense of movement within the frame. It is also important to notice that this is the first image in the book so far that is not contained within a frame. Adherence to the conventions of framing until the instance of his Morpheus' release, the writer intensifies the notion of freedom, both figuratively and literally. In this scene, we also encounter an interesting complexity in the analysis of the comic medium through film theory in Morpheus' 'flowing' cape (Fig.2.6). Since, due to the nature of the medium, images in comic books are restricted to static drawings, movement becomes much more difficult to observe than in the moving pictures of its cinematic counterpart. *The Sandman*, however, pushes the limits of the medium to depict movement by including elements of implied movement that heighten the three-dimensionality aspect and hence the reader's chance to identify with Morpheus.

There are also other ways in which *The Sandman's* illustrators managed to create the illusion of three-dimensionality. After Burgess realised that he summoned the wrong entity, he imprisons Morpheus in a glass sphere. These images of Morpheus show him, as well as reflected shadows of the scene outside the sphere. This provides the images with a greater degree of depth. Conversely, scenes shown from Morpheus' point of view, within the sphere, result in a distorted flattening of characters. (Fig.2.7)

Fig.2.7 – Morpheus' point of view.
(*The Sandman* #1:17)

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By the time Morpheus breaks out of his captivity, 'the readers have come to invest more in the Sandman's point of view, and to relate this lack of depth in the other characters to the metaphorical lack of depth within their 'characters' (Mockaitis 2005:3). As Morpheus rises from the glass sphere in a whirl of wind, light and clouds, he tilts his head back in a classic pose of strength – this scene makes use of ample movement and colour that references a three-dimensionality aspect. Scenes of dark or evil triumph, such as the one mentioned here, are common throughout the series, and it is the specifically dark nature of the triumph that makes this process of identification with Morpheus an interesting issue. The typical comic book fan is often imagined as a teenage male experiencing the hormonal and emotional angst of adolescence. Thus, it makes sense that a lot of the Sandman's appeal could be related to this dark triumph. It references a strength that does not necessarily remove one from the situation and symbolises a transformation from angst to power. Whatever the motivation for the global identification of readers with the Sandman, he remains an empowering character. It is this very identification of Morpheus as an empowering character that has resulted in an attempt to understand the filmic processes of scopophilic narcissism within this title.

2.5.3   Framing in *The Sandman*

The biggest difference between the film medium and the comic medium lies in the way the filmic diegesis differs from the panelling of a comic book. The comic book medium allows for so much freedom and experimentation in its representation that it becomes a complex issue to decide whether to consider the individual panel, a complete page or even a two-page spread, as comparable to the diegesis of film. The artistic team of *The Sandman* skilfully works with varied configurations of panels and full-page artwork to create a context in which individual panels take on a greater meaning. Scott McCloud (2005:66) points to the way in which panel shapes control the way in which the comic is read, interpreted and understood. This departure from the linear reading of conventional texts augments the reading experience and is often responsible for shaping the reader's understanding of 'comic time'. To this Mockaitis adds that there are 'dramatic ways in which the borders and framing can connote raptures, not only in time, but in the actual understanding of the narrative' (2005:3). This creative use of framing and panelling is applied throughout the entire series and allows for a more contextual understanding of the title and its primary narrative.

Fig.2.8 – Creative page layout and framing.

(*The Sandman* #1:1)

For instance, the way in which Roderick Burgess' house is used to cover an entire page graphically represents the significance of the events that are taking place within the walls of the house - and incidentally also within the edges of the page – more graphically. On the very first page of *The Sandman* #1, we encounter a brilliant blue sky and the front porch of Roderick's house framing the background of the page (Fig.2.8).

On this page, seven panels depict the arrival of Dr John Hathaway at the house, who has come to deliver the last item needed for the Death-summoning ritual. The continued presence of the house throughout this sequence suggests that the milieu itself will play a significant role. Similarly, a few pages on, the reader encounters the gate of the Burgess house forming the backdrop of this page, which contains four panels featuring individuals from across the world. Their 'confinement' within this frame suggests, that like Morpheus, they are also imprisoned within the house and that the house would have a dramatic influence on their lives. It does, seeing that during Morpheus' imprisonment his realm (The Dreaming) is vastly deteriorating due to his absence – this has a significant effect on the world. The four characters shown on this page have suffered significantly due to their disturbed dream processes, and they are traced by the author throughout the series, emphasising the fact that their lives have indeed been drastically changed by the events that took place in the Burgess house. It is also worth noting here that of these characters and the lives of their families will form the backdrop of many a Sandman tale.

The superimposition of smaller frames over larger frames was briefly mimicked in television and cinema during the 1960s and 1970s (most notable of these was probably the screen adaptation of comic book favourite, *The Incredible Hulk*). This technique has proven too confusing for the viewer and never progressed past some initial experimental stages in television and cinema. In mainstream cinema, we do sometimes encounter scenes that are framed linearly through an establishing shot and followed by a jump cut to another scene. This juxtaposition of shots in film is not as obvious as in its use in the comic medium. The significance of the juxtaposition may elude or confuse the cinema-goer, and he may only come to grips with its meaning once he re-watches the film in its entirety and gains a clearer understanding of the context. Here, the comic book reader often has an advantage because he sees a significant portion of the narrative simultaneously. This is due to the way many juxtapositions and superimpositions can be contained within the same double page spread without disrupting the narrative.

The use of interesting borders points to another instance of creative framing within *The Sandman*. In *The Sandman* #1, many of the pages have been enhanced by the use of intricate, and also meaning-significant, borders (Fig.2.9). These borders resemble ornately carved wood and indicate to the reader that the events taking place within them do not form part of the proposed 'reality' of the current phase of the narrative. Mockaitis (2005:4) noted another instance where borders are used to separate sections of the story during the ritual sequence of *The Sandman* #1: 'The border comes to partition this part of the title narrative off as unique, indeed for the reader's purposes, it is the creation of the Sandman. In addition to separating this part of the comic, it serves to intensify the liminality of these actions.' What is meant by this is that Burgess is walking the fine line between the Dreaming and the waking world by summoning Morpheus. This border recurs when Morpheus addresses Alex Burgess (Roderick's son) over his prolonged and seemingly senseless imprisonment. In this second occurrence of this particular border, it again shows liminality as the Sandman is about to bring about physical change in a mortal's life by punishing Alex with eternal waking.

Fig.2.9 – Meaning-significant borders
(*The Sandman* #1:4)

AT A GLANCE: AN OVERVIEW OF *THE SANDMAN*

3.1   Overview

Fig. 3.1 – The Endless

(www.antonweb.free.fr)

The Sandman's true departure from the formula titles that flood the market is to be found in its intricate and innovative narratives. In an earlier discussion of the various Vertigo titles, it was established that Gaiman infused his storylines with reference to classical literature (most notably Shakespeare), ancient mythology and true historical accounts, while dealing with subject matter including modern social commentary (like the decay and societal wretches of urban living), the education system, alternative forms of sexuality and sexual expression, obscure occultism and the other more conventional social problems such as, murder, abuse and insanity. This notable departure from popular content established the title's target audience firmly among those with at least a

workable knowledge of everything from Greek mythology to the works of great names in literature like Shakespeare and Charles Dickens. Despite all these varied and often contradictory influences, Gaiman remained preoccupied with fantasy in its 'purest' form. This fact is most prominently emphasised in the title's main set of characters, known simply as 'The Endless'.

As mentioned, the lead character in *The Sandman*, Dream, is known by many names: the Sandman, Morpheus, King of Dreams, Kai' ckul, Oneiros and others. Like his counterpart in mythology, the Sandman of world folklore, the narrative is depicted from the points of view of many different individuals (even animals) from within the context of many different and wildly removed cultures – hence the many names. Dream has six family members, which, for lack of a better description, may be referred to as 'siblings'. This parentless family, known as 'The Endless', comprises of: Destiny (the oldest brother and re-imagining of the Father Time or Chronos mythic archetype), Destruction (akin to the idea of Zeus or the God of War in Greek mythology), Death (a sensitive female incarnation of the Grim Reaper), Despair (the anthropomorphic representation of human depression; depicted as a morbidly obese naked woman), Desire (a 'perfect' hermaphrodite and representation of human lust) and Delirium (previously known as Delight, a mentally unstable teenage girl who personifies the shifting societal borders between what is considered 'happiness' and 'madness'). They are by nature, however, indefinable according to popular conventions concerning gods or supernatural beings. Dream and the six other members of his family rule over corresponding aspects of human life (lust, despair, madness, etc.) and, unlike superheroes, do not attempt to save individuals or humanity as a whole, from themselves or external forces. Following their policy of not 'interfering' with humanity through direct intervention, their antics are free of superhero exploits and instead are manifested in the form of subtle persuasion.

Content-wise, *The Sandman* is generally based on fantasy. Generally, it refers to any mode of fictional depiction that is not greatly devoted to realistic presentations and is rather concerned with depicting imagined worlds in which paranormal forces and other impossibilities are commonplace. Neil Gaiman himself also prefers to tread carefully around the circumscription of the term and is infamously vague about it, preferring to not define fantasy as any particular genre or fiction. The general public, however, have some conception of what fantasy is and for them, the word tends to conjure mental images of legendary creatures like dragons, faeries and elves. Even though Gaiman's vocation as a fantasy writer leads us to believe that he has greatly departed from the more traditional

associations of the genre, it does not, on closer inspection, seem to be the case. An example relates to the inclusion of a character named Nuala – an elf. In the collection *Seasons of Mist*, Nuala is presented as a gift to Dream (Fig.3.2) by the rulers of the realm of Faerie, Titania and Auberon. These two characters may be recognised as Shakespearean characters and also feature in Gaiman's adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Dream reluctantly accepted Nuala as his unconventional gift because he soon realised that he could not return her without greatly offending his 'gift givers'. Nuala initially presents herself as a person of nobility but Dream disables her ability to appear as anything she is not while she is within the Dreaming (the realm of the Sandman). He strips away her artifice, revealing her as a significantly less fanciful elf-creature, and insists that she adhere to the 'reality' of his realm.

Fig.3.2 – Dream and Nuala

(*The Sandman* #67:6)

Although the Sandman and his siblings are powerful, if not almighty, beings, this does not prevent them from falling prey to the pitfalls of humanity and its associated vices and emotions such as pride and desire. Dream's 'humanness' becomes overt as he suffers through a number of doomed romantic endeavours with humans (most notably Calliope from Greek myth and also the mother of his only son Orpheus) and strained relations with family members. There is an underlying rift between the younger and older members of the family, with Dream finding himself somewhere in the middle of the two. The only members of the family he has relatively easy 'social' relations with are Death (the second oldest in the family) and Delirium (the youngest). His most volatile relationship is perhaps with Desire, who makes it her quest to upset and unsettle him at every possible instance, even though her motivation for this war-like behaviour is completely ungrounded and never sufficiently explored. He-She even went as far as 'fathering' a child with a secondary character named Unity Kincaid, who was one of the many victims of a sleeping sickness brought on by Dream's prolonged confinement at the hands of mortals who were trying to summon his sister, Death.

Delirium was once referred to as Delight in a time that precedes the first story arc. This is also one of the notorious questions that Gaiman purposely left unanswered, as the circumstances surrounding her name-change were never discussed short of the odd mention that she was originally Delight. It is my belief, however, that the author was simply trying to make a comment on how society's classification of the terms 'madness' and 'happiness' or 'childhood innocence' has been redefined in modern times. This is born from the fact that Delirium acts in a naïve, child-like manner which poses no threat to herself or others, but may certainly be considered 'mad' behaviour for a grown woman in contemporary society. It seems that her siblings share this human perception and she finds herself being talked down to and disregarded due to her youthful innocence. As a consequence, she is probably one of the least linear characters in the series, thanks to her sporadic and impulsive behaviour, which keeps her relationship with the reader at a shallow level of intimacy.

No one can claim to know and understand Delirium in the way they might do the others. Ironically, however, despite her being viewed as an insignificant child by her peers, it is she who actively goes in search of her brother, Destruction. He abandoned his realm 300 years earlier due to rapid developments in technology, which he believed made his presence unnecessary. Even though Destruction (Fig.3.3) plays a minor role in comparison to Dream, Death and Delirium, he too serves

as a vehicle through which Gaiman tried to make a comment on modern society: we no longer need gods to destroy us; we can do the job just fine ourselves.
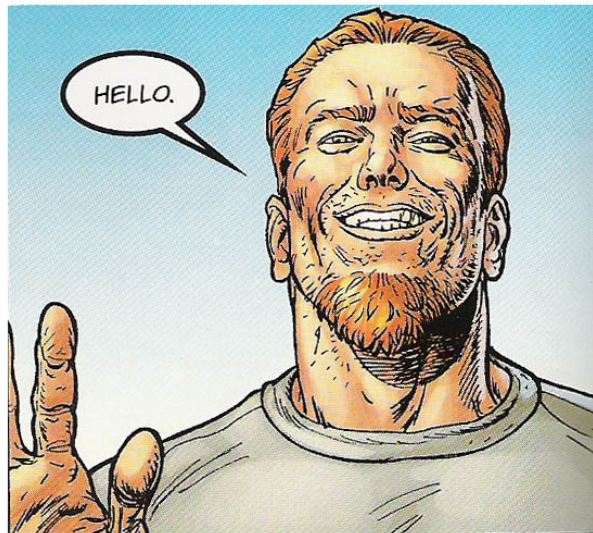
Fig.3.3 Destruction
(*The Sandman − Endless Nights* p.132)

One of the most intriguing abilities that a member of the Endless may possess, apart from a seemingly endless list of superpowers, is to project any image of himself or herself into the minds of mortals. An example of this can be found in the *Brief Lives* story arc, when Dream and Delirium are in search of their escaped brother Destruction, and decide to call on *Ishtar* - a retired goddess of the old world and Destruction's former lover. They encounter her at a strip club, where Ishtar, in dire need of worship, finds herself employed as an adult entertainer. Dream, tall and lean, Delirium, tiny in comparison and madly colourful, and Matthew (Dream's companion raven, who was also once a man) approach the door to the strip club called 'Suffragette City'. Given their otherworldly appearance, they are promptly denied entrance by the doorman. Dream then tells the doorman that they are 'three adult males attired in accordance with local standards and you are only too pleased to invite us into your establishment' (*Sandman* #46:17).

The successive panel shows the threesome now appearing to be three men dressed in work shirts and caps, making their way into the bar (Fig.3.4). To the reader, however, they are still identifiable. Delirium, for instance, can be easily identified through her distinctive speech balloon as she states, 'I did that. What you did. I did that in the beginning' (*Sandman* #46:19). It is unclear if she is referring

to the beginning of the narrative of *Brief Lives*, or if she might be referring to her enigmatic beginning and the instance that Delight turned into Delirium. It would not be surprising if her reference is characteristically obscure and indeed has no connection to the text. The reader might even conclude that she is, in fact, self-referentially alluding to all three of the abovementioned possibilities since her utterances have come to be expected as being non-linear and having coded multiple meanings.

Fig. 3.4 – Matthew, Delirium and Dream
(*The Sandman* #46:19)

Another distinctly human characteristic that Gaiman chose to depict in The Endless is their somewhat surprising predilection for gambling. This usually takes the form of side-wagers placed on the outcome of the lives of certain human individuals. In the issue 'Three Septembers and a January' (contained in the seventh story-arc – *Fables and Reflections*), Despair beckons Dream to the room of a man called Joshua Abraham Norton, a bankrupt businessman seriously considering taking his own life. It is September 1859, and Despair maliciously poses the following challenge to Dream: 'Can you really keep him from my realm, from all our realms, before our oldest sister (referring to Death) comes for him?' Dream, offended by Despair's belittling derision and taunting claims that dreams are inconsequential and, by implication, inferior to the occupations of the other family members, gives Norton the dream to become the first emperor of the United States of America. This dream quickly becomes manifest.

Among his subjects, and one of the millions to pay his 'Imperial Tax' of 50 cents, is Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain. It is Norton who gives him the necessary encouragement to write his infamous 1865 short story *The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, stating that readers are in need of stories to take their minds off their monotonous lives and to project them into a realm of fantasy. Before Norton dies a natural death 21 years after Dream's encounter with Despair in his room, he becomes an embodiment of folklore. – so much so, that he becomes a popular 'tourist attraction' and is regularly accosted by visitors to his town.

Folklore is a modern term for the body of traditional customs, superstitions, tales, dances and songs that have been maintained by processes of repetition other than the written word. Gaiman, here, calls on the conventions of folklore as Norton becomes a living legend when his fame spreads through word of mouth. Folklore is a recurring element in *The Sandman*, as Death, Dream and Destiny (to a lesser extent also the other family members of the Endless) could also be viewed as the embodiment of folklore. From the stories of Mister Sandman and his bag of magical dust and the myth of Father Time, to the various universal interpretations and images of Death, Gaiman draws extensively from universal popular folklore.

Another example of Gaiman's folklore sourcing can be found in the issue 'Tales in the Sand' (from *The Doll's House* story collection of the Sandman series). In one particular sequence two figures are shown walking through the desert at a distance, having already walked two days to reach their destination. The one figure, an elder from a native tribe, accompanies a young man on a rite of passage. The subsequent narration states that 'There are tales told many times. Some tales that you tell children, stories that tell them the history of the tribe, what is good to eat, these are cautionary tales.' The tale in question is one of passion and pride, and is told to male children when they come of age and have to undergo their initiation into manhood. It should be noted here that there is a fine line between what is considered folklore and mythology, as they are both expressions through which humanity searches for an expression of the mysteries of the world by turning them into metaphors. To simplify the distinction, one may consider folklore to be lower on the evolutionary ladder than mythology; the latter is more formal and structured as opposed to the often free form expression of folklore. Folklore is also often confined to the realm of oral expression and is therefore a lot more varied in its content and presentation, where mythology, which has found expression not only in oral tales but also in written and visual representations, is more stable in its content and representation.

Hence folklore can sometimes, but not always, be considered to be a forerunner of mythology. Criteria that determine this 'evolutionary' process from folklore to mythology include the universality and durability of the particular tale's message and the cultural context in which it originated. Also to be considered here is if the culture in which the tale originated had access to formal writings systems and if they had a means of formally recording these tales. Tales of the fictional tribe in 'Tales in the Sand', mentioned above, were not recorded formally out of choice, since the rich oral tradition of many African cultures kept these tales alive through constant repetition; they were therefore not in danger of quickly becoming 'forgotten'.

Returning to 'Tales in the Sand', the panels and their narration continue and tell a tale of a young queen named Nada, who once was the wise ruler of the fabled 'City of Glass'. She was adored by all her underlings, who were, according to the elder, the ancestors of their tribe. However, her subjects were concerned about her status as a single ruler an issue that she simply addressed by saying she would marry when the right man made his appearance.

Just as she foresaw, a suitable man did suddenly make his appearance, but his departure proved to be just as abrupt as his arrival. Their short-lived romance was enough to awaken an all-consuming passion in the heart of Nada, and after he vanished, she pursued him endlessly. In a moment of desperation, she decided to eat 'fireberries', which besides being extremely poisonous, would also reportedly transport you to your true love. She discovered that the object of her affection was Kai'ckul, the Sandman and the Lord of the Dreaming. Realising her predicament, she quickly coughed up the berries and returned home. The Sandman, impressed by the lengths she would go to seek him out and convinced that she truly loved him, decides to visit her in an attempt to secure her as a bride. She did not provide a favourable response to her suitor and after he proclaims his undying love, Nada flees. She realizes that a relationship between a mortal and one of the Endless will only end in catastrophe. After relentlessly pursuing her, however, she reluctantly yields to him. Nada's fears were soon realised. When the sun rose the next morning and found Nada and the Dream King intertwined as lovers, it became despondent at the sight of this abomination and destroyed Nada's village as a result. Nada bravely told Dream that their love was not meant to be and that they could never exist as lovers. To assure this, and assuring that her passions would not cause further harm to others, she throws herself from a cliff in a suicidal leap (Fig.3.5). Dream was not as devoted to the wellbeing of mortal men and obstructed her spirit's descent into the realm of Death. He repeated his

proposition of marriage, but this time included a warning: if she refused him again, he would damn her soul to hell. Selflessly, she agreed to these terms, keeping in mind the fate of mankind. With wounded pride in the face of his rejection, he brazenly decided to stick to his ultimatum and posed his question for a last time. This is where the tale ends and the narrative returns to the present with the elder and the young male still on their way to perform the rite. The initiate protests, however, claiming that the tale could not end there as it lacks a satisfactory ending.
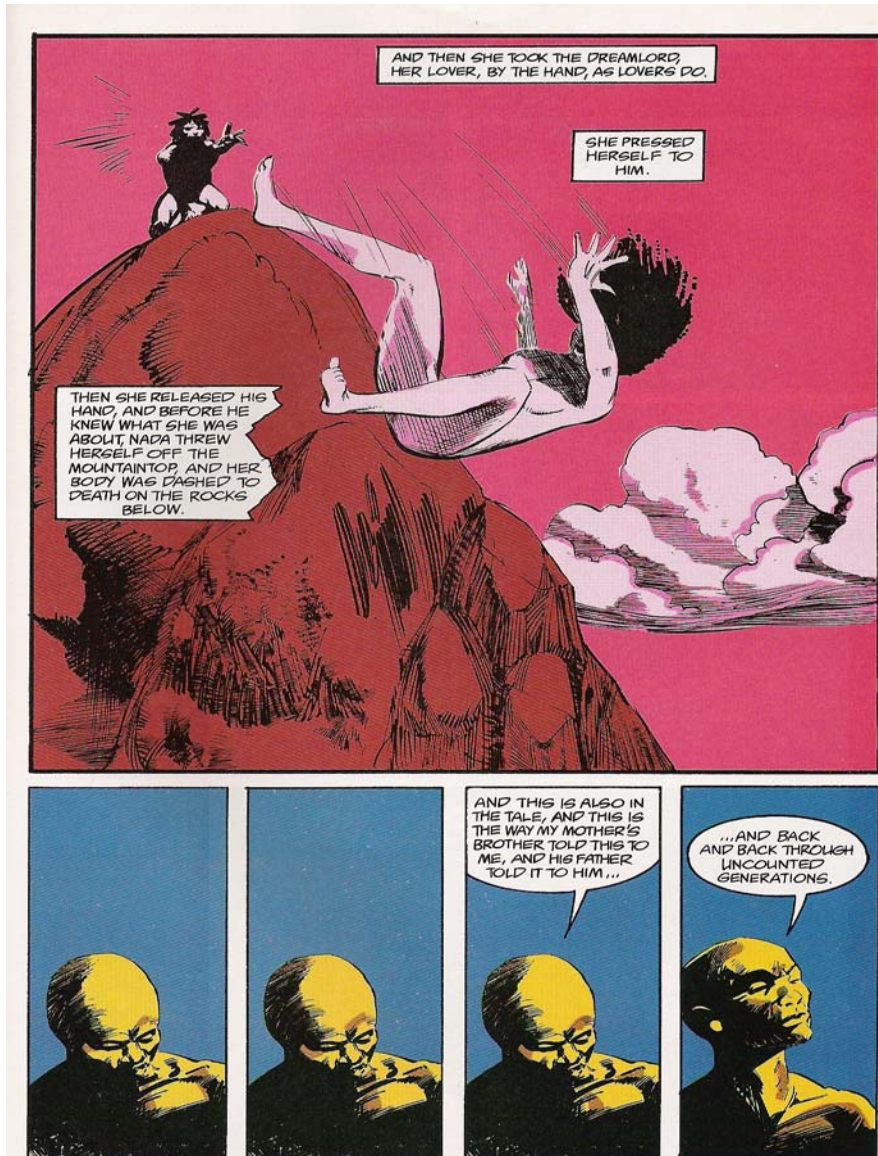

Fig.3.5 – Nada's suicidal leap

(*The Sandman* #9:23)

The significance of this issue, and my reason for mentioning it here, is not to be found in the tale itself, but in the fact that Gaiman went to great lengths to emphasise the process of folklore as a verbal pursuit. The tale itself seems to be incidental and takes a backseat to the depiction of 'folklore in action'. He further chose to emphasise the conventions of folklore by making it clear that the version of the Dream and Nada tale related in this issue is the 'male version'. It is also established that a similar tale is told to the young women of the tribe.

The details of this 'female version' are omitted and one can only guess from the declaration that if it were is told in the 'woman's language' the purpose of it would vary substantially from the male version. The issue therefore seemed to have as its primary focus, familiarising the reader with the main conventions of folklore, namely the existence of different versions as well as its dependence on oral tradition. Ironically Gaiman counteracts both these conventions by committing one of the versions to writing.

The young male initiate is, of course, accurate in his objection that the tale does not seem to end properly. The version told here, the one which ends in Dream awaiting a response from Nada, is the version that has always been told and will always be told within the specific cultural context of this specific, albeit fictional, tribe. By doing this, Gaiman broadens the issue of the existence of various versions to a universal perspective, in which different cultures and their unique social contexts shape the constructs of these tales. The story of Nada and Dream is, however, continued for the reader in later issues and proves to be quite a significant event in the primary narrative, despite the trivial way in which it is initially dealt with. It is later established that Nada was imprisoned in Hell for ten thousand years. Dream is prompted by Desire and Death to realise the error of his decisions and decides to remedy his past transgression by paying a visit to Lucifer and the Demonkind. In conclusion to this section of the narrative, Nada's soul is freed and resurrected.

Seeing that Death is the only sibling with whom Dream seems to have an intimate bond, the task fall on her to make him see the error of his ways and coax him to free Nada. Appealing to his inherent sensitivity and his growing sympathy for the plight of humankind, she convinces her brother that his

pride has caused him to greatly wrong Nada; a situation that he has to right immediately. Dream and Death's initial debate on the issue is almost comical in its similarity to typical brother-sister feuding. This back-and-forth banter happens in the beginning of the *Season of Mist* story-arc when Destiny calls together a very rare family gathering to discuss an undisclosed issue. Desire, staying true to her character, immediately launches into an attack on Dream by preying on a most sensitive issue: Dream's numerous failed love affairs.

Fig.3.6 – Reproaching the Dream King
(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4 p.33)

He subsequently leaves the gathering, not being able to defend himself or even make a retort to Desire's assault. Death follows him and sees this as an opportunity to console him, but also subtly reproaches him for his transgression towards Nada. Dream replies to this accusation in his normal verbose fashion, and claims that it was she who wronged him, seeing that he intended to make her a goddess. The ever-wise Death replies, in her typically casual tongue, that 'it is bad news for us to get involved with them. You know that.' As Dream sets out to free Nada from hell, after having realised that he had acted rashly in condemning her to such torment, Death calls after his fading figure: 'Hey Dream! Don't do anything stupid!' This casual frankness in their relationship speaks of the intimacy they share as brother and sister; an intimacy not shared between the other Endless.

Dark humour often finds its way into the text and refers to discussing or treating sinister and disturbing issues in a way that strips away their seriousness and induces the odd chuckle. As an example, the slightly dishevelled Death mostly takes her responsibilities seriously, but also takes time

to participate in overtly ironical acts, like feeding pigeons (Fig.3.7) with her younger brother in between guiding the newly deceased to the land of the dead. In one instance, Death is also shown wearing exercise clothing (a sharp contradiction to her usual, stark gothic dress), as she works 'overtime' to attend to the flood of renegade souls when the gates of hell open and Lucifer surrenders the control of his realm.
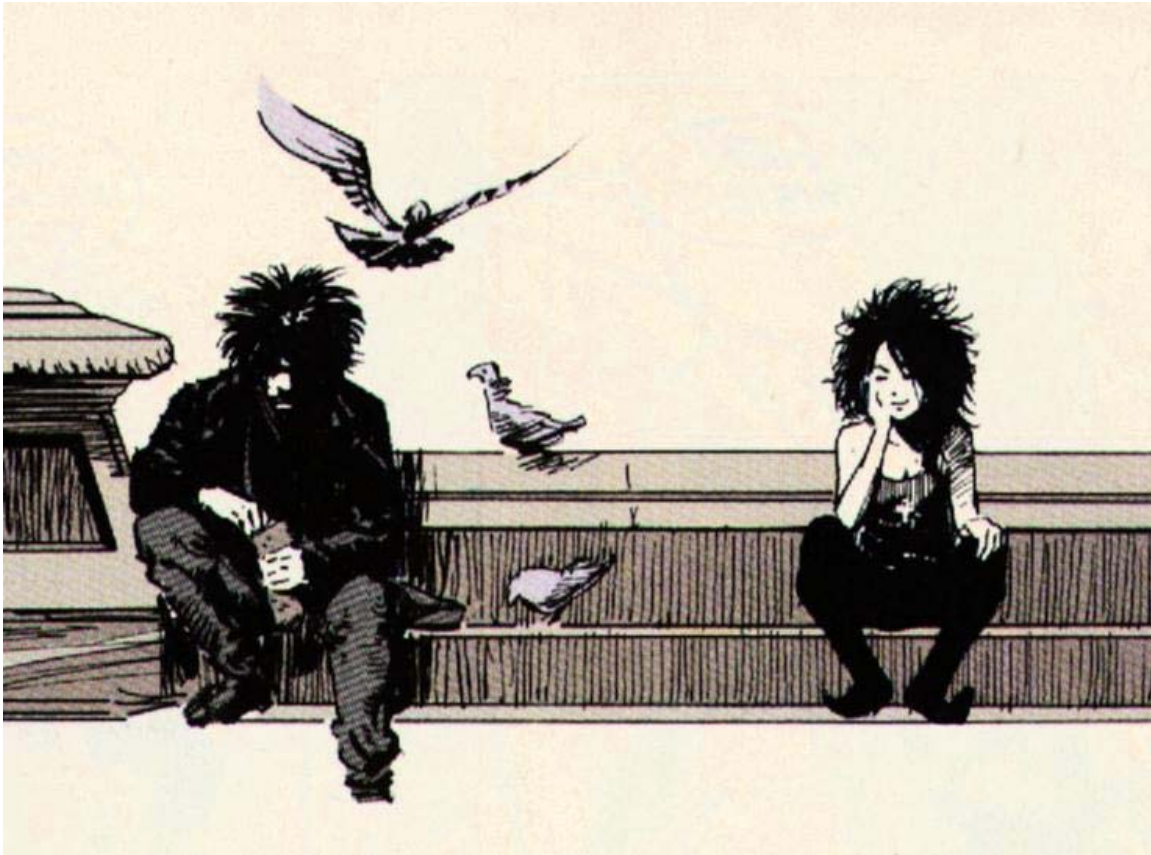
Fig.3.7 – Feeding the pigeons
(*The Sandman* #8:28)

As a result of this, the dead start walking the earth and Death has her hands full rounding them up, hence the more comfortable workout wear. In a later issue, when Orpheus (son of Dream and the Greek muse Calliope) decides to call on his aunt for assistance, he finds that Death's realm looks like a humble apartment furnished with a dilapidated armchair and a goldfish bowl. Death's notably conventional abode appears even more paradoxical with fishnet stockings, underwear and jeans casually strewn across the apartment – not exactly what one might expect from the angel of Death. Her defence of this, when joining Orpheus in her realm, is that she finds this appearance comfortable. She quickly realises, however, that this was confusing to Orpheus and changes the

appearance of her realm to that of an over-elaborate hall of mirrors for his benefit. Death's unconventionality, or non-conformity to the classical image and behaviour of the 'grim reaper' or angel of Death, is further manifested in her appearance. Destiny, the head of the Endless and also the most conventional in his ways, often chastises Death for wearing garb inappropriate to her vocation. Her old black jeans and tank tops fail to impress Destiny at a family gathering and he orders her to change into Victorian-era mourning clothes (Fig.3.8). Death attempts to protest, by saying, 'You know how much I hate that stuff! Next thing, you'll be moaning for me to get a scythe!' She always, however, heeds his wishes, mostly because she can instantaneously change her appearance as soon as she leaves his company.

Fig.3.8 – Placating her brother
(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4 p.17)

Even though certain story-arcs may be identified together with an underlying main storyline (Dream's journey from immortal being to human), linear continuity is not a primary concern as it would counteract the fluid, shifting narrative that often resembles a dream in all its surreal, shapeless splendour. Dreams have their own unique discourse, use of symbolism and metaphor, but these are only valid within the context of the dream world. This discourse is inconsistent and surreal at best, and is subjected to constant shifting and changing. As an example, Delirium's appearance and character is only consistent in its inconsistence. Her wildly coloured hair might appear long and flowing in one panel, short and conformed in the next, and in a few panels later her hair, yet again, appears unrestricted and shaded in many bright colours as if it is an extension of her ever-shifting mental state. Further, her eyes don't match (one is blue and the other green) and her clothes change constantly (from tattered fishnet bodysuit to a cocktail dress with knee-high boots). The constant changes in her appearance, together with her erratic behaviour and unintelligible, dialogue are obviously aimed to reflect her unstable mental state, but do not keep the reader chronologically orientated. It seems this inconsistency is simply due to her ability to change or her inability to control change.
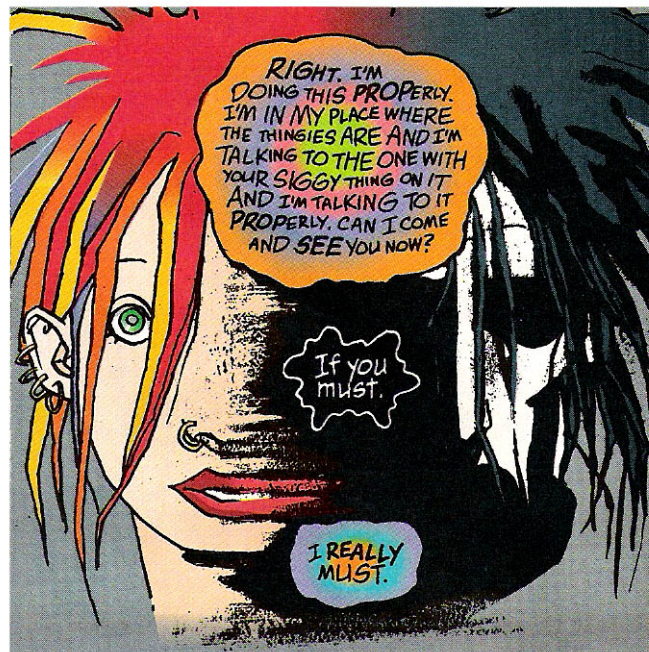
Fig.3.9 – Delirium and Dream
(*The Sandman* #64:7)

A lot can, and will, be said about *The Sandman* series, about how it managed to break every convention established by the medium and successfully accomplished extreme genre-mixing without losing its authenticity. The characters of the title, The Endless, function within the writer's preoccupation with fantasy, folklore, mythology and dark humour, and do so in a way that feels essentially human to the reader. Dream, Death and the rest of the family perform their respective tasks, but not without gently urging the reader to re-evaluate his or her own individual roles in society. In its entirety, however, the most important contribution of the series is to be found in the way that it redefined (or perhaps re-imagined) societal conventions like death and dreams.

3.1.1   Tip-toeing through the Dreaming: a synopsis

Morpheus' utter disdain for others and his generally conceited behaviour in the stories set in the distant past are somewhat softened by his years of imprisonment; an time that may be viewed as the catalyst of change or as an antagonising event in the life of Morpheus. It has somehow profoundly influenced him in a way that is not overtly clear to the reader, but as the story progresses and his current behaviour is juxtaposed and contrasted with that in his self-important history, the reader starts grasping the significance of his imprisonment and the effect it had on his perspective. The question surfaces: to what extent can a being as old as the universe itself subject itself to change? A prominent theme throughout the text is 'rules and responsibilities': whether determined by external influences or self-imposed, are we slaves to our obligations, or are we free to discard them and walk away?

Most of the narratives are set between the Dreaming and the world of human consciousness, with the occasional visit to other realms like Hell, Faerie, Asgard and the realms of his siblings. In general, however, stories play off against the backdrop of contemporary America. Like I mentioned earlier, tales of Morpheus' and his family's exploits throughout history are also recounted and often juxtaposed with 'current' events to establish context or alert the reader to certain information that has bearing on the present.

It is necessary here to briefly turn the attention to visual representation. Unlike most comic books, *The Sandman* did not feature a regular illustrator apart from Dave McKean, who was commissioned

to provide cover art for all 75 issues and Sam Keith, the co-creator. Artists who illustrated a significant number of issues include Colleen Doran, Mike Dringenberg, Marc Hempel, Jill Thompson and Micheal Zulli.

Fig.3.10 – The Baby Endless – this comical illustration showcases one of the many 'interpretations' of The Endless. This version is notably less threatening and ominous than their usual depictions

(www.ativan.netdesign.net)

Their styles varied (see Fig.3.10, 3.11, 3.12) from the flat cartoon-like expressionism of Marc Hempel – as in Fig.3.10 above - to the delicate, detailed realism of Micheal Zulli which leans towards the work of the Pre-Raphaelites.
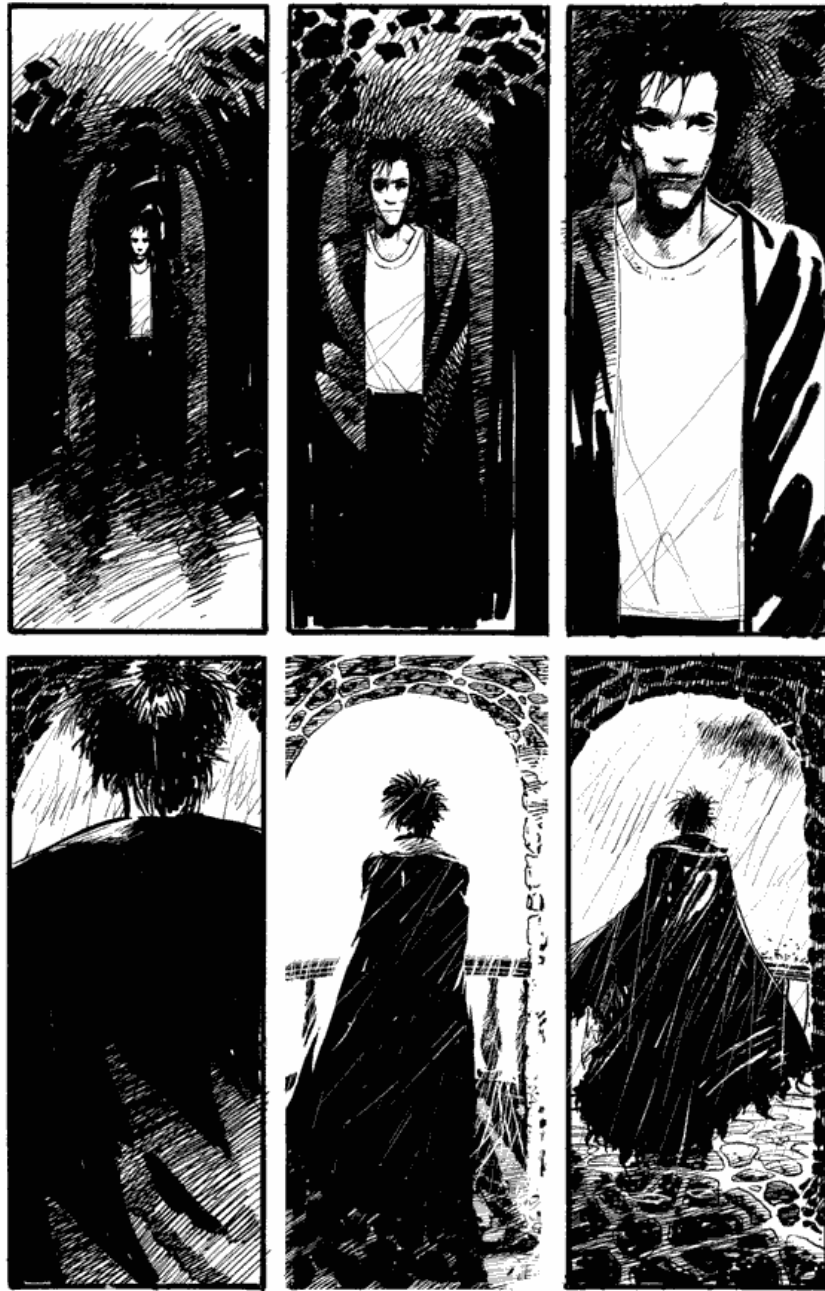
Fig.3.11 – A rare monochrome pencil illustration of a more conventional Morpheus. This illustration places emphasis on the often cold, isolated and rigid side of Morpheus' persona
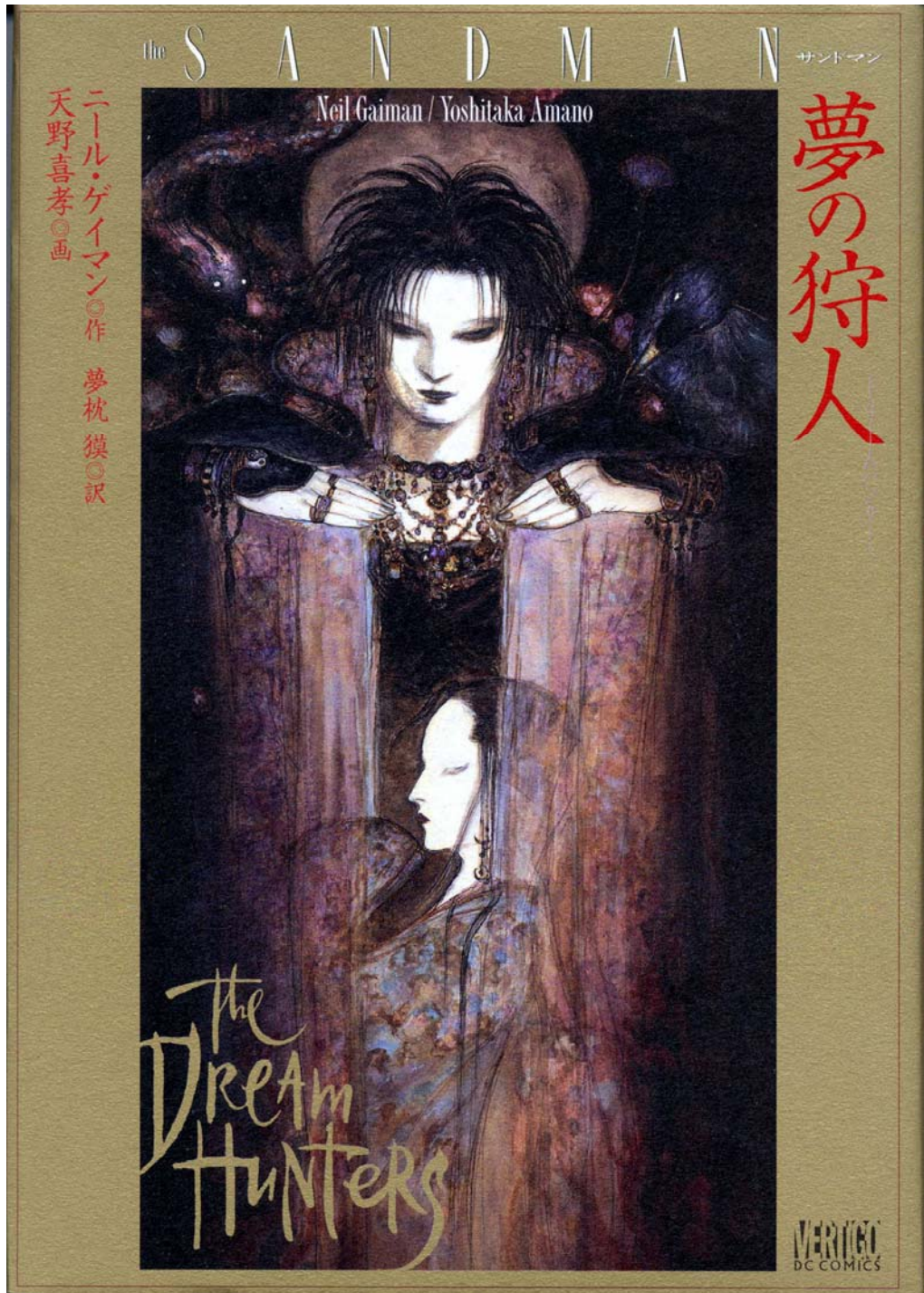
Fig. 3.12 – A very different Dream: Japanese artist Yoshitaka Amano's unique interpretation of Morpheus.
(*The Sandman* − *Dream Hunters*)

The Sandman was initially printed in 75 comic-book format issues with one slightly thicker special edition. Issues were published monthly from 1988 to 1996 and generally consisted of 32 pages. Since

its conclusion, however, the main narratives have been bound together in a series of 10 collected editions. The following summary of these collections has been adapted from Darius (2004):

(Please note: All quotes from Alisa Kwitney (2003) in this section first appeared in the original advertising of the ten collected volumes of *The Sandman*, and were later collected in her book *The Sandman – King of Dreams*.)

Preludes and Nocturnes *(Issues 1 to 8, 1988/1989)*

'In which the Dream King escapes from captivity, reclaims his kingdom, and feeds pigeons in a New York park with his older sister.' (Kwitney 2003:28)

It is June of 1916 in Wych Cross, England. Roderick Burgess and his group − the Order of Ancient Mysteries − are attempting to summon Death and bind it. The spell, however, summons something or someone completely unexpected − a pale, gaunt man dressed in black, wearing the skull of a dead god as a helm and bearing a sack of sand and a ruby. This is Death's younger sibling, Morpheus, the Sandman, Dream of the Endless. Trapped and incapacitated, Burgess strips Dream of all his belongings and imprisons him in a glass dome, agreeing to release him in exchange for immortality. Morpheus makes no acknowledgement and patiently, perhaps stubbornly, waits for Roderick to live out his life. For over 70 years he will remain imprisoned in the magic circle as the world around him changes. During this time, a strange illness spreads. All over the world, people fall asleep and will not wake, or wander around in a strange somnambulist state. After Roderick's death, the role of Dream's captor is passed on to Alex Burgess. It is not until 1988 (coinciding with the 'present day' of the first issue) that Dream finally escapes and begins to take revenge. Alexander unintentionally disrupted the magic circle that bound Dream and so freed him. As an act of revenge Dream traps him in a never-ending nightmare.

Weak and distraught, Dream must return to his own realm called the Dreaming. There he is assisted by those that stayed loyal to him and remained in his kingdom even as it decayed in its master's absence. After this, Dream must go on a quest to recover his tools that have been taken from him by

Burgess. To assist him he summons the Triple Goddess, he asks of them three questions and receives three answers. His quest may be summarised as follows:

- He first travels to London to seek out John Constantine who bought Dream's magical bag of sand at a garage sale.

- Next, he ventures into Hell to challenge the demon Choronzon who is in possession of his helmet.

- Then, Dream must track down and stop a madman who found Dream's ruby and intends to use it to destroy the world.

- Finally, having completed every task and regaining all his stolen possessions, Dream goes to feed pigeons in the park with his older sister, Death.
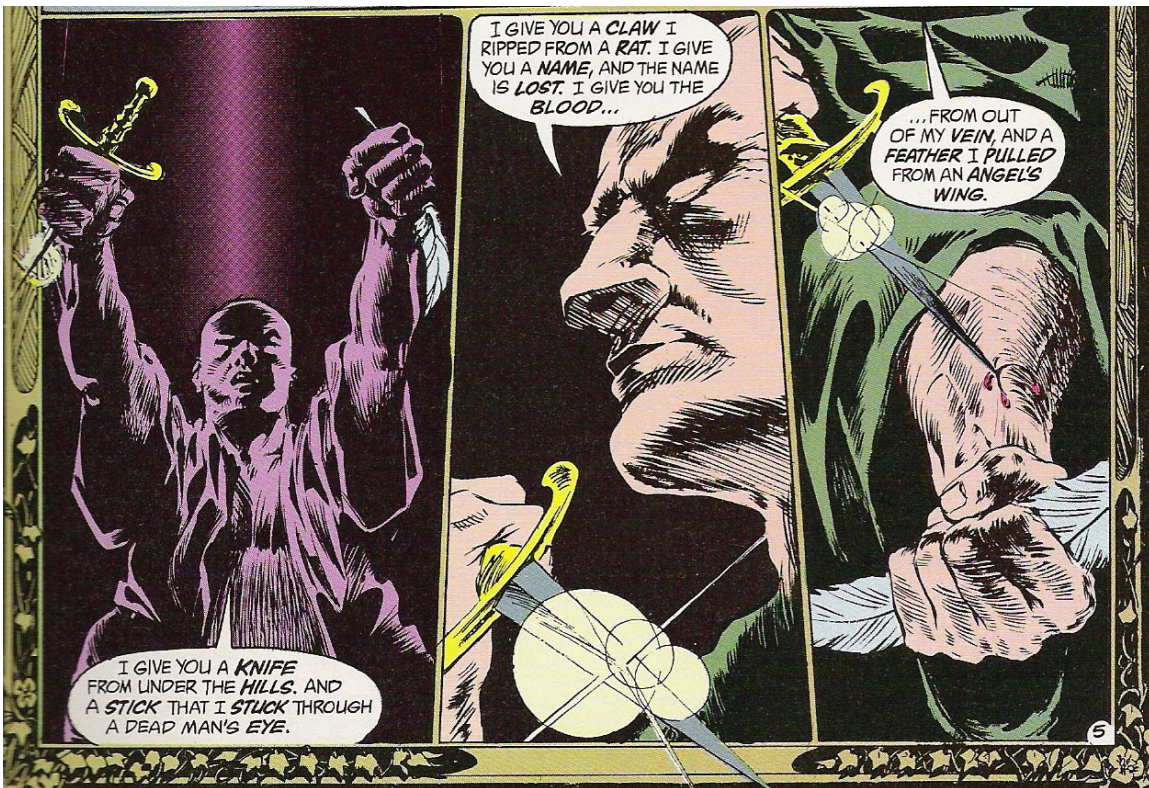
Fig. 3.13 – Roderick preparing to conjure Death
(*The Sandman* #1:5)

It is worth noting here that the stories contained in this part of the narrative (Issues 1-7) conform more to the classical understanding of 'horror fiction' than any other part of the book, and speak of

the original intentions and shock-value tactics of the writer. The mood and themes in the story-telling made a sharp turn towards surrealism and intellectual reference in the subsequent sections of the main narrative.

In issue 8 of *The Sandman*, Dream's older sister Death was introduced and became a popular fixture ever since. This issue also marked the first real 'hit' of the series and a departure from the horror genre. It also contained an introduction to this new comic title, which made it more accessible to new readers. Other characters that were introduced in this first collection of *Sandman* tales are John Constantine (Fig.3.14), the Martian Man hunter, Cain, Abel and Lucien.

Fig.3.14 – John Contantine
(www.comicmonsters.com/CMimages/hellblazer.jpg)

The Doll's House *(Issues 9 to 16, 1989-1990)*

'In which Rose Walker finds more than she bargained for, we visit a serial killer's convention, are reintroduced to *The Sandman* from the 1970s and discover that Desire likes to play games.' (Kwitney 2003:45)

This story arc would continue to establish Dream's world. Issue 9, however, did not advance the main narrative of the series – a story telling technique that Gaiman would use frequently – and was somewhat illogically captioned as a 'prequel', even though it did not in any way introduce the new story arc initiated in issue 10. The story contained in this issue was a continuation on the tale of an African girl named Nada, which was encountered briefly in issue 4 and would remain part of a secondary narrative strand that would be revisited repeatedly. In issue 10 an attempt is made by Dream to restore the damage incurred during his absence from his realm, he tracks down several nightmares that have escaped from the Dreaming and also deals with a 'dream vortex' that exists within a young American woman named Rose Walker. Dream realises that as a 'dream vortex', Rose Walker will inevitably draw malicious nightmares towards herself or be helplessly drawn towards them. Dream decides not to terminate the vortex, but instead utilise it to track down his escaped nightmare creations. He quickly realises, however, that Rose will soon become the epicentre of the Dreaming and will eventually cause it to collapse in on itself. To prevent the destruction of his realm, Dream considers killing Rose Walker.

Fig.3.15 – Matthew brings news on the 'Dream Vortex'
(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.2 p.73)

The Doll's House series also retires a previous version of the Sandman (DC's Silver Age Sandman) created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby in the 1970s. This Sandman who operated from his command post referred to as the 'Dream Dome'. He was assisted by two monstrous nightmares called Brute and Glob. Although the 1970s Sandman does not appear in Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*, several other elements of the series are referenced, including the 'Dream Dome' (a tiny forgotten speck of Dreaming) and the malicious pair Brut and Glob. The Silver Age Sandman has been replaced by Hector Hall (an ex-member of the superhero team, Infinity Inc.) under the alias of The Silver Scarab. Hector, who was killed months earlier, and his living wife, Lyta (a.k.a. The Fury), were now under the control of Brute and Glob. These two nightmare creatures are revealed to have once been servants of Dream, who had hidden themselves in the dreams of Rose Walker's younger brother, Jed

Walker. Dream banishes Hector to the afterlife and lays claim to Lyta's unborn child, due to the child having been gestated in dreams. These details might seem trivial and confusing at this point, but will have a significant impact on the rest of the narrative and will ultimately determine Dream's fate.

Dream Country *(Issue 17 to 20, 1990)*

'In which we learn what cats dream about, and who helped Will along with the story when he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.' (Kwitney 2003:54)

This is a collection of four independent tales. They are unrelated to the main narrative that was established in the previous two collections. In one of the tales, 'A dream of a thousand cats', Dream lives up to his alias as Lord Shaper and takes the form of a cat. In this issue, Gaiman explores some of the mysterious elements attributed to cats and the lives they lead on this planet. In 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', Dream forms a creative partnership with none other than William Shakespeare himself.

Season of Mists *(Issue 21 to 28, 1990-1991)*

'In which we are formally introduced to The Endless, and the Sandman struggles with the key to hell.' (Kwitney 2003:64)

After a family gathering and some serious goading from his siblings, Dream makes a journey to hell to free a former lover, Nada (the Nada in question is a loose reference to *Nada the Lily* by Rider Haggard). He condemned her to hell after she had shunned him and hurt his pride thousands of years ago. Upon his arrival, he finds hell empty and Lucifer locking the last gates of his kingdom. Rather than fight him (he once swore to destroy Dream should he ever set foot in Hell again) he hands the key to the gates of hell to Dream, who most reluctantly accepts this burden. With hell vacant and ready for reoccupation, several deities from various religions travel to the Dreaming to bargain for the key.

Despite all the wondrous and unthinkable events depicted in this part of the main story-arc, the most prominent feature here is not dramatic development but characterisation. It is here that the reader first notices the character development that took place in Dream as he reveals a notably more human side. He has now become the imperfect hero who makes mistakes and is reluctant to take responsibility for them. He reveals his internal battle between his ego and a new-found pursuit towards what is 'right'. In previous stories Dream has shown a very limited range of emotions, but in *Seasons of Mist* it becomes clear that this range has expanded. He is shocked, emotional, melancholy, worried, and dumbstruck. It is a measure of the extent to which he has changed, and is changing, that becomes evident as he is put under stress.

This series also marks Gaiman's abandonment of the horror genre for sophisticated fantasy and suspense.

A Game of You *(Issue 32 to 37, 1991-1992)*

'In which the woman steal the show, and an ancient witch named Thessaly performs a neat trick with the skin of a man's face.' (Kwitney 2003:86)

Old witchcraft and fantasy mix together here to create an adventure featuring Barbie, a young divorced woman from New York and who is also a character first encountered in *The Doll's House* series. She discovers that her vivid dreams are truly a gate to a supernatural world, where she is a princess trying to save her subjects from the clutches of the Cuckoo. Her unlikely and wonderful group of friends, both in the dream world and the waking world, are highlights of charactarisation. They are well-rounded characters that the reader may find easy to associate with. Considering the series as a whole, this volume is the most removed from the primary narrative and deals with issues like gender, identity, failed ambitions and childhood fantasies. In short, this volume explores the nature of humanity in all its varied facets. The only prominent character introduced in this collection is Thessaly, an age-old witch who is a prominent character in later sections of the narrative.

Fables and Reflections *(Issue 29 to 31, 38 to 40, 50, Sandman Special #1, 1991-1993)*

'In which Morpheus visits Haroun Al Raschid, Johanna Canstantine, and Joshua Norton.' (Kwitney 2003:92)

Where the rest of the series is deeply rooted in fantasy and mythology, this volume collects short stories that are all based on the premise of historical fact.

This volume collects several stories set throughout world history. Issues #29-31 and 50 were initially printed under the title 'Distant Mirrors' and deal with prominent kings and rulers, the issue 'Three Septembers and a January' concerns the life of Joshua Norton, the self-appointed Emporor of America. *The Sandman* #38-40 were initially printed under the collected title of 'Convergences' and deal with a wide array of fairy tales. Sandman Special #1 recounts the re-imagined tragedy of the mythological hero Orpheus. In this version, however, the myth of Orpheus is assimilated into the Sandman mythos and it is revealed that Orpheus is the love-child of Dream and Calliope.

Brief Lives (Issue 41 to 49, 1992-1993)

'In which Dream takes a road trip with his sister Delirium in search of their brother Destruction (who happens to have a pet dog named Barnabas).' (Kwitney 2003:112)

Brief Lives takes the form of yet another quest, but this time Dream only aids Delirium in a quest of her own – to find their lost brother, Destruction. According to Kwitney (2003:112), at the beginning of this series we find Dream 'brooding and depressed in the aftermath of a failed love affair, (he) begins this storyline aloof and detached, accompanying his sister as a distraction, or perhaps hoping to meet the ex-lover who's had him raining all over his realm.' This quest results in tragedy for many of those who assist them as lives are lost. This would normally not bother Dream much, but as the journey becomes more complicated and dangerous than he anticipated, he grows in compassion, acting more like a father than an older brother to the disheveled Delirium. He also becomes severely saddened over the tragic influence his seemingly selfish pursuits have on mortals. He becomes more introspective, a fact that reveals further development in his character to the reader. After Dream and Delirium find themselves at another dead-end, Dream decides to consult his son, Orpheus (or rather his son's head) to learn of Destruction's whereabouts. In exchange for this information, Dream grants his son the mercy of death – an act that will ultimately lead to the death of Dream. Ironically, his only fatherly act towards Orpheus was killing him.
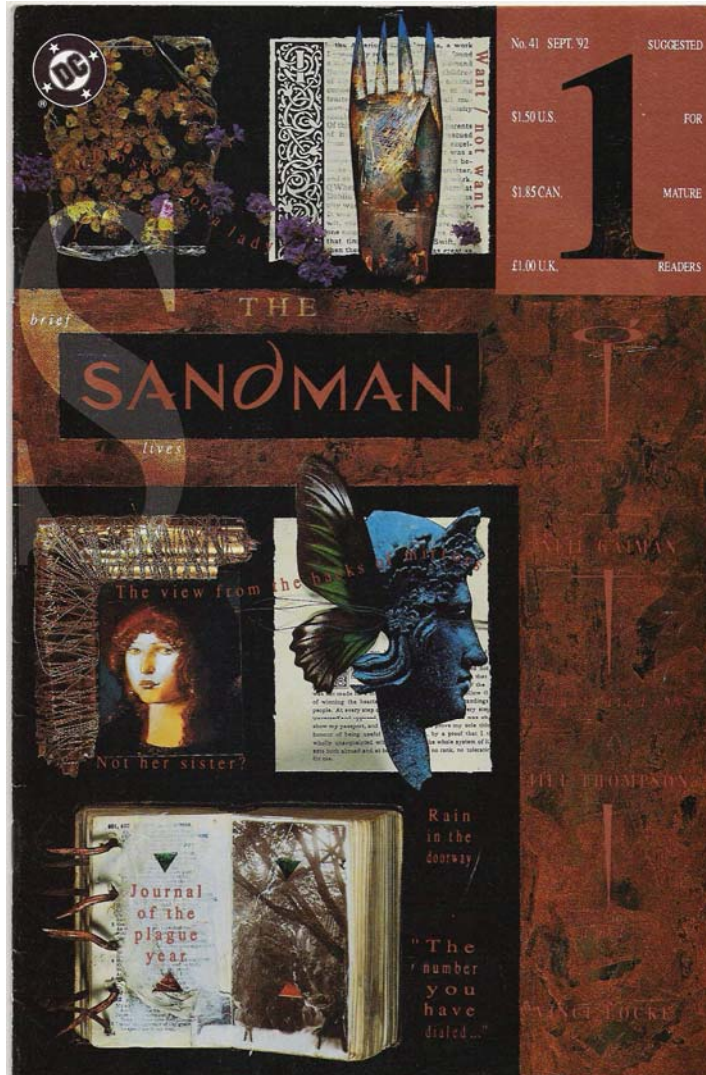
Fig.3.16 – Cover art from Brief Lives #1

World's End *(Issue 51 to 56, 1993)*

'In which we visit a mysterious in and hear the patron's tale.' (Kwitney 2003:126)

The last collection of short stories that do not directly contribute to the main narrative. Like Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *The Decameron* by Boccaccio, this collection is framed by an eclectic group of travelers telling stories from their 'realities', in this case, as they are seeking refuge from a storm at the inn at the World's End. The storm in no ordinary one, however, it is a 'reality storm' in which times, worlds, religions, cultures and various planes of reality collide.

The Kindly Ones *(Issue 57-69, 1994-1995)*

'In which Lyta Hall exacts her revenge and the fate of the Dream King in revealed.' (Kwitney 2003:138)

This series was advertised in the media as 'the beginning of the end', and rightly so. When Hippolyta Hall's infant son Daniel is kidnapped, she loses all grips on her already frail sanity. Assuming that Dream is the culprit, she goes in search of the Furies – a maiden-mother-crone triad that bears resemblance to the Fates and Gorgons from mythology and kill those who spill the blood of family. These three ancient figures prefer to be known as the Eumenides, which roughly translates as The Kindly Ones. Though they cannot avenge the abduction and supposed death of Daniel, they will avenge Dreams euthanasia of his son, Orpheus. The Kindly Ones are not empowered to kill Dream, but to drive him to suicide.

Once in the Dreaming, these avenging spirits wreak havoc, leaving several dead inhabitants in their wake. In the meanwhile, however, Dream instructs his servants, Matthew and the Corinthian, to rescue Daniel from whatever harm may have befallen him. Dream considers various means of repelling The Furies, but to avoid further damage to the Dreaming, he agrees to let his sister (Death) take him to her realm. After this, Daniel materialises into an adult and takes Dream's place as the new ruler of the Dreaming.
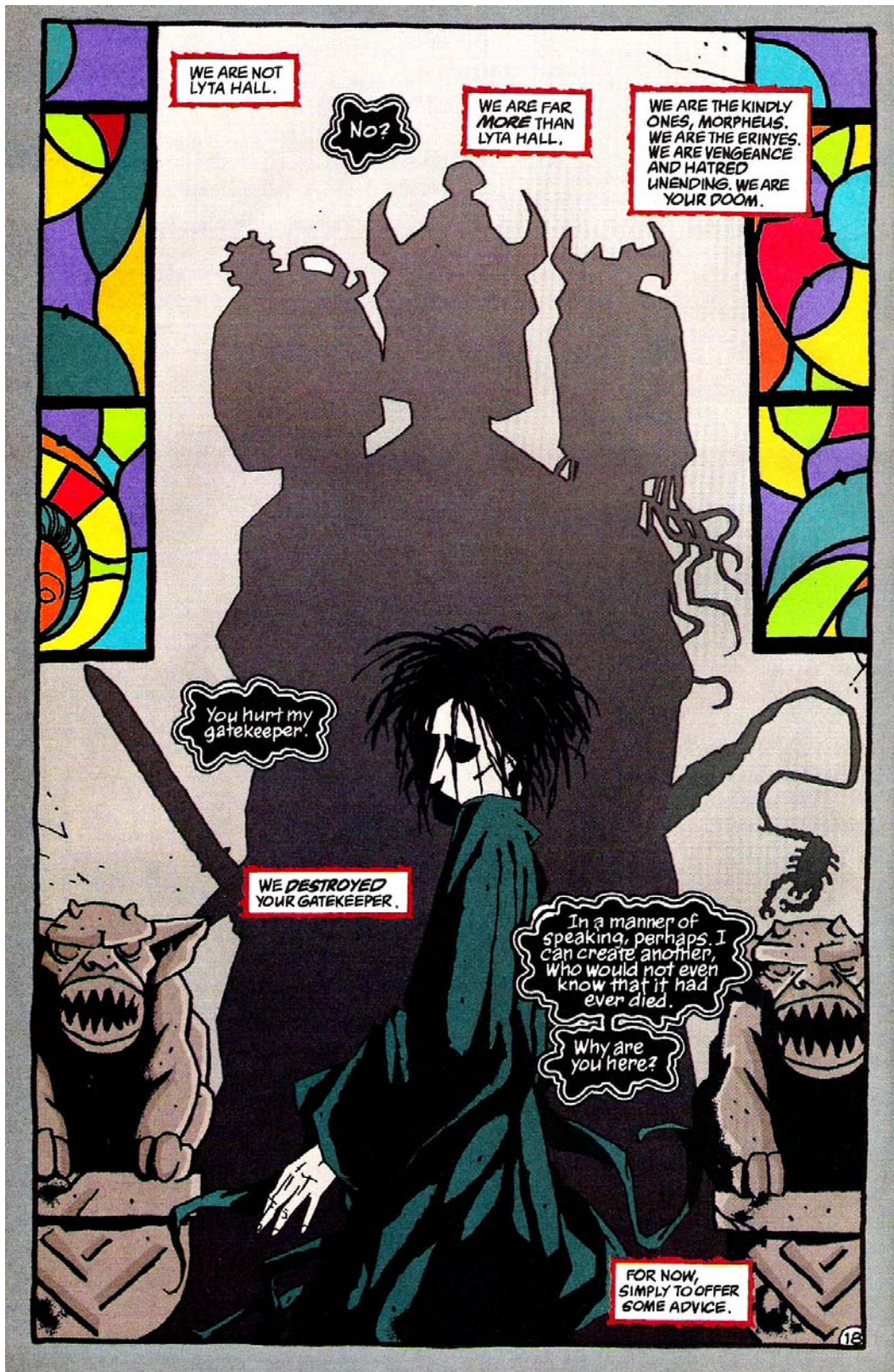
Fig.3.17 – The Furies arrive

(*The Sandman* #68:18)

The Wake *(Issue 70 to 75, 1995-1996)*

'In which we bid farewell to an old friend, and become acquainted with the new King of Dreams.' (Kwitney 2003:156)
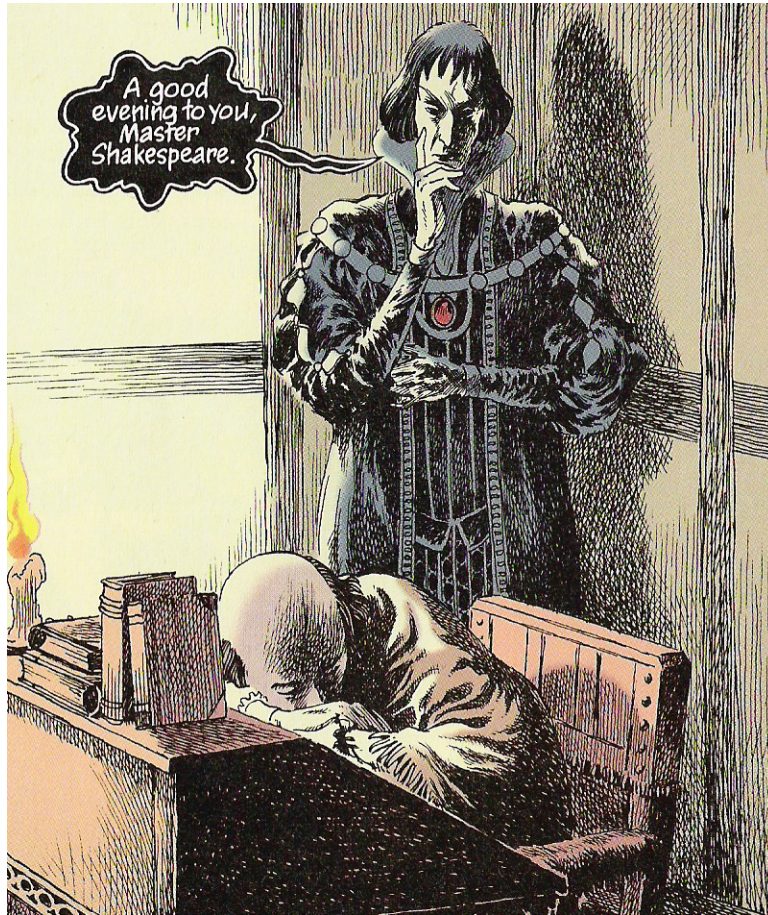
Fig.3.18 – Dream calls on a sleeping Shakespeare
(The Sandman #75:21)

The conclusion of the main narrative takes place in *Sandman* #70 to #72, where characters from throughout the series attend the wake of Lord Dream of the Endless. They spend the night swapping stories with dreamers and dreams, gods and an array of creatures, from every conceivable, and even unconceivable, nook and cranny of the universe. They get drunk, celebrate and mourn, and in the morning, they attend the funeral service and speak the contents of their hearts. In the meanwhile, Daniel, conceived in the realm of dreams, and perhaps also conceived of dreams, slowly

adjust to his new role. The last three issues are stand-alone stories. Issue #75 concludes the story of Dream and his partnership with Shakespeare in a re-imagining of Shakespeare's last tale *The Tempest*.

3.1.2 Pausing at *The Kindly Ones*

It is my opinion that *The Kindly Ones* narrative is the most important part of *The Sandman*, seeing that it contains the main climax of the series, and is therefore worthy of closer inspection.

Even though they once helped Morpheus to recover his kingdom, the Kindly Ones (a.k.a. The Furies) serve in large part as the book's antagonists. Like many characters in *The Sandman,* their origins are rooted in classic mythology and classic literature, and are at times presented as the *Greek Furies*, also known as *Erinyes* and *Eumenides*. They now pursue Morpheus for aiding Orpheus in his long-awaited death, an act they view as kin-killing. It is, however, the impetus and involvement of Lyta Hall that prompts them to destroy him. Further motivation comes from their wanting to take a rather awkward, revenge on Orpheus by destroying his father. As Persephone warned, they never forgave Orpheus for making them cry in the Underworld during his Eurydice rescue-mission. Many of the characters in the series warn that they should not be called 'The Furies' in fear of their wrath. Instead, it is suggested that they only be referred to as 'the nice ladies' or 'the kindly ones'.

Conforming to *The Sandman's* general style of writing, the existence of the Furies is interwoven with the lives of several other prominent female trios. They are at times depicted as gorgons Stentho and Euarayle, a curious group of women at an English nursing home, the Grey woman who assisted Perseus in his quest, Macbeth's three witches, and the three Fates (Atropos, Clotho and Lacheisis). Therefore, never being quite able to ascertain which manifestation they might be dealing with, many critics such as Stephen Rauch (2003), elected to more generally refer to the women as the Triple Goddess and afford them all the attributes that the name might entail.

Another Fury central to the story is Hippolyta Hall. She is believed to be the daughter of the original Fury, but was orphaned and raised to become a member of the crime-fighting group, *Infinity Inc*. She later left the group to join her dead, and disembodied husband, Hector Hall (the Silver Age Sandman) in a forgotten sector of the Dreaming to continue their fight against evil. When Morpheus journeyed out to restore the damage done to his realm, he was forced to close down the dimension, send Hector on to the land of the dead and return Lyta to earth. The first friction between

Morpheus and Lyta came when he, for unknown reasons, told her that he would one day lay claim to her son Daniel who had gestated in the Dreaming. At the beginning of *The Kindly Ones*, when Daniel goes missing and is presumed dead, she assumes that Morpheus has taken him. As a result of this, she has a mental breakdown and vows to take revenge on Morpheus.

Her title as The Fury is greatly appropriate. Firstly, she wants revenge for the death of her family: the ghostly husband that Morpheus was forced to banish and the son she suspects he also abducted and killed. Secondly, her name and origin have mythological ties. Hippolyta was the name of the Amazon queen confronted by Hercules. While it states in *The Kindly Ones* that she was 'given in marriage by Hercules to Theseus' the Minotaur-killer, other myths have it that Hercules slayed her in battle to prove his might to the Amazonians.

While being overtly troublesome characters, neither the Kindly Ones nor Lyta's motives can be viewed as being primarily evil. It is also worth noting here that despite the inclusion of characters and their actions that may be traditionally classified as 'good' or 'evil', the text does not make a comment or attempt to classify the characters and their actions as good or evil (another departure from the superhero genre). There are therefore no true 'villains' and 'good guys', as is the norm in other comic titles. Even the malevolent pair involved in Daniel's disappearance, Loki and Puck, do not seem inherently evil, but rather appear to be under the employ of some unidentified higher power. Loki is, however, intentionally attempting to complicate Morpheus' life, while Puck just acts in accordance with his usual mental deficit. Morpheus is assisted in this difficult time by Matthew the raven, the Corinthian, the immortal mortal Hob Gadling and the once-raven librarian, Lucien. It could also be suggested that the title may be referring to these characters, who are each good-hearted and victims in their own right.

It has become clear that the existences, names and entangle histories of the characters in *The Sandman* are all significant to some degree. It is therefore conceivable that the way some characters are paired up or juxtaposed is also deliberate and significant. Attention should also be paid to how Gaiman actualises character development by means of role-switching when some of these characters are 'reborn' or reincarnated in a different state. Some characters, therefore, do not experience a linear development, but are remade to fit different roles, either by Morpheus, in the case of Matthew and the Corinthian, or by unidentified forces, in the case of Delirium and Lyta Hall. Here are some of the more significant character combinations in *The Kindly Ones*:

Matthew and the remade Corinthian: Matthew described this team by saying: 'It was like a bad TV show. He's a reincarnated serial killer – his partner is a bird. They're cops' (*The Kindly Ones* 9, p.24). In fact, Daniel, at a later stage, reveals that if he didn't intervene, the Corinthian would have killed Matthew. So why did Morpheus decide they would be the perfect pair to travel to Swartalfheim and find Daniel? Well, both Matthew and the Corinthian are death-orientated characters. However, the nightmare known as the Corinthian causes gruesome deaths, while Matthew as a raven comes to hear and witness it. Both have a particular fetish for eye-eating, Matthew, however, does it because it's in his nature as a bird, whereas the Corinthian does it because he enjoys it. In addition, both are loyal servants of Morpheus, mainly due to his having re-created them to be that way. Both are in their second incarnations as their first acted in a threatening way towards Morpheus. The first Corinthian was another one of the errant dreams that had escaped the Dreaming during Morpheus' capture and found pleasure as a serial killer on earth.

He was destroyed and recreated by Morpheus and forced to return to the Dreaming. Matthew, on the other hand, is prone to becoming discontented with, and despairing of his current form and is continuously being recreated. As a team they work well, because Matthew is inquisitive by nature and loves to probe, while the Corinthian simply acts without thinking at all. In addition, their emotional differences also seem to support each other (or at least cancel each other out), as Matthew easily gets upset by violence and the Corinthian has the emotional capacity of a brick.
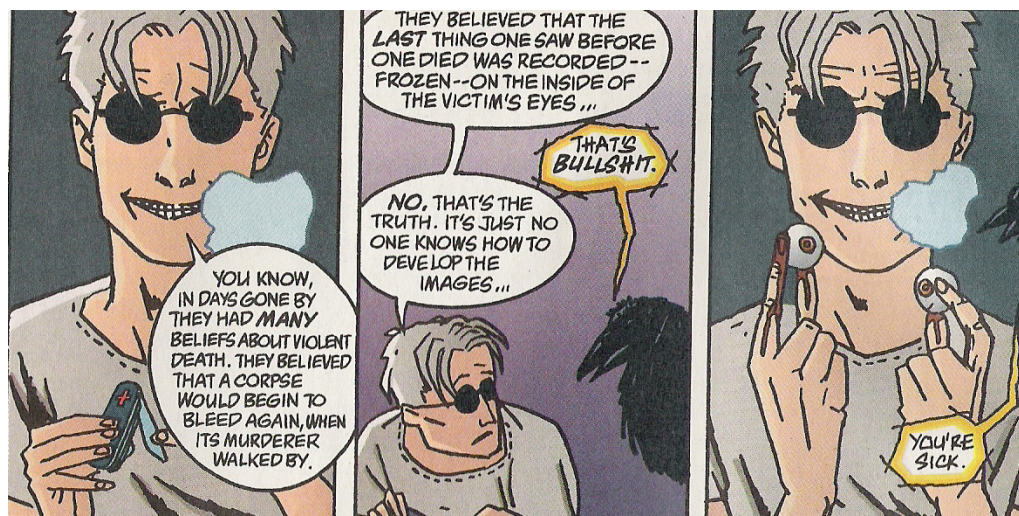

Fig.3.19 – Hungry for eyes: Matthew and the Corinthian
(*The Sandman* #64:12)

Ironically, these two ambassadors of death are not affiliated with Death herself. Or are they? What slowly becomes clear during the unveiling of the narrative is that Death actually works for Dream. Maybe she only does this in the same capacity of a sibling protecting another sibling, or perhaps their jurisdictions are more complexly interwoven than previously anticipated. More certain is the fact that, if he desired, Morpheus could have a greater influence on who Death takes and who she leaves. For example, he allows death for the immortal Orpheus, reincarnates Matthew and the Corinthian, and sends Hector Hall to the underworld. Gaiman is trying to make a clear yet subtle comment here: Dream is more powerful than Death.

Robin 'Puck' Goodfellow and Loki Skywalker: This is the good-for-nothing pair that Matthew and the Corinthian are sent to confront. The only thing these two live for is mischief, a fact that is emphasised by their roots in classic mythology. The one (Loki) hails from Norse mythology, the brother of Odin and tormentor of the mighty thunder god, Thor. The other (Puck) springs from the world of Faerie, ruled by Oberon and Titania, and has become infamous through his role in William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The play was a parting gift from Morpheus to the royal couple on their visit to earth in the late 16th century. Both of the tricksters are loose on earth and joined forces to kidnap baby Daniel and 'burn' the mortality out of him for a mystery supporter. A close reading of the text may point the finger to Morpheus as being the enigmatic force behind the troublesome two.

The interesting thing about these two characters is how their respective realms view them and what fates they suffer for their actions. Arguably, they are roughly the same (with perhaps some small difference in their respective motives - oddly enough, Loki seems to also want revenge for simply feeling indebted to Morpheus). Loki, however, is a criminal in his realm, a rogue 'fit to be bound in the entrails of his son and have scalding venom leaked over his eyes all the time'. He has acted malignantly towards Odin and the rulers of his ultra-strict homeland. Puck, however, also comes from a monarchy, but one that seems to exist only for the pursuit of mischief and merriment - as long as no ill will befalls it. The morals of these two characters do not divide them, but their individual heritages do eventually determine their condemnation. The Corinthian delivers a unique brand of punishment that reflects this: he snaps Loki's neck, digs his eyes from their sockets, eats them and leaves his corpse to the mythical Odin. With Puck, he merely has a short conversation, after which he lets him go.

Fig.3.20 – Loki and Puck burning the 'mortality' from Daniel

(*The Sandman* #66:1)

Lyta Hall and Delirium: This ultra-strange pair find themselves in similar circumstances, that are, nevertheless, leagues apart in reception. Both are powerful beings in their own worlds: Lyta was once a very powerful Fury and Delirium was once a different entity called Delight.

It is clear that both have suffered some terrible loss or trauma that was directly responsible for the transformation they had to undergo and the individuals they eventually became. Though Lyta's loss clearly refers to the near annihilation of her family, it has never been established what happened in Delirium's past. Whatever the reason for her transformation, she is now the wildly deranged Delirium and completely preoccupied with finding her missing dog, Barnabas. What makes these two characters so interesting is that they both tried to pursue 'standard' channels to find the things that they once lost, but only proved more successful in their quests when they finally embraced their respective insanities.

It would seem that as humans, our sympathies should lie with the mortal Lyta and not with the supernatural and selfish wanderings of the Endless. Though counter-intuitive, the reverse seems to happen. Lyta's plight becomes vengeful and notably inhuman; her demands to have Morpheus' head seem to be excessive and unfair. Even her protector, the Thessalian witch Larissa warns:

> 'And you … are a pawn … who briefly became a Knight … or a queen. And you've just been taken off the board … as I understand it, your actions have ensured that you will never see Daniel again … I'd take a shower, and then start running, if I were you. Lots of people are going to want to hurt you for what you've done. Including me.' (*The Kindly Ones* Issue 13, p.20)

Pity for Lyta now seems almost impossible to summon, especially in the light of the fact that at the end it is her own doing (causing Morpheus' death) that 'dooms' Daniel to immortality. Sympathy for Delirium, on the other hand seems as easy to conjure as sympathy for a lost puppy. Some enigmatic yet profound event in her past has destroyed the youthful innocence and beauty of Delight and left only Delirium in its burning wake. Now powerful but pitiful, she incoherently searches for the four-legged companion she got on loan from her brother, Destruction. And along the way, she finds herself in a fret over her brother's situation, just as would be expected from a baby sister. There are

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few more emotional moments in the entire series than when she eventually does manage to find her dog in the care of an old street beggar.

Hob Gadling and Dream: It may be subjective, but the human-inhuman reversal we encounter between Lyta and Delirium may also be found between Hob and Dream. Hob Gadling is not immortal; he is an ancient mortal. Like a few other humans in history, he simply does not grow old or die. It is not clear if any one reason exists for this phenomenon; it seems that Death has simply 'forgotten' about him. He has assumed multiple identities since his original life as a contemporary of Chaucer. In that life he also befriended Dream and they sit to have a drink together every hundred years. The friendship seems normal enough: both have seen many generations pass; both are known by different names in different cultures and different times; and both failed to prolong relationships with mortal women. Yet over the next several meetings, it is the godlike Dream who informs Hob on the inhumanity of slavery, while Hob is the one that finds no passion in the plays of another famous contemporary, William Shakespeare. The human is the one who observes objectively that life is full of pain and suffering, while Dream is the one to have an emotional outburst during one of their meetings in the 19th century. It is, however, in *The Kindly Ones* that their biggest reversal may be observed: the mortal Hob warns the Endless that he can 'feel' Death coming for Morpheus. There is a definite reversal here, as the human is not only concerned about the 'god', but also manages to outlive him.

The writer also tries to make a further comment here: the death, maiming, destruction and overall abuse of deities and myths are fair game. He allows his readers no easy assumption in their view of gods, legends and other deities. Fate and destiny might be real, but absolute safety is not; it reminds us that even though the characters in *The Sandman* may seem way above the common man in spiritual or cosmic status, they are just as prone to peril and demise.

The Kindly Ones series also features some fine examples of Neil Gaiman's particular brand of humour. It is rather impressive that such a sombre book can still succeed in being so silly and satirical at times. For instance, in departing from Destiny's garden, Delirium literally leaves by turning herself into a leaf that gets tossed around by the wind. Then there is the previous lord of hell, Lucifer who now plays piano in a nightclub called *Lux* (Latin for light). As if that is not ironic enough, he is found playing a song called 'Sit down you're rocking the boat'. Also, there is the eye-eating Corinthian who calls himself a 'visionary' and the mischievous pair, Loki and Puck, who disguise

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themselves as detectives named Luke Pinkerton and Gordy Fellowes (as in Robert 'Puck' Goodfellow).

There is also a numerological undercurrent to this particular part of the series. It cannot be coincidence that multiples of three are hidden everywhere. Three women appear on the cover of the magazine Lyta is holding as she walks down a street with multiples of three on every sign she passes. She also meets the creature, Geyron, who has three heads. The Corinthian has three mouths, while Luke Pinkerton wears three sets of bandages and Rose Walker spends three hours at Wynch Cross. The Corinthian also eats three sets of eyes and the Dreaming pulls Matthew back three times. Morpheus stumbles upon Larissa, who just happens to be his third jilted lover. Morpheus' lifeline is threatened by the three Fates, as well as the three Furies, who might in fact be the same beings. If this is not just some strange coincidence, why would the writer include this recurring theme? It seems appropriate considering the theme of the Triple Goddess in the book, but could he be saying something else? Gaiman has proven to be comfortable with freely co-opting, shaping and creating an array of religiously tied characters. Many of the myths and religions he seems to be dealing with, however, seem to be in decline: the Faeries have abandoned the earth realm, the Endless are in discord or missing, Christianity is largely altered by Satan's abandonment of his role as the antithesis of God etc. Even though the world Gaiman has created is free of the amazing exploits of superheroes, he still makes it clear that lots of marvellous things are happening all around people, but they seem to be wholly blind to the wonder that this world holds. Here Gaiman is making a social commentary, as if he holds no concern for anything sacred if it interferes with his story. His love of the story and the interactions of the characters, human and divine, is more of a commentary in favour of Humanity rather than Divinity. Ironically, it is the habitually dishonest Loki who gives the most honest comment on the gods' mutability and modern roles in *The Sandman* series. When asked who he is, he gives the following clearly articulated response:

> 'I am merely one who regrets the abandonment of Theology, in these strange
> warm times… you don't have to believe in God. But what about gods? Eh? The
> plurality of Powers and Dominions. The Lords and Ladies of Field and Thorn,
> of Asphalt and Sewer, gods of the Telephone, War, gods of the Hospital and
> Car-crash?' (*The Kindly Ones* Issue 5 p.24)

Viewed as a whole, the focus on *The Sandman* is on the idea of 'story', not any particular story, but 'story' as an autonomous entity with all its attributes like the act and culture of storytelling. Morpheus' tale along with that of the other gods and the myths depicted in the series are not completely incidental, but do in fact take a back seat to the process and notion of story. To my mind this is the most significant contribution that Gaiman has made to the genre of comic books and literature as a whole, as he made a valiant effort to revive the 'story' in its purest and basest form, not only through the telling of marvellous stories, but also through the resurrection a culture of storytelling. If one has a look at the *World's End* collection, one would quickly become aware that, not only does the emphasis here fall on a complex set of stories that interweave, but also on the storytellers, their respective points of view and cultural heritages and the act of story telling itself. Whether starting, concluding, embellishing or discrediting the series, considering *The Sandman* collection in its entirety, it becomes clear why Morpheus is also referred to as the Prince of Stories. He makes storytelling his number one priority above all else and in retrospect it seems that the greatest part of his interaction with prominent humans (most notably Shakespeare) seems to have been in his capacity to inspire or prompt the process of storytelling.

The settings of the secondary stories, as well as those pertaining to the main narrative, are compromised by an unfathomable vagueness. In dealing with all these multiple lands, dimensions, characters, continuities, times and places, the author opts for fluidity between locales rather than a rigid and limited time and place or setting. As an example, Gaiman never feels it particularly necessary to circumscribe certain notions like Heaven, Hell or any other aspect from Christian theology, in terms of the book's context and its main setting; that is. The Dreaming. In spite of this lack of definition, however, angels (another Christian concept) come and go from the Dreaming to earth and to other points not referenced in the story or in theology. Greek legends, from places beyond any of the expected worlds like Olympus and Hades' underworld, freely come and go as they please. The Dreaming itself, being the world of dreams, is believed to be fluid and amorphous. It could therefore be understood that even though places within the story are given specific names, their geography is largely indefinite. This may sound confusing, but what it actually implies is that the reader should not feel it necessary to 'jump' to different locales in his/her reading, but rather view all locales as being part of the main setting (The Dreaming). In this way, Gaiman saves himself from scrutiny, as the settings, character and any other supposed historical aspect from his stories are not to be viewed as true depictions, but rather 'dreamed' or imagined depictions. Gaiman does not like

to 'remember' things the way they happened, but the way he remembered them. It is with this philosophy in mind that the reader should approach the text.

Analysing the aspect of time and how it is dealt with in *The Sandman* would warrant a complete study on its own. Like setting and any other aspect of narration, this should also be viewed within the context of dreams. One might dream a whole lifetime in a second of dreaming, and similarly in the text, the notion of time is rather arbitrary. It could be said, however, that time in *The Kindly Ones* is mostly chronological, as it is one of the very few story-arcs that stick to a start−development−climax−conclusion formula. An interesting aspect of time in *The Sandman* is that story-time seems to adhere to the series' printing schedule. For example, not only was Morpheus released in 1988 (the first year of publication), but the five years of publishing the book coincides with five years of Morpheus' freedom from imprisonment. It is more problematic to synergise story-time or publishing-time with the idea of time in the separate mythos that the books deal with. In terms of Norse mythology (one of the mythological references), how close or far are we from the 'the cataclysmic battle of the gods' (Ragnarok)? In terms of Shakespeare's tales, how long has it been since the events of *Midsummer Night's Dream* took place? Even though *The Sandman* as a title does not overtly explore its ties with the DC Universe (Setting of all other DC titles and their characters), the question arises does 'time' in the DC Universe correspond with time in *The Sandman* or the Dreaming? Do Superman, Batman or Spiderman visit the Dreaming in their sleep? Presumably, the answers would all be yes, even though it could never fully be determined given that *The Sandman* very rarely, and never after the first series, crosses over to the main DC Universe. All we know for certain is that the series depicts the early 1990s in 'the real world' (the DC Universe is believed to be a parallel plane to the real world), with no definite relationship to any other time-table. This indefinable quality of time adds to the primary emphasis on 'story', while putting notions like chronology, authenticity or accountability on the back-burner.

Even as it comes to its conclusion, *The Sandman* series seems so overly preoccupied with storytelling that many stories only begin or continue by issue 75, with no intention by the writer to conclude or resolve them. The only stories that find an end are: the main narrative of Morpheus, Lyta Hall's quest, Zelda's ailing conditioning and Alex Burgess' suffering. Daniel's reign, however, has just begun, Cluracan's nemesis was just born and Nuala's wanderings are never explored. Further, many other story lines and threads are not resolved. The consequences of Hell's new management are not

explored, Loki and Puck's employer is never revealed, Destruction's post remains vacant and Lucifer travels to points unknown. The plot arc is clear for Morpheus himself, but the writer feels no obligation to tidy up any of the secondary narratives or the fates of the secondary characters. While this does leave things unresolved, it adds to both the pseudo-realism and the focus on Morpheus' narrative.

It may seem that Gaiman wrote to a point, intending to conclude all the loose ends, but then just abandoned the project halfway and killed off Morpheus. Given the meticulousness with which Gaiman shaped the 'fine yarn' of this tale, it seems extremely unlikely that he would end the series in such a way. Looking at the grander picture, it becomes very clear that not only did Gaiman intend to end things the way he did, but he also had every step planned along the way with uncanny precision. For instance, by the time Dream actually dies in *The Kindly Ones*, the reader is not surprised at all. Hints were given along the entire series, which slowly made you aware of the impending doom of Morpheus. This points to planning and intention; before even starting *The Sandman*, Gaiman knew exactly when the tale of Morpheus would come to an end. This sort of planning allowed him to carefully arrange hints (or perhaps auguries within the context) throughout the entirety of the story – from beginning to end. These hints are to be found all over, for instance, in *Fables and Reflections* Morpheus' heir, Daniel, is found in his crib holding a raven's feather. The raven's feather, a symbol of death in many cultures, seems to indicate that death is on the way. By the time the boy is captured by Loki and Puck and tossed into the fire (his mortality was burned away like that of Hercules), the feather he was holding turns into a phoenix's feather. The initiated would realise that this points to the possibility of Daniel being resurrected from the dead, like the mythical Phoenix out of the fire. Gaiman has twice told us that 'A King will forsake his kingdom. Life and Death will clash and fray. The oldest battle begins once more'. The Grey Ladies say this to Destiny in the *Seasons of Mist series* and then the Fates read it again off a message in a fortune cookie, and say: 'We've had that one before, haven't we?' and 'It's definitely familiar, dearie.' This also further establishes the notion that the Grey Ladies, The Fates and The Furies are one and the same. We're dealing here with a self-fulfilling prophesy. The prophesy comes true when Dream comes to Nuala's aid, allowing the Kindly Ones to tear apart the Dreaming and force Morpheus' death. This was brought on by the following string of events:

- Nuala only came into Morpheus' life as a gift from the Faerie in an attempt to obtain the keys to Hell.

- Morpheus got the key to Hell due to an old grudge held by Lucifer.

- Morpheus only encounters Lucifer again after his sister Death prompts him to rescue Nada (a wronged ex-lover) from Hell. She does this during a discussion at a rare family meeting.

- Dream and Death had the opportunity to have this conversation only because this meeting was called by Destiny.

- Destiny calls the family meeting because he was told to do so by the Grey Ladies.

In other words, the prophesy itself set events into motion that led to the fulfilment of the prophesy.

The Kindly Ones illustrator Marc Hempel, also hints at the doom and dark days ahead by shading the 'gutters' (spaces between frames) black whenever action shifts to the Dreaming. Simply, darkness surrounds Morpheus and the Dreaming, a darkness that is offset and sharply contrasted when the pure white Daniel becomes the new Dream. The classic connotation of black (death) and white (life, purity) is applied here in abundance. The two Dreams, Morpheus and Daniel, are sharply contrasted as Daniel is dressed in pure white with long white hair, while Morpheus is dark in appearance with black hair and clothes.

At the end of the story, this seems to be exactly what *The Sandman* is all about – a new Dream. Morpheus' imprisonment was both a humanising and dehumanising undertaking for the Endless; in *The Kindly Ones*, he finally acknowledges it. After claiming responsibility for the death of Orpheus and showing Nuala his 'bleak mask of regret', he says:

> 'Have you ever been imprisoned? I was … I spent over eighty years in a glass bottle, like a genie … or a city … I could have waited until the earth crumbled to dust. But still, I waited. I told Ishtar that she was wrong. That I was not changed. That I did not change. But in truth, I think I lied to her.' (*Thw Kindly Ones*, Issue 11 p.6)

It is this change in Morpheus that gives him new perspective and insight into the life of his son and the mortals over whom he has great influence. Mainly due to the damaging influence of his

imprisonment, his ever-growing lethargy and his personal guilt, a new Dream and 'dream' are needed, and hence subsequently created. The vocation of Dream is merely augmented by the addition of Daniel's human attributes.

Fig.3.21 – Getting to know the locals: the new Dream and Cain
(*The Sandman* #71:15)

Daniel is Dream, but different in many ways. Unlike Morpheus, he did not have to undertake a long, elaborate journey to accomplish 'humanness'. He was born a human and therefore makes a much

more balanced Dream from the start. His human qualities allow him to be a lot more susceptible and open to change and the effects it has on him. This can be seen in the last conversation between Destruction and his brother (The Wake, p.75):

> Destruction: I wasn't going to come and then I thought, sod it. I'll stop by, give
> you a little advice. You've never been inclined to listen to my advice in the past,
> but well: Things change, don't they?
>
> Dream: Yes, they do.
>
> Destruction: Wise lad.

3.2   The Characters of *The Sandman*

Fig.3.22 – The Endless: Destiny, Death, Dream, Desire, Despair and Delirium
(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4:26)

Here follows a description of the primary characters in *The Sandman*, who are collectively known as *The Endless*. They are included here as they are influential in the actions and reactions that Morpheus displays throughout the narrative. Morpheus' dealings with his fellow family members have had a

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profound influence on the motivation for his 'hero's journey', his path to realisation and humanisation, as well as his sensitive and fluctuating mental state.

Death, of The Endless

Fig.3.23 – Death

(www.bourbon-street.net/index)

Like most anthropomorphic representations of death, Death of The Endless meets with the recently deceased and guides them into their new existence. This particular incarnation of death is, however, the complete opposite of traditional personifications of death. In English culture, we encounter a rather sinister character, named The Grim Reaper. He is depicted as an intimidating skeleton in a black robe brandishing a scythe. The fact that Death of The Endless is female (death has a culturally masculine connotation), has a pleasant and caring demeanour, and dresses in casual 'gothic' attire widely removes her from traditional perceptions of death. She also fails to conform to the 'angel of death' in Christian mythology, who is also a masculine being believed to be a celestial entity and, by implication, an instrument of God. This Christian view of death has inherent moral and religious implications. While being greatly feared, the Angel of Death is still considered to be an instrument of God and its actions are therefore implicitly classified as 'good'. The previously mentioned Grim Reaper is viewed as an evil force who, independently from a higher power, decides to take lives as he sees fit and therefore serves no greater purpose apart from his own malevolent agenda. Death of the Endless, apart from being presented as a rather lovable teenage girl, promotes a more unbiased or natural view of death that is neither good nor bad, but views death as an issue free of moral or ethical attributes.

From her dress sense to her personality, Death is a walking paradox. She is presented as an attractive young woman dressed in stripped-down 'gothic attire' — often a black top and jeans. Besides being deathly pale, there are two other defining elements to her appearance: her Egyptian-motif eye make-up and a silver ankh (Egyptian cross) pendant that she wears round her neck. But it's her untamed black hair and general ashen appearance. These two facets of her appearance allowing the reader to always identify her, no matter what guise she assumes. Character–wise, she might be described as being pleasant, perky and nurturing (especially to Dream). It is this strange paradox that has helped Death become one of the most popular characters from the title and led to the creation of two of her own books entitled *Death: The high cost of living* and *Death: The time of your life*.

Except for being the secondary character that most frequently appears in the pages of *The Sandman*, Death's realm is not portrayed in the series, apart from a brief scene in *Song of Orpheus* and *Sandman Special #1*. Although her realm is never explored to the extent of that of the other characters, it is still an extension of the paradox that radiates from her persona. In addition to the utter

unconventionality of her 'apartment', she also has a collection of floppy hats and two goldfish named Slim and Wandsworth.

Destiny of The Endless

Destiny continues to walk...

He is holding a book. Inside the book is the Universe.
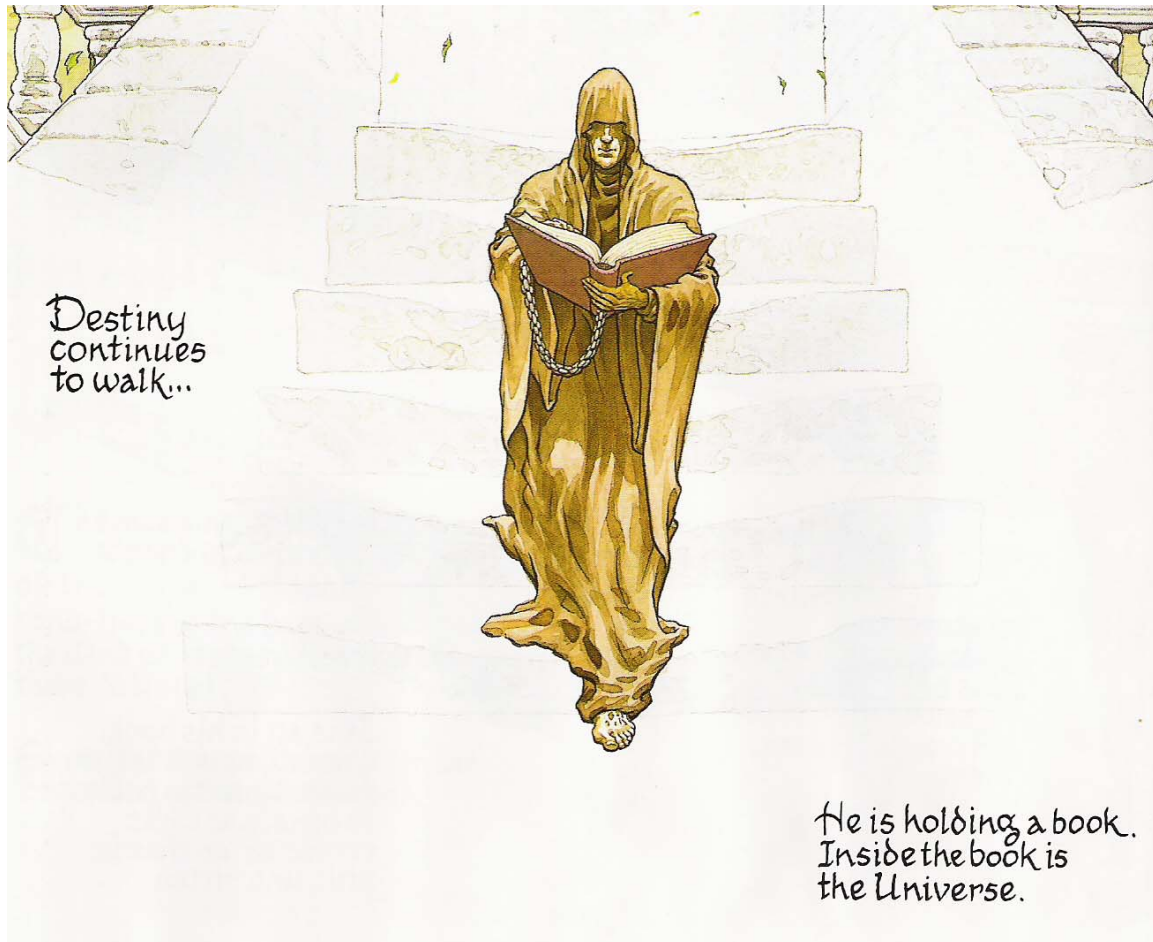
Fig.3.24 – Destiny
(*The Sandman − Endless Nights* p.152)

The enigmatic oldest of The Endless is portrayed as a tall figure, obscured within a brown robe and cowl. He is constantly engaged with a large book chained to his right wrist. Destiny does not cast a shadow when he walks, nor does he leave footprints. Destiny's realm is an immaculately kept garden, with a hedge maze through which he walks continuously. Most curiously, however, Destiny is blind – a fact that does not appear to hinder him. He is the least characterised and least used of the Endless in the series. He makes his first appearance in the series at the beginning of the fourth

collection, *Season of Mists*. In a subtle way, he seems to direct Endless family affairs; it is he who calls the family meeting that begins *Season of Mists*.

As previously stated, Destiny represents the archetype of Father Time/Chronos and it is therefore conceivable that his blindness may hint at the uncertainty of the future, which is like a blank canvas that is filled as time progresses.

Desire of The Endless

Fig.3.25 – Desire

(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4 p.2)

'It' is the third youngest of the Endless. Desire is depicted as a beautiful, perfectly androgynous figure who is not so much genderless as multiple-gendered. Desire blends in effortlessly with whatever environment it finds itself in. Desire is prone to smoking, and brandishes an ever present sly smile, though not at all like Death. Desire lives in a massive statue of itself, known as the *Threshold*. The attire of this character extends on its ambiguous persona and helps to establish its 'genderlessness' by being both feminine and masculine at the same time.

Desire is easily the cruellest of the Endless and seems obsessed with interfering in the affairs of its elder siblings, particularly Morpheus. The motivation behind this is not clear, but seems to be simply a variation on childish teasing. Desire is not exactly unaware of the consequences of its

actions, but considers those consequences ultimately unimportant, a position which anger Morpheus and Death in particular. Desire is the twin sibling of Despair (their wildly different appearance would not so much as hint at this fact), and the two sometimes act in concert. The relationship is not clear, however, and Desire is much more distant from its siblings than Despair. The theme of pairs in *The Sandman* plays an important role, and the pairing of Desire and Despair makes an interesting social comment through the progression of the tale. Similar to Buddhist philosophy, the writer is claiming that desire and despair often go hand in hand and are not mutually exclusive.

Being a hermaphrodite, Desire makes the Endless line-up come out perfectly. They total seven members, the perfect number, but by virtue of Desire's gender, they contain both four males and four females.

Despair of The Endless
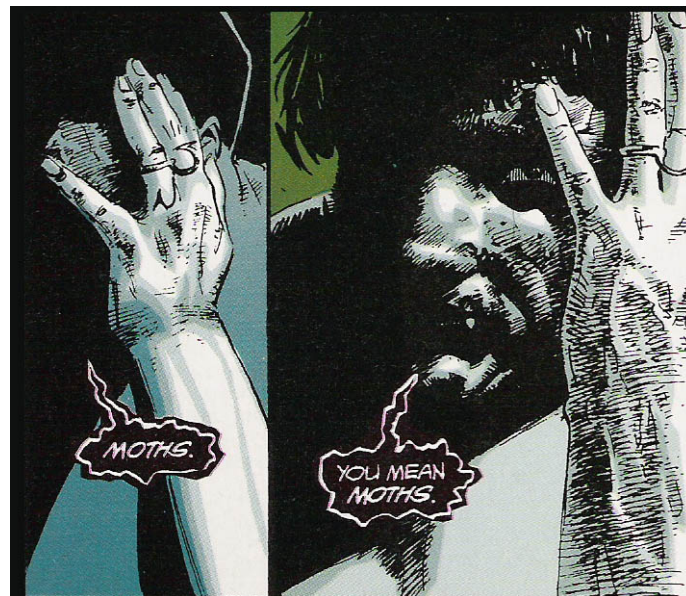
Fig.3.26 – Despair

(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4 p.28)

Desire's twin sister is presented as a squat, obese and stark troll-like creature with black hair. She habitually appears in the nude, and on a finger of her left hand she wears a ring with a hook attached to it, with which she compulsively carves her flesh. Her realm is a grey space covered in a white fog and countless mirrors. These mirrors match mirrors in the human world, through which she looks on those who are in despair.

Despair sometimes acts together with Desire when it is plotting against the elder Endless, most notably when Despair takes on a challenge with Morpheus over the life of Joshua Abraham Norton, seemingly at Desire's bidding. She is less distanced from the family than Desire, though, and seems to have some affection at least for Delirium, and also to share Delirium's affection for Destruction. She does not say much, and consequently appears brusque, but her speech at Morpheus' wake reveals her sympathy and feeling for him.

Late in the series, it is revealed that the Despair we see is not the first Despair, but a second aspect. The original Despair is seen in *The Endless Nights-series*. She is portrayed in much the same way there as she is now - fat, flabby, and unclothed - but taller and with red tattoos all over her body, and she appears more socially adept.

Destruction of The Endless
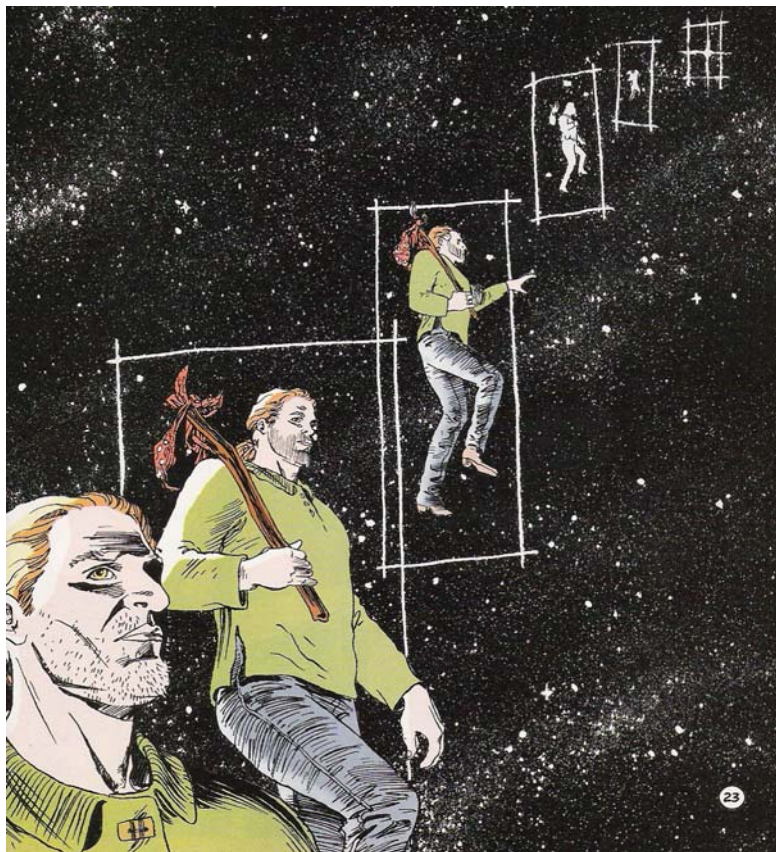
Fig.3.27 – Destruction
(*Brief Lives* Chapter 8 p.23)

He is the fourth eldest of the Endless – and is depicted as a big, red-haired, bearded man. He wears colourful clothes with no particular theme and always appears to be happy despite his disillusionment with his vocation. When Delirium and Morpheus encounter him in the seventh collection of issues in the series, *Brief Lives*, he has taken to wearing his hair in a ponytail and owns a talking dog, Barnabas. Like Death, his realm is not portrayed in the series. A further subtle comment could be deduced from this, as 'death and destruction' seem to be everywhere.

Destruction abandoned his realm and his responsibilities some time around the turn of the 17th century at the dawn of the modern age. He did not cease to exist as the active aspect of Destruction, he simply stopped directing the affairs over which he had control. As he says, destruction did not stop, it was merely no longer ordered and controlled. Destruction features most prominently in *Brief Lives*, in which his siblings Morpheus and Delirium set out to track him down. When they finally meet, they do not exactly argue but cannot seem to agree; Destruction's choice of path baffles and to some degree infuriates Morpheus, while Destruction finds it hard to comprehend Morpheus' position and concentrates on trying to impart to him some wisdom on the necessity of change and self-knowledge. Delirium just wants her brother back; she is wholly dependent on her siblings for support, particularly her older brothers.

Destruction is self-obsessed in the most positive sense of that term: after giving up his responsibilities, he concentrates instead on attempting to learn about his own nature and exert control over it. This is manifested in his deliberate attempt to subvert his own essential nature and create instead of destroy. He is shown at various points writing indifferent poetry, painting a trivial picture, cooking a meal left untouched by those for whom it was intended, and brewing Greek coffee which Delirium fails to drink properly.
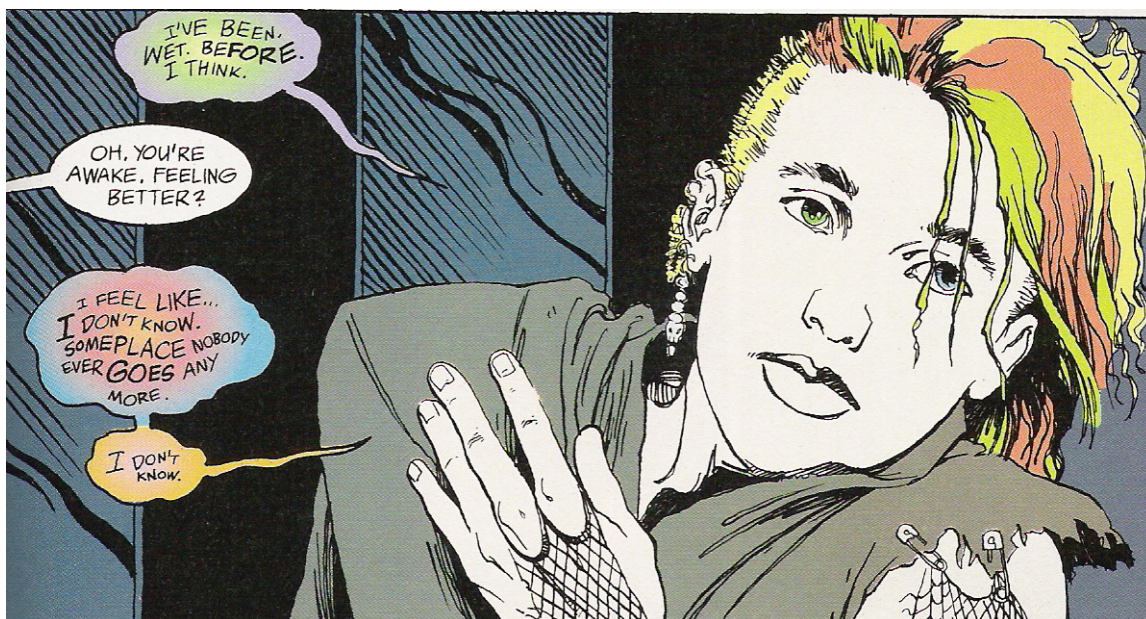
Fig.3.28 – Delirium

(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.7 p.7)

Delirium, known to some cultures dealt within the series as *Mania*, is the youngest of the Endless. She is usually quite short, and thin. Her hair changes style and colour constantly, as do her clothes. Her shadow never reflects her shape and is tangible, like velvet. She is said to smell of sweat, late nights, sour wine and old leather. Her realm is a chaotic, constantly changing mass of colours and strange objects and shapes, and contains a sundial with the inscription 'Tempus Frangit' (time breaks, a Latin pun on the phrase 'Tempus Fugit', time flies.) Delirium travels with a 'guardian' of sorts, a German Shepherd dog named Barnabas – given to her by Destruction.

Initially known as Delight, she was changed into Delirium long before the advent of the storyline. Most of the time, she is scatterbrained: she often forgets the thread of her conversations, and comes out with offbeat and seemingly inconsequential observations. Todd Klein, the series' letterer, draws her speech as letters - which do not quite match in height or line up neatly against a multi-coloured background, to illustrate this. Very rarely, however, she is able, with an effort, to become more controlled in thought and speech, at which point her speech is drawn more neatly and the background fades to white.

The other Endless all seem to be fond of Delirium, to varying degrees, and protective of her. She in turn is affectionate towards them, particularly Destruction. She could also be viewed as manipulative in this aspect, as she rarely takes on a task without some assistance from her siblings who she convinces and ropes in by seeming utterly 'helpless'. She has, however, proven quite resourceful on occasion, leaving the reader to wonder if she is the helpless innocent she appears to be.

Delirium features in many of the most inventive sequences of the series, particularly in the seventh collection, *Brief Lives*, in which she and Morpheus attempt to track down Destruction. One of the most striking frames of the whole series features Delirium lying on a hotel bed with a bottle of bubble-blowing liquid, blowing bubbles in a variety of impossible shapes - diamonds, crosses, cats and small alien beings with umbrellas. Also, in a very important moment in the story, when Destiny imparts upon Dream the information and the means by which he may find Destruction, Delirium manages to collect herself so much that her usual mismatched appearance disappears, and she becomes a symmetrical creature, reflecting perhaps that in delirium, delight still exists, no matter how painful.

It may be noted that Delirium once exhibited a very deep form of order. Towards the end of *Brief Lives*, as she recounts to Destruction the steps she and Dream undertook to find him, her appearance - hairstyle, clothing, etcetera - recapitulates in almost the exact order it had originally appeared.

Fig.3.39 – Morpheus
(*The Sandman* #8:28)

In addition to the detailed description of Morpheus already supplied in Chapter Two, a moment should be taken to note the significance of Morpheus' name. Keeping with the nature of contemporary mythology and its way of incorporating and assimilating elements from classic mythology, Gaiman surely based his character, at least partially, on Morpheus — the principal Greek god of dreams and sleep. At first glance this Morpheus, as encountered in the poem *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid, does bare striking similarities to the Sandman. For instance, he has the ability to appear in dreams, is suggested by Ovid to be able to mimic humans perfectly and has a sibling which is the personification of Death. The similarities end there, however, as the rest of the Sandman's family tree and the details surrounding his quests and dealings are primarily attributed to Gaiman. Something worth noticing here, however, is the fact that all the tales contained within Ovid's *Metamorphoses* deals with transformation, change and development. The first poem, for instance begins with the very first 'metamorphosis', the creation of the universe, and ends with the

death and deification of Julius Caesar. Many of the stories show the relationship between mortals and the Gods, the consequences of obedience or disobedience as people are either punished or rewarded by a final transformation. It is fitting then that Gaiman's Morpheus does not only have the ability to undergo an instantaneous metamorphoses of physical appearance, but also find himself as part of a larger metamorphoses where he undergoes a journey from deity to mortal man.

Strictly within the context of this particular graphic novel, however, the fact that he has a personal name does not seem arbitrary, as none of the other Endless have names outside their titles. His name, therefore, should have some significance apart from its roots in mythology. Worth considering here is his other title as 'Lord-Shaper' and the meaning of his name's root word: *morphe*. The Greek word 'morphe' comes from 'metamorphosis', which means 'a change of shape'. Throughout the series, several different characters comment on how nothing can remain unchanged forever; all things evolve or change. This insight is shared by Destruction in *World's End*, the Furies in *The Kindly Ones* and Lucien in *The Wake*. Dream, however, clearly did not agree with this sentiment, and many of the other characters concurred that he was forever constant and fixed, including his ex-wife, Calliope. His name could subtly hint at the change that he might inevitably have incurred through his prolonged imprisonment.

The change in Morpheus could be summarised as follows: he became more human, humane, sensitive to the plight of humanity and, by implication, less 'god-like'. This notion is supported by the fact that Morpheus' successor Daniel (a human boy who became a mortal and not the other way around like Morpheus) takes the role of Dream of the Endless but not his name. After his metamorphosis into Dream during Morpheus' wake (*The Wake*, p.26), he says that he is 'not Morpheus. I have no right to that name. I am Dream of the Endless: it is enough'.

Now that we have become acquainted with *The Sandman*, its narratives, plotlines and characters, and considered the role of fantasy and folklore in its content, we can proceed to look at *The Sandman* in its wider role as contemporary myth.

C h a p t e r   4

CONTEMPORARY MYTHOLOGY AND ITS HEROES

4.1   Introduction

At the beginning it was stated that this study sets out to show how contemporary fiction draws on traditional mythology to create archetypal fictional heroes and narrative patterns with mythological characteristics. These then perform functions comparable to those myths in pre-modern societies. For ease of classification, these postmodern works of fiction that assimilate elements from traditional mythology are referred to as 'contemporary mythology'. It should be noted, however, that contemporary mythology can in no way be the equivalent to traditional mythology in every possible respect, as traditional mythology formed an integral part of the religions of the ancient world and was a means of explaining occurrences in the 'real world'. Contemporary mythology is therefore a term which is used in reference to works like *The Sandman* and *The Matrix*, which do not constitute examples of a 'proper mythology', but rather works of fiction in which characters and narratives, with the attributes of traditional mythological heroes and story patterns, are to be found. To avoid confusion, it is necessary to provide my description of the term 'traditional mythology' as I use it in this study:

> A term collectively referring to the myths of all world cultures, attributable to traditional authorship or originating in the pre-modern world. These include the classic mythologies of Rome and Greece, but also those of Native American Indians, Australian Aborigines and ancient Hindu civilisation, amongst many others.

To establish the validity of any claim regarding the concept of 'contemporary mythology', the term 'myth' must firstly be reconsidered in its new application. The *Webster's Dictionary* offers the following definition:

> **Myth** *(1a): a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold a part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief or natural phenomenon. (b)*

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Parable, Allegory. (2a) A popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; especially: one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society. (b) An unfounded or false notion. (3) A person or thing having only an imaginary or unverifiable existence.

The *Webster's Dictionary* also defines 'Mythology' as 'a body of myths dealing with the gods, demigods and legendary heroes of a particular people'. From these two dictionary definitions, the terms that should be noted here are 'ostensibly historical', 'allegory', 'popular', 'unverifiable' and 'legendary'.

In this study, 'myth' is linked to fantasy fiction as the contemporary genre in which it is most prevalent. The collection of J.R.R Tolkien's works, for example, is presented in its entirety as accounts of past events – a supposed 'alternative history' for the people of Europe and in particular Britain. In film, George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga is wholly allegorical, archetypal and also supposedly historical ('A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away …'). Another prominent example of fantasy fiction set in a presumed past, can also be found in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (one of the most influential works in the genre of fantasy fiction). The reason for setting these works in a superficially distant past is rather simple. It aims to authenticate and validate the tale on the premise that if it happened very long ago, in the temporal space occupied by the traditional myths of ancient Rome, for instance, then like these established myths their contemporary counterparts may be considered valid, authoritative and perhaps even containing a shred of 'truth', through association. It also serves to make the tale, and its constituting elements, completely unverifiable. This brings me to another facet of fantasy fiction, which establishes itself as a contemporary fiction drawing on traditional myth, in the same way that authors extrapolate from elements like 'magic', 'religion' or even 'modern technology' to give their tales, and the fictional plane they are set on, an unverifiable quality.

There also remains the question of popularity. Fantasy fiction is, without a doubt, not only the most popular and successful genre (spanning every conceivable medium from film to graphic novels), but also the fastest growing genre of fiction in contemporary society. This has resulted in a collection of fictional characters that attained hero status virtually overnight, an anthology of stories that immediately became the stock of legend and the establishment of fantasy fiction, including science fiction and horror genres, as the most prominent source of popular content on the planet.

4.2   Re-animating Mythology

Analytical psychology relates myth to the most early and primitive level of human intellectual evolution, to a pre-logical mentality stage. This implies that in this modern age of technology and science, anything that does not conform to man's sensory experience or that does not fall well within the boundaries of logical human reasoning should be rejected. So how is it that modern man has been unable to leave behind his 'primitive mentality', that myths filled with noble heroes and fearsome dragons still grab our imagination, that a book like J.R.R Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is, apart from the Bible, the most read book of the 20th century? (Leitner 2005:1). Is it therefore not safe to hazard the suggestion that works of post-modern fiction, in some respects, seem to emulate the conventions of traditional myths?

Like his earliest ancestors, modern man still uses stories and symbols/archetypes to relate his living experience, and more particularly, the elements of his reality perception that cross the boundaries of the physical world and transcend into a metaphysical or spiritual plane. All human civilisations, since the beginning of time, have had their own myths, some of which have been passed down through the ages and are still known today: Gilgamesh, Isis and Osiris, the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, Homer's *The Odyssey*, Virgil's *The Iliad*, the myths of Plato, the *Heike Monogatori*, the legends of the Catholic Saints, King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, the *Edda*, the *Kalevala* and countless more. It is true, however, that mythology experienced a somewhat dormant period around the 17th and 18th centuries, but was revived in the 19th and 20th centuries through art, music, literature and film: *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Sandman*, the *Matrix*, *Dune*, the novels of Terry Pratchet and Harry Potter, to name but a few on a seemingly endless list.

This 're-animation' of mythology has led to the establishment of systems of collection, classification, interpretation of mythological elements and ,inevitably, the study of comparative elements (Archetype/Myth Criticism). Like I stated in Chapter 1, the German anthropologist Adolph Bastian was first to propagate the notion that myths from across the world are built on the same fundamental ideas. These fundamental structures conformed to Jung's 'archetypes' (the structural elements of the collective unconscious), which he claimed were inherent in all humans due to their shared perceptions of notions like 'hero', 'king' or 'quest'. Since, according to Jung, these ideas/symbols are part of the human unconscious, they are by implication timeless and not confined

to a particular age, given that they have been in existence for as long as humans have existed. They are always part of the human condition, embedded in the social unconscious which is therefore the birthplace off all myth – ancient and contemporary. Even though one could take Jung's theories further by safely claiming that there exists in essence no discernible difference between classical and contemporary mythologies due to their shared origins in both the individual and social unconscious collectives, it must be remembered that contemporary mythologies do not enjoy the central position in society as traditional mythologies have. Even though the archetypes of Jung's shared unconscious have made their way into the narratives of our contemporary fictions through characters like Morpheus in works like *The Sandman*, Morpheus is not a god in a true and proper 20th century American mythology, and therefore not the central figure in any mythology, like the gods and heroes of traditional mythology were; he is only an emulation of these archetypes.

4.3   Correlations between the Old and the New

In continuation of the search for the contemporary myth, one has to consider correlations in the most important elements of any myth, both old and new, namely the archetypes. Commonalities between the universal elements of contemporary and ancient myths will bring the critic closer to validating the contemporary myth through its associative relation to the already validated traditional myths.

Battle between the forces of light and darkness: One of the most commonly used mythic elements, is the use of opposing factions. These opposing forces, operating in their binary relation, serve to qualify each other as either 'good' or 'evil', following the notion that without the existence of evil, there can be no good, and vice versa. Ancient examples of this can be found in the *Bhagavad Gita* (classic Hindu text), with the two rivalling groups, the Pandavas and the Kuravas. In works from the 1600s, these opposing factions were still evident, for instance, in Shakespeare's immortal rivalry between the Capulets and the Montagues (*Romeo and Juliet*). In contemporary times, equally strong themes of opposing forces can be seen in the battles between the Planet-side and the Death Star (*Star Wars*), humans and machines (*The Matrix*), the fellowship of the ring and Mordor (*Lord of the Rings*) and even in Harry Potter and Voldemort (*Harry Potter* series). In all these examples, the universal theme of 'power' is strongly present. The evil forces want power (like Sauron in the *Lord of*

the Rings, who needs the power of the ring to control all life in middle earth) and consider all other matters as insignificant and trivial. The forces of good, however, resist the greed for power through the conquering of some internal struggle with their base (evil) nature.

The hero, saviour and Messiah: This indispensable element of any myth takes the form of the main character or protagonist, who has a special quest to complete or mission to fulfil. His nature is both human and supernatural, and in Greek mythology, this dualnature was represented by the hero being a sort of demi-god, usually having one divine and one human parent (like the Greek hero, Achilles). But it is this 'otherness', or supernatural nature of the hero, that implies a destiny filled with dangers and trials, through which the hero must successfully navigate. In the course of the hero's journey, he will often nearly die, but also discover his inner strength and personal potential. Under this category in contemporary myths one might find Frodo Baggins (*Lord of the Rings*), Neo (*The Matrix*), Luke Skywalker (*Star Wars*), as well as many others faced with the task to 'save the universe'. Once the hero overcomes this practically impossible task, the universe or reality of the characters involved will drastically change.

Another, slightly different, variation on the hero archetype might take the form of the Messiah or saviour. This archetype features prominently in Frank Herbert's *Dune*, which is presented as a religious text, recounting the life and times of Kwisatch Haderach, the Messiah. Another case of this character archetype is manifested in the character Neo, from *The Matrix* trilogy, who can perform feats no other human can and serves to 'lead his followers to the truth.' The task or quest of the Messiah/saviour focuses more strongly on an inward or spiritual journey, as opposed to the overtly outward journey of the classical hero. The hero in contemporary fiction is characteristically more internally driven and introspective, and his obstacles and monsters often take the shape of personal (internal) demons, as opposed to the allegorical beasts and dragons his classical counterparts had to face. This anomaly is due to a shift in the social consciousness.

Stephen Harris and Gloria Pantzer, in their book *Classical Mythology – Images and Insights* (1998:230), stated that 'the implicit function of the hero is to redeem humanity, a process begun by Prometheus's defiance of Zeus … by his half-divine nature, his glorious deeds and his relentless pursuit of immortality, the hero uplifts humanity from its dismal condition and reminds us of our

own godlike potential.' Three heroes from Greek mythology personify this definition of the function of a hero:

Perseus: The son of Zeus and Danae. Danae, the princess of Argos, was locked in a tower by her father. The motivation for his actions was to be found in a prophecy that warned that the son of Danae would kill him. Zeus, in appreciation of her beauty, decides to sleep with her and approaches her in the form of a shower of gold. After finding out that Danae bore a child, he has her and the child put to sea in a large chest. They soon find themselves on the island of Seriphus where they are rescued by Dictys, the king's brother. The king of the island, Polydectes, desires Danae and in an attempt to save his mother from these unwanted advances, Perseus offers to bring the king a gift of his choosing. Polydectes agrees to the bargain, but as a gift chooses the head of the gorgon, Medusa. This initiates Perseus's Hero's Journey. With the assistance of Athena and Hermes, he is triumphant in defeating Medusa and acquiring his prized head. He then goes on to rescue Andromeda, his future wife, from a terrible sea monster. After this, he returns to Argos to claim the throne.

Heracles: The son of Zeus and Alcmene, the queen of Tiryns. Zeus tricked her into sleeping with him by taking the form of her husband, King Amphitryon. She fell pregnant and gave birth to twins, Heracles (son of Zeus) and Iphicles (son of Amphitryon). Heracles was credited with accomplishing many great feats, which included assisting various kings, founding the Olympic Games and completing 'the twelve labours'.

Odysseus: The son of the mortals Laertes and Anticleia. Some believed, however, that his Hero status was validated by his supposedly having a half-human, half-god ancestor (Autolycos – son of Hermes). Odysseus ruled over Ithaca as king, with his wife, Penelope, and his son, Telemachus. As ruler he was much loved by the people of Ithaca and celebrated for his prudence, ingenuity and resourcefulness. He proved himself a master strategist for the Greeks during the Trojan War and has the Trojan horse credited to his genius. His Hero's Journey is an amazing one, riddled with wonders and danger.

The Master/Mentor/Father/Old man/Sage: Also a very prominent fixture in myth as every Hero needs to be counter-balanced; where the Hero is young and ignorant, the mentor is old and wise. This character is aware of the hidden potential in the young hero and serves as a teacher and

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guide on the Hero's path to enlightenment. He leads the Hero in his preparatory phase and instils in the Hero a sense of virtue and wisdom. The Master is often privy to the larger context of the Hero's mission/journey and systematically brings the Hero to realise the truth for himself and to free his mind from the illusions brought on by false truths. As already mentioned, some of the most prominent Master figures in contemporary fantasy fiction are those of Obi Wan Kenobi and Yoda from *Star Wars*, as well as Morpheus from T*he Matrix*.

Here are some prominent characters of this particular archetype in traditional mythology:

- **Amotken:** The creator Deity of a North American Indian tribe called the Salish. He dwells in heaven, solitary and alone. He takes the guise of a wise and kind old man with infinite compassion for his creation. There are many legends relating to Amotken and the guidance and wisdom he shares with others.

- **Merlin:** In Arthurian legend, the wise old man and 'natural mystic' who serves as supreme council to King Arthur. He has also, according to legend, raised Arthur and therefore also fills the role of the father figure.

- **Chronos:** In Greek mythology, Chronos is the personification of time. He is usually portrayed as a wise, old man with a long, grey beard (father time).

- **Nereus:** Presented as the 'wise old man of the sea', he is the god of the Mediterranean Sea and the son of Gaia and Pontus. He is the husband of Doris and the father of 50 friendly sea-nymphs, called the Nereids. Nereus is a gentle and very wise old man with the ability to predict the future. He is, however, reluctant to provide guidance to those who seek him out. He will not answer questions until he is caught and often changes his shape to avoid this (such as when Heracles came to ask him the way to the Garden of the Hesperides).

The Quest: Here follows a few examples of mythological quests from traditional mythology for the purpose of comparison to similar quests in contemporary fiction, like those of Luke Skywalker, Frodo Baggins and Neo.

1. The quest for the Holy Grail. In Arthurian legend, a seat at the round table was kept vacant for whoever should accomplish the quest for the Holy Grail. For any person of lesser achievement to sit at the designated place would be fatal. At the crown of his achievement, Sir Galahad took his seat at this space on the table referred to as the Siege Perilous.

2. Jason and the Argonauts on their quest for the Golden fleece. Jason was accompanied by some of the most famous names in mythology on this perilous quest, most notably Orpheus and Peleus.

3. Odysseus and his incredible journey.

4. Heracles and his twelve labours.

5. Perseus and the quest for the head of Medusa.

The Temptation: This archetypal element refers to any possible element of the tale that may distract the Hero from his quest and could take numerous forms. The temptation may come in the form of a love interest, the promise of power or wealth, physical/mental exhaustion or any number of psychological obstacles. The Temptation may also be personified within the tale, as is the case with the Shairan from Muslim mythology. The Shairan coincides with the Muslim belief that the individual is accompanied by two distinct personal entities: an angel who coaxes the individual to perform good deeds and the Shairan (similar to the Christian concept of the devil) who urges the individual towards evil.

4.4 Drawing lines of comparison: *The Matrix* as contemporary fictional treatment of Plato's cave

To illustrate how postmodern fiction incorporates traditional mythological elements, it may be useful to draw a comparison between a traditional myth and a socalled 'contemporary myth'. There are striking similarities between *The Matrix* (a contemporary myth) and Plato's myth of the cave (a

traditional myth), as well as the Far Eastern concept of Maya (also part of a traditional myth). This comparison serves to show how *The Matrix*, a film and work of postmodern fiction, is informed by Plato's myth, a story which illustrates a shift in the human mindset from 'illusion' to 'reality'; this shift is now embodied in *The Matrix*'s depiction of a human movement from 'virtual' to 'real' (Adhyatma 2001). The narrative of *The Matrix* is an example of how Plato's vindication of the difference between appearance and reality is adopted to shape a narrative informed by concepts of new media and their possible implications. This form of adoption of traditional mythological concepts is also prominent in *The Sandman* and other well-known works of 'contemporary mythology'.

To simplify and clarify the comparison, I thought it appropriate to include a short summary of both myths here, as adapted from 'The Matrix: A Vedantic Interpretation' (2001).

Plato's cave and the Eastern concept of Maya: Appearing almost 2400 years ago in his seminal work *The Republic*, Plato recounts a tale of men imprisoned in a cave and misled to believe that the visions they see and the noises they hear are part of their 'reality'. The concept of not being able to trust one's senses conforms to the Eastern notion of 'Maya', which is the illusion that makes up our perception of our ever-fluctuating lives and the physical plane on which we spend them. This 'illusion' or Maya is a mask, a veil that has been drawn over our eyes to conceal the truth of our reality. We are unaware of, yet willing victims of, this deceit which is often fuelled by our own ignorance and unwillingness to believe.

The Matrix: Set in the distant future, in a time when science breathed the 'life' of artificial intelligence into machines. The machines returned the favour by waging war on their masters and nearly annihilating the human race. The surface of the planet is completely overrun by machines, forcing the few remaining humans to congregate in an underground city (Zion) built in a cave/cavern. The war has eradicated all energy sources on the planet's surface (including the sun), forcing the machines to utilise alternative sources in the form of human bio-energy harvested in fields of human clones. In order to keep these 'human crops' stable and alive, their minds are plugged into a computer-generated virtual reality referred to as *The Matrix*. Humans therefore live under the illusion that they are living comfortably on the planet Earth of over a hundred years ago.

A commonality in both works is the presence of the 'saviour' or 'enlightened one'. This character breaks the mental bonds of his captivity and is capable of disregarding the veil of deceit; that is, he sees the world for what it is. He then initiates a quest (a Hero's Journey of sorts) to enlighten the masses and 'free their minds'. In *The Matrix*, however, an isolated group of individuals have already been liberated through the efforts of their leader, Morpheus (Master/Sage archetype). Their struggle against the machines is propagated through their voluntary access to or manipulation of the Matrix. Their efforts have, however, proven to be little more that an exercise in futility; they are in need of a saviour. Such a saviour is to be found in Neo (Hero/Saviour archetype) who as prophesised by an oracle (both the Hero's prophesy and the oracle are recognised archetypes) would, through his supernatural abilities, be able to manipulate the Matrix and liberate the human energy cells. Typically, Neo is unaware of his potential and that is where Morpheus comes in. He believes in Neo against all odds and takes it upon himself to train and enlighten Neo. The first instalment of *The Matrix* trilogy is dedicated to the 'the call', 'the refusal of the call', 'the realisation' and the overcoming of initial, yet immense, personal and physical obstacles.

Morpheus, as master, has to guide the young Neo and prepare him for his enlightenment/realisation of what is truth and what is falsity. In order to come to this point, seeing what reality really is, Neo's connection to the Matrix (the Maya) has to be severed – he needs to be unplugged. The wires that connect Neo to the 'lie' relate to our senses that supply false information and subsequently lead us into believing that lie.

As in *The Matrix*, Plato describes the slow and painful process of coming to terms with 'reality'. *The Matrix* and Plato's cave serve as a metaphor for the human notion that 'ignorance is bliss' and that as humans, we find it easier to deal with the comfort of falsity than the harsh reality of truth. The reaction to the realisation of the truth is treated similarly in both myths – as initially extremely painful, but ultimately rewarding. In the myth of the cave, Plato relates what happens to the philosopher after freeing himself from his bondage and exiting the cave to have the truth dawn on him. He returns to free his fellow captives, who prove more than reluctant to leave and even threaten him with violence.

This extreme disinclination is also evident in *The Matrix*, as is deducible from the following quote:

> Morpheus (addressing Neo): The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you're on the inside, you look around. What do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters. The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do, these people are still part of that system, and that makes them our enemy. You have to understand, most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inert, so helplessly dependent on the system, that they will fight to protect it.

> (as transcribed in: Adhyatma 2001:2)

The most striking correlation between these wildly removed works is in their common purpose and message, a result of both myths (old and new) being rooted in the same social consciousness. We have not become as enlightened as we, as a society, claim to be: we still ridicule, martyr, exile and kill our philosophers and prophets for speaking the truth. We still fear, above all, change. This illustrates how contemporary mythology addresses current social issues as well as time-worn questions that have puzzled the greatest thinkers for millennia, just like the myths of the ancient world.

4.5   The Value of Myth

The question of the value of mythology arises here. Do the contemporary myths −or rather postmodern fiction incorporating traditional elements − hold the same value as the myths of the ancient world? Do they fulfil the same crucial purpose? Joseph Campbell (1972) viewed the structure of myths as more than good stories making use of dated archetypes; he believed that myth was the channel society used to educate us in the art of physical and mental wellbeing. Sabine Leitner (2005) refers to different yet complementary views held by J.R.R Tolkien and J.A Livraga respectively. Tolkien considered myth and fairytale as being one and the same thing. He claimed that they are the most successful modes of communicating moral and ethical issues, as well as preparing the reader for his/her ultimate Hero's journey – their own lives. Livraga said that myths are not pure fictions or lies, but the containers of meta-fictional realities. In this sense myths are not simply pure fictions, but

vehicles for meta-historical realities. These meta-historical realities are the mental and physical driving powers inherent in every man, woman and child which result in a diversity of human behaviour and emotions. These powers also contribute to the internal moral and ethical struggle between 'good' and 'evil'.

In general, myths provide 'maps' or 'guides' which may prove valuable on our own personal journeys. The Hero in myths serves as a role-model or point of reference that assists us in navigating through the treacherous waters of life, and also helps us to define our identities by striving for certain favourable hero characteristics that may protect us from potential harm. The Hero archetype is therefore a fundamental element in the evolution of mankind and a psychological tool to develop our inner being. The universal message of the Hero, that transcends time and cultural divides, is that personal success is dependent on the realisation of personal potential. The mass global appeal of myths speaks of a deep rooted societal need for stories to inspire and heroes to aspire to, a need that has remained constant throughout the ages.

Just like in Joseph Campbell's description of the hero who must endure the fire of initiation, the tales in contemporary mythology must also perform their 'cleansing ritual' in order to prevail. In this way, contemporary mythology, as a genre, helps to define what is right and wrong, just as the traditional stories of ancient civilisations represented, and often shaped, the ideals of society as a whole.

4.6 Contemporary Infused With the Classic: *The Sandman* as Contemporary Mythology

This section brings us back to the main point of discussion: *The Sandman*, which constitutes the embodiment of how the 20th century American graphic novel assimilated traditional mythological character and narrative archetypes. The initial concept of the story is rooted in the children's fable concerning a certain ominous character who sprinkles sand in their eyes to induce sleep. The Sandman in question, however, in no way resembles his fairytale origins. He is one of The Endless, a family of seven beings that has kept watch over the world since before the dawn of mankind. They are often mistaken as being gods, albeit gods created by humans and will only exist as long as humans believe in them. They should rather be viewed, as Stephen Rauch (2003) referred to them, as

'manifestations of consciousness', with their individual names indicating their function or the specific human condition that they 'preside' over. Stephen Rauch (2003:15) offered this following helpful insight: 'In a sense, they are the reason we have gods, for they are the constituents of consciousness, for in Gaiman's world the gods come from dreams.'

It, however, remains to be seen how *The Sandman* incorporates figures from traditional mythology and is validated as contemporary myth. Returning to Webster's basic definition of 'a body of myths dealing with the gods, demi-gods …' it certainly does seem to apply to *The Sandman.* The text primarily, after all, concerns itself with the dealings of The Endless which, while not strictly being gods, have god-like powers and serve a 'godly' purpose. Another facet of the tale that lends it a mythic overtone is that it draws extensively on the world of traditional mythology; it could thus be viewed as a simplified and popularised compilation and adaptation of the great myths of the old world. Making his way through the text, the reader will encounter the Norse, Odin, Loki and Thor; Lucifer from Jewish and Christian belief; Eve, Cain and Abel from biblical tales; the Japanese Susano-no-moto; the Greek muse Calliope and her son, Orpheus; many elements from native African, American and Australian mythology; as well as characters like Fairies from general world folklore. By making use of many varied cultures and their mythological content, Gaiman brings to the surface the universal appeal, as well as the validity, of myth. For *The Sandman* to qualify as a contemporary myth, however, it should transcend the traditional and cultural boundaries that restricted traditional mythology. The myths of the ancient world were initially confined within the boundaries of their social origination and were only much later taken up into the collective of planetary knowledge at the dawn of the information age and the introduction of formal writing systems, printing technology, etc. The contemporary myth should, therefore, from its place in the world of modern information technology, incorporate diverse cultural influences– a task in which Gaiman succeeded admirably.

Beyond sourcing from, and re-manufacturing traditional mythology, *The Sandman* presents the fictional happenings in the realm of The Endless as its own autonomous myth. This supposed myth corresponds to the four functions of mythology that Joseph Campbell (1972) identified as a pre-requisite for any story to gain mythological function and value:

1. **The Mystical function:** Being exposed to myth should make you aware of the 'mystical wonder' of the universe, you should stand in awe before its promise of great mystery, and you should realise that you too form a part of this 'mystical wonder' and mystery. This function is the most clearly identifiable in *The Sandman*, not only due to its use of mysticism and occult/magical reference, but also due to its protagonist and his enigmatic nature. Morpheus not only conjures an ominous feeling through his appearance (pale, thin, dressed in black with unkempt black hair), but also through his mysterious agenda and his unfathomable views on his life and that of the humans he deals with. He often stands in awe and wonder when confronted with the trivialities of the universe and the nature of human spirit; a characteristic that slowly changes him and eventually leads to his demise.

2. **The Cosmological function:** Campbell's cosmological function refers to the ability of myth to present to humanity an image of the universe: its constituent parts, how it looks and, most importantly, who inhabits it. The cosmological dimension, the dimension concerned with science, presents to us a view of the universe in which its mysteries has not been omitted. It is here that The Endless enter the frame as, according to Rauch (2003:17), 'the cosmology of The Endless exists behind and in support of many pantheons of the world's cultures…'

3. **The Sociological function:** The contemporary myth should relate the notions and wisdom of its particular cultural context and time as the outdated ethics of established cultures are no longer adequate. Here, *The Sandman* departs slightly from Campbell's views as it does not only serve to validate a particular social institution, but also critiques it. As a contemporary writer of fiction, Gaiman addresses the people 'that have been left out of past discourses, those that have been marginalised' (Rauch 2003:17).

4. **The Pedagogical function:** This function is apparent, not only in the story of Dream, but as a work of myth, whereby *The Sandman* text in its completion may serve to assist the reader through the stages of his/her life. For this function to work, however, modern readers must learn to 'live through the story' and therefore allow modern communities to be sustained by myth, as has been the case for millennia.

It should be stressed, at this point, that *The Sandman* serial, even though presented as a proper myth, cannot be viewed as a myth unto its own, but simply as incorporating mythological elements and fulfilling a role similar to those of traditional mythology. Even though *The Sandman* conforms largely to Campbell's functions of myth, and present an immense depth and complexity in its text (something that no myth can do without), it does not fulfil a central role in society. The fact that *The Sandman* and other major works from this genre, only enjoy prominence amongst a select audience ultimately robs these works of a validation as proper mythology. The term 'contemporary mythology' is by implication also problematic, as a myth created in the era of post-modern literature cannot completely conform to features commonly associated with myth – traditional authorship or a tale being shaped over the course of centuries through multiple mediums. Joseph Campbell (1988:132) has picked up on the paradox of a myth for the modern age and noted that 'life today is so complex, and it is changing so fast, that there is no time for anything to constellate itself before it is thrown over again.' Even though it is agreed that due to inconsistencies in societal belief systems and trends, a story does not have time to develop into a myth, this cannot completely negate the possibility of the emergence of a contemporary myth. On the other hand, modern stories cannot be considered to constitute a contemporary mythology by simply utilising elements and characters from classic mythology.

In the search for a contemporary mythology one is rather looking for 'a certain depth of meaning and emotion (that) is required to advance these narratives past the point of creative postmodern storytelling' (Rauch 2003:96). With *The Sandman,* Neil Gaiman has achieved just that, by providing a story that rises to the level of mythology. He achieved this by not simply incorporating elements from ancient mythology, but synthesising them with the new.

Sociological value

Even though *The Sandman* largely conforms to all Campbell's functions, its sociological function is perhaps most significant. The sociological value of *The Sandman* is a completely new element; it relates to Gaiman's unique view of contemporary society and his guidelines to conducting oneself in contemporary society. In addition to this new element, *The Sandman* also features characters that would never have been included in the mythologies of the old world. Among these are strong, independent women who do not fit the traditional roles of mother or wife and do not conform to

attributes we normally associate with notions like 'homosexuality' or 'transgenderism' (Rauch 2003:91). In the same sense, the views that traditional mythology propagated, such as that the hero should always be brave and masculine and his lady helpless, do not translate well for a contemporary audience. The old issues of identity and morality therefore are no longer relevant and are in need of replacement with a more liberal sensibility. On the issue of the social relevance of mythic tales, Rauch (2003:96) included the following quote from Campbell (1988: 13), which had the following to say:

> The models have to be appropriate to the time in which they are living,
> and our time has changed so fast that what was proper fifty years ago is
> not proper today. The virtues of the past are the vices of today and many
> of what were thought to be vices of the past are the necessities of today.
> The moral order has to catch up with the moral necessities of actual life
> and time, here and now.

It is Campbell's contention, then, that most of our societal problems stem from the fact that belief systems of Western society are based on Christian theology and the Bible, and are therefore more than 2 000 years old and, by implication, 'out of date'. Even though I largely agree that contemporary mythology must hold a valid message for the society in which we live, I depart from Campbell in my belief that if you strip away the contextual aspects of ancient myths, they reveal eternal and universal truths. If they didn't, they would not have enjoyed the longevity and fame that most myths do. It is true, however, that the context or the social relevance quickly becomes outdated as society changes (hence the criticism against the inclusion of Shakespeare in contemporary school curricula) which creates a need for updated myths relevant to the society and time in which they are created.

Without exception, we find that every societal norm, belief, tradition or cultural nuance has been carried and transmitted through an extended narrative, like the *Bible*, *Koran*, *Mahabharata* etc., which serves as the foundation for all the knowledge a society holds. This long narrative, of which a workable knowledge is a commonality among the members of a society, is the cement that holds its members together (Rauch 2003:99). Even though *The Sandman* is a long narrative (altogether over 2 000 pages), it cannot be said to transmit all the beliefs and cultural norms of any particular society,

but it does serve to create a sense of unity or belonging amongst those making up the title's loyal fanbase – creating, in a sense, a *Sandman* community.

A significant change in societal order relates to how it deals with sexuality, and in particular gender, identity (Rauch 2003:101). A discussion on these issues as dealt with in *The Sandman* would warrant an entire study on its own, I wish to discuss it here only briefly, in order to exemplify how *The Sandman* transgressed social boundaries. The most notable of such transgressions would be found in the inclusion of an abnormally large number of homosexual and transgendered characters prior to mainstream acceptance (remember that the title ran from the late 80s to middle 90s). The use of these characters in a medium that was primarily aimed at adolescent males, at the time of *The Sandman's* publication run, was deemed extremely controversial and was one of the reasons the title was ousted from mainstream publishing. In secondary narrative arcs like 'The time of your life' and 'A Game of You', marginalised characters like the lesbian couple, Hazel and Foxglove, are placed at the centre of the narrative, with their relationship portrayed as one of the most happiest and most stable ones in the entire series. Their fulfilling and committed relationship sharply contrasted to Morpheus' many failed heterosexual relations. What Gaiman is perhaps hinting at here, is that the only way a myth may remain relevant is if it addresses the issues of minority groups and people from all walks of life, including those outside the mainstream of society. It should also be noted here that in addition to not making provisions for characters of alternative sexuality, the comic medium is also lacking in its portrayal of 'real' independent women as they rarely shake their stereotypical depiction of the 'damsel in distress'.

Yet even though these instances of social commentary are not hidden in the pages of *The Sandman*, they are also not overt depictions of how individuals must behave in a contemporary society. There are unmistakable glimpses, however, of a new society in which we find that the preconceived ideas, carried over from traditional myths, will no longer adequately serve the public. Returning to the marginalisation of social groups, every character in *The Sandman,* especially female, is depicted with a sense of individual dignity and worth as a human being (Rauch 2003:102). One of society's marginalised women, a simple, mundane-looking blonde called Barbie, is encountered in *The Doll's House* series and is initially dismissed as a character that propagates the notion of the stereotypical 'brainless blonde bimbo'. When she is later affirmed as a rich, complex character, contravening every

preconceived societal notion of blondes named 'Barbie', Gaiman instils 'human worth and dignity as the series fulfils the third sociological function of myth' (Rauch 2003:102).

Gaiman's greatest contribution to a contemporary societal vision has been made through an unconventional depiction of marginalised groups like women and members of the gay and lesbian fraternity, to allow greater insight into the lives of these individuals. This would lead society to a better understanding and treatment of marginalised and suppressed groups.

The Sandman in Balance with the Old

It is clear that *The Sandman* promotes a new socialisation and is therefore true to Campbell's idea of what a contemporary myth should be. An implicit sociology is, however, not all a contemporary myth needs to be validated; it needs to be empowered through a balanced integration of old mythic elements. Some theorists, like David Miller (1974), feels that a 'whole' myth may not be born from a contemporary society if it does not return to the polytheism (multi-deity religion) of ancient cultures. This feat can only be achieved if society discards their one God and embraces many gods at the same time. Polytheism as understood by Miller (1974:12) 'is the name given to a specific religious situation', one that is 'characterised by plurality, a plurality that manifests itself in many forms.' Within a social context 'polytheism is a situation in which there are various values, patterns of social organisation, and principles by which man governs his political life. These values, patterns, and principles sometimes mesh harmoniously, but more often they war with one another to be elevated as the single center of normal social order.'

Miller (1974:4) believed that in our modern society, spirituality has decreased significantly, but that this should not be considered a negative thing, as it allows us to invoke the many deities of ancient mythology and 'rediscover the vitality of mythic narratives that have been out of sight for hundreds of years' (1974:51). It also seems that with the incredible rise in popularity of genres like fantasy fiction in our contemporary society, there is a growing need for stories – especially the stories that hold mythic or religious value. The fanatical following that some of these stories enjoy may equal, or even surpass, the following of certain monotheistic religions, which points to a shift in society towards its old polytheistic ways.

In the modern world polytheism may be able to transform society and create a suitable breeding ground for a contemporary mythology. Miller believed that practices like psychoanalysis should and will replace the religions that a theology-based society has depended on as its central belief system. The link between myth and psychoanalysis has been established previously by Campbell's mythological approach and Jung's psychoanalytic findings. Society's most valuable route back into the polytheistic world of myth, it therefore seems, is through dreams and depth psychology. On this, Miller(1974:55) said:

> Freud named one of our many imaginable fantasy structures by the name Oedipus. Presumably that is just the beginning. We enact many myths in the course of our lives. We feel deeply the configuration of many stories. We are the playground of a veritable theater full of Gods and Goddesses. What do the Gods and Goddesses want with us? Our task is to incarnate them, become aware of their presence, acknowledge and celebrate their forms, so that we may better be able to account for our polytheism.

Miller also felt that as a modern society we have become too pluralistic to adopt any single model of functioning. Simply put, this is because all life and meaning is in essence subjective and therefore by implication pluralistic, man must be polytheistic in order to articulate his sensory and spiritual experiences. One would have to seek far and wide to find a story that is as pluralistic in its nature as *The Sandman. The Sandman* presents a collection of old stories that brings us hope that through each story's polytheistic approach, we shall be able to enter into an age where we could expand in our monotheistic theologies to come to a greater understanding of mankind. In this way, the content and subject matter of *The Sandman* echoes Miller's (1974:13) definition of polytheism in philosophy, that of a 'reality experienced by men and woman when Truth … cannot be articulated reflectively according to a single grammar, a single logic, or a single symbol-system.' As the many characters of the main and secondary narratives of Morpheus' tale struggles with this very dilemma, the articulation of their various realities, Neil Gaiman attempts to unravel the fabric of a 'philosophically polytheistic situation … (that) will break forth with principles of relativism, indeterminacy, plural logic systems, irrational numbers; substances that do not have substance, such as quarks; double explanations for light; and black holes in the middle of actual realities.'(14) One does not have to look very far to find this 'philosophically polytheistic situation' in *The Sandman*, as all these elements

may be located in an issue like 'Seasons of Mist: Episode 5' in which the diplomats of the various realities (conforming to Miller's 'gods and goddesses of the psyche') bid for the keys to hell. At a banquet held for these envoys in Morpheus' castle, we find competing for this valued item, the ambassadors from the court of Faerie (Cluracan and Nuala), the Egyptian gods Bast and Anubis, the shapeless Princess of Chaos, the Japanese deity Susana-o-no-mikoto, the demon pair Merkin (the mother of spiders) and Choronzon, and the 'Lord of Order, his form that of order manifest: an empty receptacle' (*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4:148). Apart from strongly reflecting the 'relativism, indeterminacy, (and) plural logic systems' that Miller associates with polytheism, this episode and the rest of the narrative show how these different realities, gods and religions act in 'contention' and that our very existence may be characterised as ' a war of powers' (1974:27). Miller (1974:28) expanded on this by saying:

> Man – his self, his society, and his natural environment – is the arena of an eternal Trojan War. Our moods, emotions, usual behaviors, dreams, and fantasies tell us those rough moments when the war is no longer a cold war or a border skirmish, but an all out guerilla conflict. These indicators also tell us, by feeling and intuition, when one god has absented himself and another has not yet rushed into the vacuum. We know the war well.

I agree with Miller in that Man's contemporary acknowledgement of these gods, and their respective myths and religious tales, is important and functional, and that it will help him breathe new life into his old ways of seeing and thinking of the world. I do, however, not agree that this means we should advocate the death of any one God or religion, but rather, like Rauch (2003:108) suggested, that we should embrace the rebirth of old stories and mythic narratives which are still relevant today. The discarding of the current regime and replacing it with a less biased system is a prominent theme in *The Sandman,* as Morpheus, the very personification of a biased monotheistic belief system, is replaced by a new, more balanced, Daniel who represents all the benefits of polytheism.

The main element from old mythology, incorporated into the new mythology of *The Sandman,* can be identified as the strong polytheistic theme that it carries through its depictions of countless beliefs, religions, cultures, etc. But this is not the only mythic element that Gaiman chose to bring to life in

his work, as he also made an effort to include many traditional mythic patterns. We have already mentioned some of the most prominent of these patterns or archetypes, namely the Hero, the Hero's journey, the personification of Death and the relation to Dream. Apart from these there are others that make *The Sandman* read like a traditional text, old as myth itself. These archetypes are enacted by modern participants and lend a strong mythic overtone to *The Sandman*. Some of these are:

- **Sage/Wise old man** – Destiny, Gilbert and often Morpheus himself.
- **The Triple Goddess** – Maiden, Mother and Crone. The trio appears as the Weird Sisters, the Fates and the Kindly Ones. Commonly known as the Thessaly (Crone), Hazel (Mother) and Foxglove (Maiden).
- **Battle/Rivalry** – The archetype features prominently in the text and is often discernible in the constant bickering among members of the Endless.
- **The Trickster** – Desire of the Endless is often credited as being representative of this archetype, although any of the three youngest Endless (Desire, Despair and Delirium) steps into this role from time to time. In *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (1959:255), Jung discussed the roles of the Trickster, mentioning 'the fondness for sly jokes and malicious pranks, his powers as shape shifter, his dual nature, half animal, half divine, his exposure to all kinds of tortures…' This description fits Loki and Puck perfectly as they are not satisfied to cause chaos in their homelands; they also kidnap Daniel and trigger events that will lead to Morpheus' ultimate demise. Also, in Norse mythology Loki turns into a salmon or a bird, and in *The Sandman* he takes on the likeness of Daniel, the Corinthian and fire. Loki from both old myths and *The Sandman* is fond of telling dirty jokes. He also fathers a wolf that he sends after Matthew and the Corinthian, and finally, he is tortured, not only by the snake in the cavern (traditional tale), but also by the Corinthian (*The Sandman* #55).

Another synthesis of the old and the new encountered in the text is evident in the role of the gods in the story. The gods that find themselves in the modern situations of *The Sandman* are experiencing what Miller identified as a 'spiritual decline'. Some of these gods were forced to stand by idly and watch their worshippers disappear, some have died and others have adapted by pretending to be

mortals. One of these gods who decided to adapt is Susana-o-no-mikoto from an ancient Japanese pantheon. In response to the dilemma of the waning amount of worshippers, he said to Morpheus: 'We are expanding – assimilating other pantheons, later gods, new altars and icons. Marilyn Monroe is ours now, as are King Kong and Lady Liberty' (*Collected Sandman* Vol.4:160). This statement is significant as it shows gods, and by implication mythologies, adapting to modern circumstances and provides a glimpse into how new gods are created and assimilated into older systems.

Another god who chose to adapt is Pharamond, who now runs his own travel agency. It seems Morpheus is somehow responsible for this new state of affairs. Explaining this to Delirium, he says 'He used to be a God when we last met in Babylon, his sacrifices were dwindling, and many of his shrines had already been abandoned. I merely suggested that he finds himself an occupation' (*Sandman* #43:21). It seems that Gaiman is trying to comment on the variability of gods: if they don't change, they fade into oblivion. Perhaps this is also his way of hinting to the audience to evaluate the validity of their current beliefs and perhaps move towards a more polytheistic society.

Not all divine beings, as dealt with in *The Sandman*, have been so successful in making their transition into the modern age. One of these, a goddess called Ishtar, has gone from Goddess of Love, with many temples and worshippers, to an exotic dancer surviving on the little worship she receives from male onlookers. This part of the story also deals with the marginalisation of women and the circumventing of stereotypes (in this case, strippers) by making one of the strippers a student with a Masters degree in Women's Studies.

The Sandman's dealings with gods do not end with lacing them in modern situations. *The Sandman* is also pluralistic and represents a sort of 'new polytheism'. By featuring members from all eastern and western mythologies, it seems that the author is trying to tell us that they are equally valid, as each of them is a product of human consciousness and therefore transmits of the same universal truths. Campbell claimed that the exclusivity that connected certain cultures to certain theologies, and by implication served to segregate people, is quickly disappearing. On this, he said: 'There were formerly horizons within which people lived and thought and mythologised. There are now no more horizons. And with the dissolution of horizons we have experienced and are experiencing collisions, terrific collisions, not only of people but also of mythologies' (1972: 254). These collisions become manifest in stories like 'Seasons of Mist', where deities representing a large group of mythologies

interact around the 'Keys to Hell' debate. Even though it was not possible to include representatives from every possible pantheon, this 'integration of different gods, goddesses, and assorted mythological beings, as well as his (Gaiman's) inclusion of marginal characters, is a start. In this context, it is becoming easier to see what makes *Sandman* a modern myth' (Rauch 2003: 113).

As part of *The Sandman*'s classification as myth, it must also make use of elements that are original and unique. The most notable of these are, of course, the creation and inclusion of The Endless. Stephen Rauch considered The Endless to be *The Sandman's* ultimate contribution to a contemporary mythology, and said: 'Gaiman crafted a mythology out of a whole cloth, a mythology that explains why we have myths, because the Endless are the consistent elements of consciousness as myths are formed out of consciousness. The Endless must exist above and beyond all gods, yet they also take on the aspects of gods' (2003:113). While *The Sandman* seeks mythic validation through the synthesis of old and new, the Endless are like a typically dysfunctional 20th century family, lacking parental control. Relationships between the Endless centre around the conflict, and the individual pursuits of recognition, of its members.

The Sandman comes as close to a mythology as a tale crafted in our contemporary times could possibly come. It does this by not combining, but synthesising the old with the new— the old gods with the new, and an outdated social vision, with one that acknowledges a unique world, time and people of the 20th century.

4.7 Conclusion

At this point, it should be clear that validating a concept like 'contemporary mythology' is in no way an exercise in absolutes. I would, however, like to state that a logical conclusion to the question of the contemporary myth, and the role of the hero in it, may be drawn from the following:

 a. The idea of contemporary mythology corresponds to the popular definition of the terms 'myth' and 'mythology'.

 b. Contemporary and traditional mythologies often share a temporal plane.

c. Authors of contemporary mythology, like those of traditional mythology, deny a verifiable quality to their tales.

d. Contemporary mythology and fantasy fiction are wildly popular and have a universal appeal.

e. Modern man needs to express his life experience through the use of symbolism, just like his ancestors.

f. There are distinct correlations between structural elements and archetypes of both old and new mythology.

g. Contemporary mythology has a similar value or purpose to traditional mythology.

h. Even though *The Sandman* cannot be viewed as a proper myth unto its own, it does largely conform to Campbell's function of myth, and may therefore be considered to be an example of a postmodern fiction fulfilling similar functions as traditional mythologies that is, a contemporary mythology.

MYTHOLOGY, *THE SANDMAN* AND THE HERO'S JOURNEY

5.1   The Function and Legacy of Mythology

As we've already established, the term 'mythology' refers to the traditional stories concerning the lives and exploits of a group of deities, heroes and heroines, and the way in which they relate to mere mortals. Richard Buxton (2004:1) stated that in the realm of classical mythology, the world of ancient Rome and Greece did not have a monotheistic religion. The pluralistic nature of classical culture meant that no single orthodoxy was adhered to and therefore, by implication, no singular written text was considered authoritative or the source of belief. In the place of this, the religions and cultures of the ancient world consisted of wildly varying tales about the origins and actions of immortals. These 'accounts' of godly exploits were characteristically inconsistent, and their respective contents and perspectives depended on the context in which they were presented. Different types of narratives, like for instance, the epic, tragedy or comedy, portrayed greatly differing and even conflicting aspects of the realm of immortals. The myths of the ancient civilisations survived the passage of time and vicissitudes by being contained in literary and artistic traditions. The greatest part of their preservation, however, could be attributed to their place within a rich oral tradition (Buxton 2004:3). Parents and grandparents had been transmitting tales of brave heroes, vengeful gods and frightful monsters to their offspring for generations and over millennia. There even existed special 'clubs' for this purpose, called 'leschai' or 'conversation clubs', where the elderly from the society gathered to hone their storytelling skills and add to an already vast collective mythology. It is therefore clear that storytelling as a mode of communication, whether it appropriated a written, visual or oral medium, served as the hub of classical Greek and Roman civilisations.

According to Buxton (2004:2) the most prominent and authentic works of documented myth to come from the ancient world can be attributed to the Greek poet Homer, who did not create myths but re-worked existing myths into his epics. His most famous works *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, took the form of lengthy epic poems that were based on the Greek tradition of lengthy, orally composed poetry. *The Iliad* is set during the Trojan War and its main focal point is the result of a quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles – two of the greatest Greek heroes. *The Odyssey* picks up the story

in the aftermath of the Trojan War and recounts the tale of Odysseus and his triumphant return to his home on the island of Ithaca after spending years sauntering through wild and magical realms. The tale of the Trojan War was, however, not wholly contained within these two works, however; it was rather spread across a vast array of other, lesser works of literature and art.

The main concern with mythology in this particular work of research is not so much with the content of a particular school or brand of mythology, but rather with the function of classic mythology and how it corresponds to that of contemporary mythology. At the heart of this issue lies the simple question: why do we tell stories? Here follows some of the main functions of mythology as set out in *Classical Mythology – Images and Insights* (Harris & Platzner 1998):

1. Myths explain the structure and order of the world in which we live. They supply a viable explanation to the origin of elements of our consciousness and plausible reasons for the current state of affairs (political, cultural, etc.). Hesiod's *Theogony*, for instance, narrated the development of the present state of the universe by relating it to chaos – the origin of all things. The Greek poet further detailed an intricate process of violence, revolt and sexual attraction that brought about the contemporary regime of Zeus. Another famous work of Hesiod related the tale of Pandora and her infamous box as an explanation to the question of the origin of all strife in the world. In this attempt at an infinitely more complex debate, we can deduce an important comment on the society of the time as the tale put the universal female (Pandora and her disobedience and ignorance) at the root of all evil. It seems, therefore, that sexism is as old as humanity itself.

2. Myths serve as transportation to uncharted territories of human nature and as means to explore the contradictions and ambiguities of the human condition. In short, myths help us to make sense of the senseless while examining the possible reasons for specific human actions and beliefs. In *The Iliad*, for instance, Homer looked at the possible consequences of Agamemnon's dishonourable conduct towards Achilles. The story of how the Greek leader Agamemnon deprived his faithful soldier of his prize (a slave girl) and the disastrous consequences of this insult is, of course, well known. Achilles refuses to fight for seven years, during which the Trojans inflict unspeakable horror upon the Greek army. The issues involved here are honour, respect, self-worth and duty, and the myth as a whole serves to inspect these

issues in the light of Achilles' reaction and its disastrous consequences. At the dawn of what some refer to as the age of the 'civilised' or 'thinking' man, the nature of masculinity and the role of men in society were already under the microscope. Homer himself does not seem to take a personal stance on issues like the 'limits of honour' or 'masculinity'; he simply places the issue on a cause-and-effect scale, unmasking male-ness of its magnificently ridiculous facade. Perhaps the reason why this tale has endured the passage of time, and is still considered relevant in modern times can be found in the timeless questions it poses: Where does the hero's personal honour stand in reference to his duty towards society? To what degree must the hero wreak vengeance to restore his honour? What conduct is considered honourable and fair? Where should the hero's loyalties lie? It is these very same questions that are also explored in contemporary mythology, and their proposed answers tell us about society's opinions on issues like masculinity, heroism and maleness. We will later look at these questions and how they apply to *The Sandman.*

3. Myths also function to legitimise claims or actions by providing extra authority. There are numerous examples of this throughout the cultures of the classical world, as aristocratic families and prominent social figures liked to trace their ancestry back to the heroes and gods of mythology. It is a widely accepted premise that works of so-called mythology were commissioned fabrications to make an individual or specific group seem superior. These tailormade myths are responsible for not only legitimising of the Romans as the strongest race on the planet, but also for the establishment of the Roman Empire. The well- known tale of Romulus and Remus, brothers raised by wolves and the founders of Rome, served to classify Roman citizens within the realm of myth and in so doing, rendered them far superior to the rest of mankind. Works like the *The Aeneid* and the incredible exploits of Aeneas contained therein, created an archetype of the Roman citizen, establishing the latter as a race that could conquer any imaginable feat (including death). Hence, they were regarded as closer to gods than mere mortals. Returning to modern mythology, it is interesting to note that mythology is still used to legitimise certain discourses. *The Sandman* for instance would not enjoy its wide acclaim if it were not so steeped in mythology. Its references and interpretations of prominent mythological works served to separate it from the canon of general comic books and raised it to a highly reputable work that would not have enjoyed this authenticity were it not for its ties to these sources.

4.   Lastly, myths are a source of entertainment. It is important to always look at myths within the oral tradition at the time of their creation. Storytelling was the only entertainment available and therefore served as a form of escapism, similar to the wide variety of entertainment available to modern audiences. People engage in these bizarre tales because they are so unlike their own mundane lives. These tales could be enjoyed for the simple fact that they are only stories and little more. In that aspect, modern and classical mythology are still on a par.

Mythology formed the hub of classical society and was intricately interwoven with all aspects of social life. Even when these myths were adapted and appropriated by other cultures (Virgil's *Aeneid*, for instance, was a re-imagining of the wanderings of the Trojan hero, Aeneas), they still served their 'original' purpose – to serve as a vehicle for reflecting on, and coping with, the world I which we find ourselves (Buxton 2004:7). These myths are still considered to be the most authentic, valuable and significant works of oral and written tradition to ever see the light of day, despite the interpretative paradigm in which they were originally perceived being no longer relevant. These wondrous tales were once the stock of religion and perceived societal truths, serving to uplift the soul and legitimise one's claim to supremacy (Buxton 2004:8). In modern times, however, they have acquired a different, yet equally important value, namely allegory. These stories could be interpreted to reveal a wealth of wisdom and age-old truths. An allegorical reading of the *Judgement of Paris*, for instance, is a typical example of such a tale that may hold a universal message applicable to people from all socio-cultural and religious heritages. The famous tale of the young Trojan shepherd who was faced with the impossible task of choosing between the goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, could actually be interpreted as a quest for morality, with the shepherd's choices representing a 'life of action', a 'life of contemplation' or a 'life ruled by love' (Buxton 2004:9). As long as these allegorical and interpretative approaches to mythology persist, myths and folklore will always hold their value as expressions of basic, universal truths.

Let us now turn our attention to the most prominent of all myths, and the heart of our discussion, namely the myth of the Hero and his quest and their roles within *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman.

5.2   Step by Step − *The Sandman* and the Hero's Journey

David Adams Leeming (1998:152) said that 'the quest myth in one sense is the *only* myth – that is, all other myths are part of the quest myth … psychologically all heroes, as we have seen, represent humankind's search for the self.' This insight may perhaps hint at the reason why the Hero Myth is the most enduring and prominent genre of the mythology of both the classic as well as the modern world. Greatly generalising, the Hero Myth may be described as a tale of an 'individual or a god, armed with special abilities, (who) embarks on a journey, faces tests of mettle and determination, slays terrible monsters, comes to a mystical realization, returns to the world of men with a boon for society, or is transfigured and joins the gods' (Rauch 2003:38). As already mentioned, these overt manifestations of valour and masculinity may be viewed as allegory, which slightly augments the singular traditional view of the Hero as 'champion of society.' If one subscribes to Leeming's view of the Hero myth, it becomes clear that the myth and the quest that it relates serve a dual purpose, in that they not only to a societal value in terms of masculinity or the male as cultural icon, but also to an internal journey to self-discovery (similar to that of the Buddha). The Hero's journey is therefore often an inward one, whereby the Hero progresses through his metaphorical tasks and obstacles to obtain a deeper realisation or enlightenment. The Hero's tale is thus a tale of every man who has ever achieved or longs to achieve and has come to identify with the great powers of the hero. In support of this, Carl Jung (1998:95) said that when faced with the tale of the Hero, 'the ordinary man is gripped, freed from his importance and misery, and raised to an almost superhuman status, at least for the time being and … is sustained by such a conviction for a long time.'

The question at hand, however, is not concerned with the Hero's Myth in general, but with *The Sandman* as a contemporary graphic story in which a hero with mythological attributes may be found. The first point of order is to establish if this particular work of contemporary mythology could, in fact, be classified within the canon of Hero mythology.

The initial problem with classifying *The Sandman* as 'typical' Hero's myth stems from the fact that Morpheus, our hero and protagonist, is closer to being a god than he is to being a man. This turns the Hero's journey, from mortal to immortal, completely on its head, as Morpheus progresses from being an immortal to a mortal. All is not lost, however, and viewed in the context of the comic book medium as a whole, which has greatly relied on the classic hero 'formula' since its inception, it

becomes clear that this inverted Hero's Journey may simply be a creative response to a formula that has become rather stale (Rauch 2003: 39). *The Sandman* and its characteristically intellectual approach seems to be a response to the lack of subtlety in the medium that has resulted in countless valiant heroes, evil villains, terrible monsters and beautiful maidens in distress. While Morpheus is not a completely new breed of hero, he is definitely a more restrained version of the archetype. While he goes on a journey and travels to strange and mystical worlds, these settings lack the prominence and importance of the actual lessons he learns along the way and the changes he undergoes. The most important of these changes, and also the stock of the primary narrative, is Morpheus' development and progression from deity to human.

Before we continue unravelling *The Sandman* and its main character's journey, let us first establish a framework for the Hero myth. To establish a reference point for this discussion on *The Sandman*, I thought it wise to juxtapose this supposed modern hero with one of the most authentic incarnations of the archetypal Hero myth and a major representative of the conventions attributed to Hero mythology, namely that of the Greek Hero, Achilles. In the following brief overview of the Achilles myth, the basic criteria of the Hero myth should be realised, from his extraordinary, though mortal origin, to his eventual place amongst those who will never be erased from the collective memory of the human race.

The Achilles of Greek mythology was one of the greatest warriors during the Trojan War and was widely known for his supernatural fighting ability and stupefying callousness. He was spawned from a union between the sea nymph Thetis (an immortal) and Peleus, king of the Myrmidons of Thessaly. The myth attributes his uncanny skills to his having been dipped in the river Styx as a child by his mother. This supposedly made his whole body impenetrable and invulnerable, short for the heel by which his mother held him. Achilles fought countless battles during the ten-year siege of Troy and quickly became reputed as being the greatest warrior who ever lived. When the Mycenaean king Agamemnon denied him his prize (the captive maiden Briseis), a spiteful and sulking Achilles withdrew himself and the Myrmidons from battle. The Trojans, experiencing a renewed vigour in light of the absence of this feared warrior, attacked the Greeks and drove them into a headlong retreat. When Patroclus, Achilles' companion, begged Achilles to lend him his armour and let him lead the Myrmidons into battle as a last attempt to break the Trojan stronghold, he very reluctantly agreed. When Patroclus came face to face with the Trojan prince, Hector, he was slain, prompting a

grieving Achilles to rejoin the battle. This, however, was only an act of revenge and after he had slain Hector, he dragged his body behind his chariot. He later permitted Priam, king of the Trojans, to ransom Hector's body. Achilles fought his last battle with Memnon, king of the Ethiopians, and after killing him, led the victorious Greeks to the walls of Troy. There he was fatally wounded by Hector's brother, Paris, who pierced his vulnerable heel with an arrow.

As should be clear from this short introduction to the classic Hero Myth, heroes are traditionally valued by their physical achievements. *The Sandman* myth departs from this in the sense that not only is the Sandman's heroic value not determined by his physical exploits, his journey is in fact not a journey at all − it is rather a transformation from god-like being to humanbeing. Where traditional heroes depart or distance themselves from their humble human origins and strive towards godliness, Morpheus, in essence, throws this convention out the window and makes a 'return' to humanity. The Hero myth can therefore only be applied to *The Sandman* if the framework is inverted. However, this inversion cannot simply be 'forced' into the mould of the traditional Hero's journey and be expected to represent the same order of meaning. *The Sandman*, as postmodern work of fiction, created an irony of the convention of the Hero's journey in traditional mythology literature by inverting it in its post-mythological application. Stephen Rauch (2003:40) clarified this by saying that the '*Sandman* in its own way provides a new paradigm for hero myths, of an otherworldly being recognising his own humanity.' Considering the text as a whole, we learn that this 'inverted' hero's journey takes the form of relationships and acts of compassion that become an essential part of Morpheus becoming human.

Sections of the narrative that pre-date Morpheus' imprisonment makes it clear just how significantly he has developed as a character. These tales, preceding what I'd like to refer to as, his 'antagonising event' (his capture by Roderick Burgess), are cleverly contained by being placed outside of the chronological order of events and, in fact, constitute a sort of 'flashback' sequence. These flashbacks are strategically distributed throughout the 75 issues, juxtaposed with issues depicting tales or scenes from the primary narrative in the proposed present. This juxtaposition continually emphasises not only the fact that Morpheus is undergoing a metamorphosis of character, but also serves to create some sympathy and understanding for the character when he commits acts that may seem excessively 'inhuman' to the reader. In short, I believe these flashbacks justify his actions in a way,

following the logic that in comparison to his earlier behaviour, he is in fact not as inhumane as he could have been. One of these inhumane acts was recounted in the story 'Tales in the Sand' (published just after Morpheus is freed from his captivity and constituting the first in a series of juxtapositions of the current narrative and the implied past), where Morpheus condemns Nada to hell because she put her concern for her people above her love for him. This absolutely unjustifiable act of maliciousness may perhaps remind the reader of a similar reaction exhibited by Achilles and, by implication, encourage the same allegorical reading that would speak abundantly on the evils of masculinity and the abuse of power. His actions in this tale establish his reactionary character and his tendency to retort when his emotional vulnerability is exposed. This pattern echoes through all his other relationships with mortal women and as an allegory reflecting societal views, one may conclude that in the light of a consistent presence of domestic abuse in society throughout the ages, the Sandman's character reflects all the social disorders associated exclusively with men. The reader comes to understand that Morpheus' easily tarnished ego and concealed emotional vulnerability, like those of so many men in modern and ancient societies, can only be sated and restored if he inflicts violence on a 'lesser being', thereby establishing his dominance as 'superior being' demanding absolute respect. I believe that even though Gaiman wanted to establish Morpheus, in this tale that took place over 10 000 years prior to his imprisonment, as a creature not even faintly resembling a human, it could only work if the reader is completely oblivious to the societal mishaps and tumults that have plagued this planet for millennia. Spousal abuse and sexism may be frowned upon in our modern, politically correct milieu, but we have somehow failed to remove these injustices in the thousands of years that man has walked the planet. The fact that Morpheus' continuous relational misconduct and disrespect for women speaks of society's 'tolerance' and subconscious acceptance of this type of behaviour in men. Morpheus, of course, comes – or is rather forced by Death – to realise the injustice he has perpetrated towards Nada and eventually frees her from Hell. This indicates a move on his part towards change on a primary level, especially with reference to his view of women and his regard for humanity as a whole.
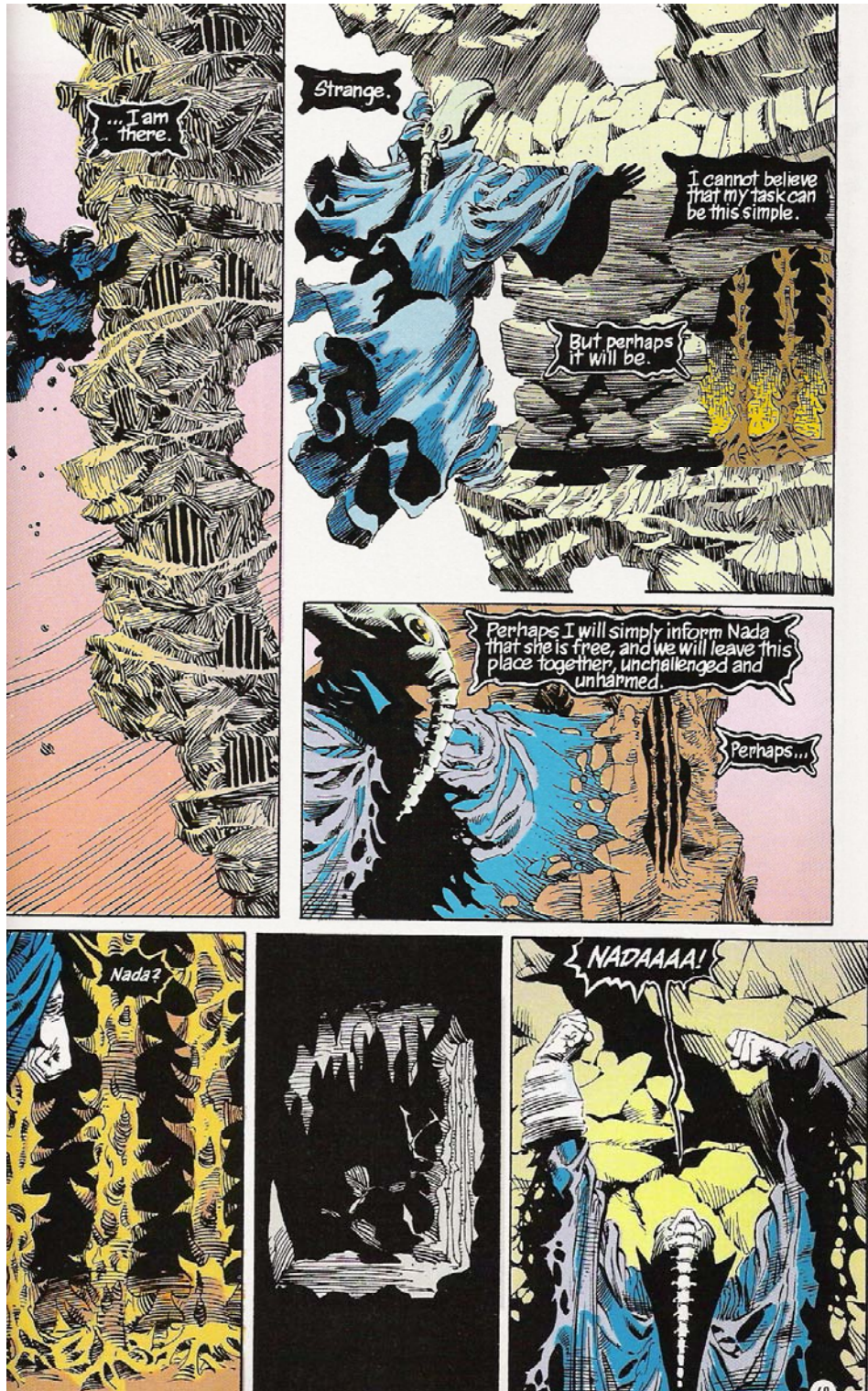
Fig.5.1— Morpheus seeking Nada in hell

(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4 p.69)

The most significant contributing event to Morpheus' journey towards humanity happened during the Orpheus episode. After Orpheus' great love, Eurydice, dies, Morpheus makes an unorthodox attempt to console his son after he is too heartbroken to attend her funeral by saying, 'It is the mortal way. You attend the funeral, you bid the dead farewell. You grieve, then you continue with your life. And at times the fact of her absence will hit you like a blow to the chest, and you will weep. But it will happen less and less as time goes on. She is dead. You are alive. So live' (Song of Orpheus, *Sandman Special* #1:15). This advice may sound very wise, but these cold, and almost heartless, words identify another aspect of Morpheus' character that is long overdue for a revamp. This excessive emotional stiltedness is further emphasised when, after Eurydice's departure to the underworld, Morpheus refuses to assist Orpheus in a quest to regain Eurydice. Without recounting the entire tale here, Orpheus is beheaded by the Baccants, but remains alive due to Death's promise never to take him. Morpheus does not see his son again until he calls upon him for assistance in finding his vagrant brother, Destruction. During this final farewell, Orpheus calls Morpheus 'father', to which he replies, 'Father? Did you not say you were no longer my son?' Not being the type to forgive a transgression, he tells his son, 'Your life is your own, Orpheus. Your death, likewise. Always, and forever, your own. Fare well. We shall not meet again' (The Sandman # 48). Morpheus has established a priesthood to protect and assist Orpheus (or at least his head) in his absence, but he can never die. The most heartless action on Morpheus' behalf is therefore not his neglect of Orpheus, but the fact that he has 'condemned his son to immortal life' (Rauch 2003: 41) in his decapitated state when the only desire of his heart was to die and thereby be rejoined with his beloved Eurydice. One cannot help but think that, viewed in the light of Morpheus' inability to find true and lasting love with a mortal woman, Morpheus was intentionally boycotting Orpheus' chances of love.

Fig.5.2– Morpheus and what's left of Orpheus after his altercation with the Baccants

(*The Sandman Special* #1:47)

The fact that Morpheus has any relationships – with his son or love interests – is a new addition to the archetype of the hero. Even though Morpheus' relationships are wholly unsustainable, the hero is generally conceived as an individual without relational responsibilities or emotional connections. A quick tally of our most prominent modern heroes, like Batman, Superman, Frodo Baggins, Spiderman, Neo, Luke Skywalker and even Magnum PI and McGyver, would reveal that they have either very strained relationships with the opposite sex or, in most cases, no relationships at all and most certainly no offspring. It is obvious why these leading men do not pursue such connections or are unable to sustain them, given the nature of their work. In general, they are viewed as men who have sacrificed these virtues of the common man to lead an extraordinary life in search of glory. 'Glory' and 'power' are therefore the ultimate achievements of ego and by implication, not achievable by the selfless common man who lives for his wife and children. Before Achilles left to join the Trojan War, his mother presented to him the following option: stay, get married, have children and you will be remembered as long as they live, or go and be remembered always. Why, then, did Gaiman choose to place Morpheus in these terrible, destructive relationships? One can speculate that it was to illustrate what the result would be if these often selfish and ego-driven leading men were to get involved in these types of relationships. My opinion is, however, that Gaiman was aiming to shatter the ultimate male fantasy: that of the promiscuous and responsibility-free hero/cowboy character that has flooded the subconscious of every man for millennia, first through mythology and later through action films, novels and comic books.

What one also needs to take into consideration, when looking at the Nada and Orpheus episodes and Morpheus' inhumane behaviour, is that he is, in fact, not a human at all. These two episodes are therefore important when he seeks atonement for them later on in his journey towards humanisation, as they serve as point markers to illustrate his progression. Ironically, though, when trying to remedy the Orpheus situation by granting him death, he set in motion a series of events that would bring about his own death (the ultimate sign of humanness / mortality).

It is, however, unfair to claim that pre-imprisonment Morpheus (before 1988) was completely devoid of sympathy for or insight into humanity, as is illustrated through his dealings with William Shakespeare. The last instalment of *The Sandman* (*The Sandman* #75) deals with Morpheus' commissioning of *The Tempest*. In motivation of this commission, he explained to Shakespeare that he 'wanted a tale of graceful ends … a play about a king who drowns his books, and breaks his staff,

and leaves his kingdom. About a magician who becomes a man. About a man who turns his back on magic' (*The Sandman* #75:35). He tells Shakespeare that he felt a need for a play like this because 'I will never leave my island. I am … in my fashion … an island'(36). When Shakespeare answers to this that all men have the capacity to change, Morpheus replies: 'I am not a man. And I do not change. I asked you earlier if you saw yourself reflected in your tale. I do not. I may not. I am the Prince of Stories, Will, but I have no story of my own. Nor shall I ever' (36). Morpheus' introspective response here forms one of the central ironies of the series, becuase *The Tempest* could be viewed as a mirror and summary of his life; he is the Magician that became a man. This insight is the closest that pre-1988 Morpheus will come to realising the flaws in his nature and his lack of humanity. Rauch (2003:42) considers it fitting that the reference to *The Tempest* should be contained in the last issue of *The Sandman*, as it considers the essential central plot of *The Sandman* as a whole.

It is time to have a look at the 'pebble that stirred the water's surface'; the cataclysmic event that sparked Morpheus' journey. His capture and imprisonment, as Rauch (2003: 42) claims, was not just an antagonistic event that set this wheel of change in motion; it also set the stage for the rest of the narrative. Morpheus' first step towards becoming human was indeed his biggest step as Gaiman said: 'His seventy-two years of imprisonment changed him a great deal; more than he ever realized or understood. He was almost a different entity by the time he emerged from Burgess's glass cage' (Bender 1999:209). Even though he may not immediately have been aware of the change that took place in him, it becomes apparent in an issue entitled 'Men of Good Fortune' (the interlude to the *The Doll's House* series). In this issue Morpheus has his once-a-century meeting with Hob Gadling, the immortal-mortal. During a meeting that took place in 1889, Hob made the mistake of insinuating that Morpheus must be 'lonely.' Morpheus, severely insulted by this insolence, answers: 'You dare! You dare imply that I might befriend a mortal? That one of my kind need companionship?'(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.2:137). He then stormed out in a frenzy and Hob called after him that if he showed up at their next meeting in a hundred years, it would mean that they're friends. It can be deduced that if Morpheus was not imprisoned and started undergoing changes in his personality, he would still have viewed Hob as an impudent human and therefore not have felt warranted to attend another meeting. But as it happened, Morpheus did show up for their next meeting in 1989 (a year after his release) and said, 'I have always heard it was impolite to keep one's friends waiting. Would you like a drink?' (*The Collected Sandman* Vol.2:138). It seems that in only one short year of the series Morpheus has learned the meaning of friendship or perhaps he simply started experiencing one of

the fundamental needs of being human: companionship (Rauch 2003:42). This 'need' is echoed throughout the series in Morpheus' insistence to make use of 'help' to maintain his realm. The reader must understand that the Dreaming is not an external facet of his existence; he is the Dreaming and it is him.

Fig.5.3− A scene from The Tempest
(*The Sandman* #75:28)

The fact that he chooses to enlist the services of a landscaper (Mervin Pumpkinhead), a librarian (Lucien), a messenger (Matthew) and many others populating his realm points to his growing need for companionship and the presence of 'otherness.' It is difficult to consider the character as anything other than a disgruntled, lonely human being, but one must force oneself to think of him as

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a representation or personification of a human condition (namely, dream). If one does that, it becomes clear how truly bizarre it is that this being is in need of human interaction at all. I believe that the recurring theme of fostering relations not only serves to separate Morpheus from the rest of his family (none of whom exhibits the need for companionship) and instigate his introspection, it also makes the reader understand that the heart of our existence as humans is to be found in our relationships with others. This is why Morpheus' improved relationships (even if it only improved to the point that he realised that he has transgressed in a relationship) are both the product and the effect of his own personal growth and the progression of his journey.

According to Rauch (2003:42), Morpheus has made significant progression by announcing his friendship to Hob Gadling, he is, however, nowhere near the supposed end-destination of his journey. In the rest of *The Doll's House* series, Morpheus' treatment of Lyta Hall speaks greatly about the changes he still has to undergo. After disassembling the part of the Dreaming occupied by Lyta and her dead husband, Hector, and banishing him to the underworld, Morpheus made it clear that he would one day lay claim to Daniel (Lyta's unborn son who was gestated in the Dreaming). He made the empty promise that he would not harm Lyta, but does not realise that he has, in fact, destroyed her life by taking her family from her. Even though Morpheus did the right thing (the dream world that Lyta and Hector occupied was created by Brut and Glob and should therefore never have existed), his coldness towards Lyta undeniably points to his still lacking in compassion and understanding for humanity. Even after he is confronted with the second love affair that has the potential of stretching past the boundaries of death (Orpheus being the first), he still has no conception of the meaning, importance and power of love. Morpheus' inability to comprehend this essential aspect of humanity may directly have contributed to his incapability to sustain a relationship. Nada, for instance, did not reject him out of a lack of love for him, but because her love for her people and the potential doom that her relationship with an immortal held for them overshadowed her feelings for Morpheus. He did not, and perhaps could not, at that point come to terms with the intricacies of humanity and therefore chose to be consumed by his pride and condemned her to everlasting damnation. Morpheus' ill treatment of Lyta will further propagate the vehicle of his demise, as she will return for revenge. Taking responsibility for one's actions and considering the consequence of one's actions are identified here as important lessons a human, or a being on its way to becoming human, should learn; lessons Morpheus will only learn when it is too late.

Another significant event in the course of Morpheus' journey is when he decides to come to the aid of a former lover, the Greek muse, Calliope. After Morpheus frees her from imprisonment (she was held captive by a crazed writer who forced her to 'inspire' him), she tells him, 'You have changed … in the old days you would have left me to rot forever, without turning a hair' (*The Collected Sandman* Vol.3:34). Morpheus responds, 'I no longer hate you, Calliope. I have learned much in recent times, and … no matter. I do not hate you, child.' Rauch (2003:43) points out that even though Morpheus shows progression here, it is important to note that he still speaks to her as a subordinate or lesser being, and before they part ways, he makes it clear that they are never to see each other again. This event constitutes only a minor victory for Morpheus over his unfeeling immortal heart, but a victory nonetheless. A similar 'minor victory' can be observed in *A Game of You*, when Nuala tells him that she made an attempt to warn Barbie of the coming events. Morpheus expresses gracious gratitude for her disclosure and departs. However, he stops in his tracks, turns to face her and tells her that she did the right thing. The sequence concludes with him walking away and smiling. Morpheus' progression here shifts from small and trivial occurrences to something tangible, as he made an attempt to relate to Nuala on a human level, even though this response was not a natural outflow of his character. At this point in the journey, it is clearly emphasised that the main characteristic of humanity is relationship; a need to relate to others.

The next major leap forward on Morpheus' progression towards humanisation takes place in *A Season of Mists*, where the family is called together by Destiny. During this meeting, Desire uses this rare opportunity to reproach and ridicule her brother, particularly about his ill treatment of Nada. Death surprisingly joins in this attack and states in her characteristically informal vernacular, 'Nada was right. It is bad news for us to get involved with them, you know that. Anyway, condemning her to an eternity of Hell, just because she turned you down … that's a really shitty thing to do. Okay, I've finished. You can shout at me now.' (*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4:34). The progression here is not so much an outwardly visible movement as it is an inward realisation. Before the issue was put to him in this light, he had no idea that his actions were interpreted as 'wrong', 'reactionary' or 'inhuman.' For the first time in the series, Morpheus shows utter remorse for what he has done and comes to the shocking conclusion that he is no longer 'perfect.' These are definite human character traits, and in the true spirit of humanity, Morpheus sets out and frees Nada in an attempt to gain redemption. One could also assume that during this whole episode, Morpheus started experiencing

guilt. This is another major departure from 'godliness' as immortals kill indiscriminately due to their contempt for humanity; guilt is a truly human trait indeed. Along with his first sting of guilt came his first wish to unburden himself and therefore his first apology. When Morpheus finally frees Nada, he makes the following clumsy effort at an apology, 'Ten thousand years ago, I … I condemned you to hell. I now think … I think I may have acted wrongly. I think perhaps I should apologize. I should tell you that I'm sorry' (*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4:199). Nada's initial reaction is not surprising when she lashes out at him, and this leaves him disillusioned and confused. When she does, however, come to forgive him, Morpheus realises the strength of the human spirit and is left facing the knowledge of the pain he has indifferently caused her.

Up to now Morpheus' progress has seemed rather subtle, but in the *Brief Lives* series he starts showing drastic change in his perception and character. When a fire breaks out in a hotel and causes the death of Morpheus' and Delirium's guide, a mortal named Ruby, Morpheus feels strongly responsible and exclaims to Delirium, 'She was assigned to guard us, and take us from place to place, and thus we had responsibility for her. We failed her. As I say, it might be simple accident that Ruby's room was where the fire started … reason was never an important part of my dominion. But certain conclusions become inescapable' (*Brief Lives* Chapter 4 p.24). This response represents a major departure from the expected response that a being as old as time itself would have when faced with the death of a mortal. For example, Ruby's boss, an immortal named Pharamond, responded to the news of Ruby's death by saying, 'Ah me. That's the trouble with mortals. They do that. Not to worry, eh? I try to not let myself get overly fond of them' (*Brief Lives* Chapter 6 p.8). This cold-hearted response following Morpheus' notable emotional response alerts the reader to Morpheus' progress through its juxtaposition. It seems that Morpheus has come to learn that the lives of humans are brief and are therefore much more precious and important than he originally thought. Rauch (2003:44) states that Morpheus also comes to realise that his entire existence, and also that of his family, is dependent on these frail humans, as he and the rest of the Endless are anthropomorphic representations of certain human conditions. A complete disregard for humans would imply a complete disregard for the fabric from which his existence is spun. By placing gods and mortals in this one-way dependent relationship, Gaiman makes an important comment on the value of mythology and religion: these beliefs serve no purpose outside of the human context. They only exist while humanity actively and creatively participates in the upholding of their legacy. Morpheus, and any other being from the realm of mythology, is wholly dependent for his 'existence'

on humanity. It is the revelation of this valuable relationship between humans and gods that forms the basis of the aptly named *Brief Lives* series, and elicits a greater respect and understanding in Morpheus for the frailty of human life. This realisation becomes manifest when Morpheus insists on continuing his quest to find Destruction. Initially, it seems that he was not upset enough over Ruby's death to stray from his path, but soon it is revealed that he actually intends to complete this journey so her death will not be in vain. By finding Destruction and reuniting him with Delirium, he is giving meaning to Ruby's death.
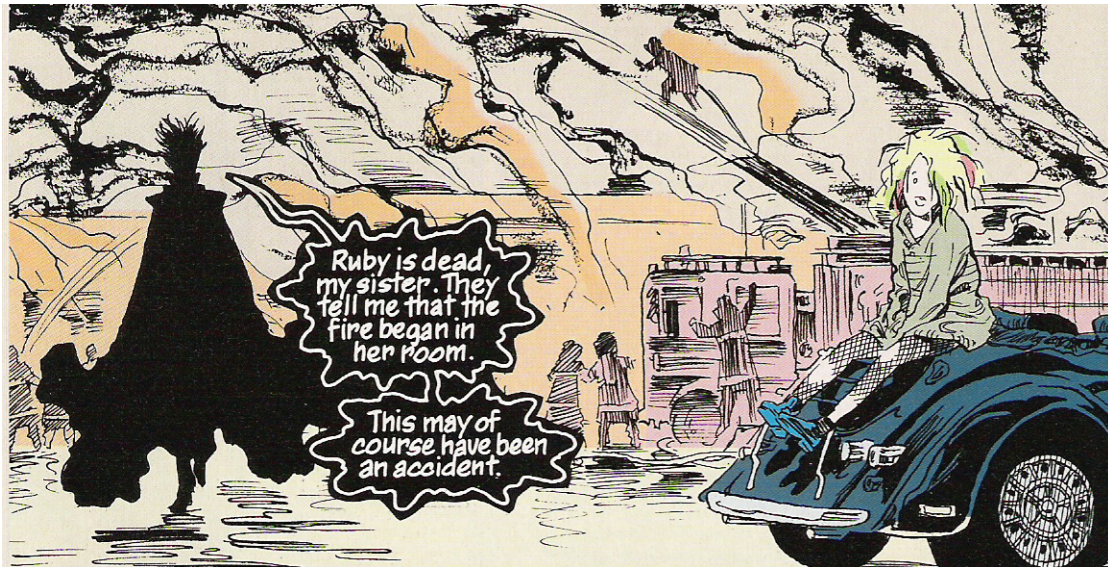

Fig.5.4− Morpheus and Delirium at the scene of Ruby's death
(*Brief Lives* Chapter 4 p.24)

Later in *Brief Lives*, we also witness the dramatic end of the Morpheus-Orpheus saga. In Destiny's garden, Morpheus realises that the only person who can help them in their quest to find Destruction is his estranged son, Orpheus. The idea of having to face this unresolved aspect of his life, for which he now feels extremely guilty, overpowers him and he collapses (*Brief Lives* Chapter 7 p.11). It is clear at this point that his numb soul has started to give way and the emotions attached to all the hurt he has caused have now started to flood in. He is indeed starting to 'feel' human guilt and pain. Before he goes in to see Orpheus, he says to Delirium, 'I have … no desire to do this, my sister' (*Brief Lives* Chapter 7 p.18), to which she replies, 'I know.' Delirium realises the emotional distress this is causing him, but does not allow him to pull out. It seems that she too, like her other sibling Death, cares deeply for Morpheus and wants him to resolve the transgressions of his past so that they can stop causing him pain. Morpheus' primary reason for being so reluctant to see his son is that he knows

what Orpheus would want in return for assisting them in finding Destruction: he would require Morpheus to kill him. Undoubtedly, the 'old Morpheus' would have exhibited no emotional distress in ending his son's life. It is understandable, however, that at this point in his humanisation this would cause Morpheus immense pain to finally kill the son to whom he owes so much. When he returns to fulfil his son's request, Orpheus says to him, 'Father? Mother came to me … she said that she had been imprisoned (referring to Calliope's imprisonment by a crazed writer) and that you freed her. You have changed, since the old days' (*Brief Lives* Chapter 9 p.3). Morpheus, of course, dismisses this immediately, but it is very clear. After granting Orpheus his heart's desire, Morpheus returns to his palace in the Dreaming and finds that his door guards fail to recognise him due to the extensive change he has undergone. When, in disbelief, they ask if it is really him, he replies in a way that signals the extent of his change: 'A strange question to ask, my servant. Am I not your creator? You three have served me well in the past; as you shall serve me in the future. Have I ever told you how much I appreciate your service? That I value you most highly.' This leads one of them to ask, 'Is he all right?' (*Brief Lives* Chapter 9 p.13). The changes in Morpheus are, therefore, no longer trivial, but have culminated in this overt display in the *Brief Lives* series. There is no more speculation: Morpheus is becoming human.

The *Brief Lives* series, with particular reference to the death of Orpheus, marks the climax of the entire *Sandman* story. The moment Orpheus left the realm of the living Morpheus became guilty of spilling family blood and set in motion the chain of events that would bring the main narrative to a conclusion and bring about the final stage of his journey to becoming human. As Frank McConnell wrote, in his introduction to *The Kindly Ones*: 'And with that act (referring to Orpheus' killing) Dream has entered time, choice, guilt, and regret – has entered the sphere of the human' (*The Collected Sandman* Vol.9:9)

As Rauch (2003:44) stated, it is clear that being, or becoming, more human has taken its toll on Morpheus by the time we encounter him in *The Kindly Ones*. Exposed, vulnerable, tired and filled with the terrible guilt and regret for all his misdeeds, Morpheus does not seem comfortable with the changes he has undergone and the half-being he has morphed into. It becomes clear that he wants to be released from the terrible guilt that burdens him. This revelation unfolds when Nuala comes to visit him. He unburdens his heart and relates to her the things that have been troubling him: 'There are old rules, Nuala. Rules that were old when time was young. The ladies (The Fates) have power to

avenge blood-crimes … and I killed my son. I killed him twice. Once, long ago, when I would not help him; and once … more recently … when I did. The ladies are empowered to hound those who spill family blood. I have Orpheus' blood on my hands, Nuala. I killed my son. It was what he wanted … what he craved. In my pride I abandoned him for several thousand years; and then, in the last, I killed him' (*The Sandman* #67:6). In this response, Nuala gives the greatest insight made in Morpheus' character when she asks: 'You want them to punish you, don't you?' Nuala knows that with Morpheus' 'humanity' came the terrible guilt of what he has done, not specifically in reference to Orpheus, but the millennia of inhumane behaviour he now has on his conscience.
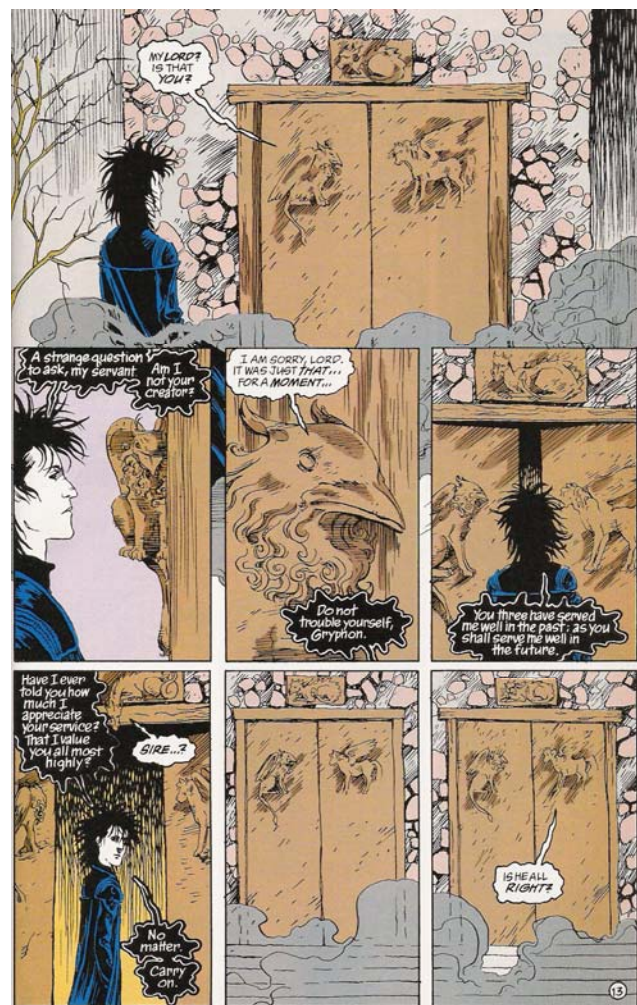

Fig.5.5 – The guards don't recognise Morpheus upon his return
(The Sandman #49:13)

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It is simply not possible that a mortal can carry the guilt of the countless transgressions perpetrated by an immortal over millennia. Herein lies a fundamental irony of the tale, as it is the journey itself that ends up destroying Morpheus. He is presented as a heartless, cold individual with no respect for humanity and is therefore ripe to undergo the changes we have discussed up to now. The irony is this: the changes the reader wants him to undergo will lead to the end of the character. This is, however, only realised at the end of the series as the reader does not consider the impossibility of a human and a god sharing one being.

At the end of this sequence, Morpheus reflects on a conversation he had with Ishtar in *Brief Lives*: 'I told Ishtar that she was wrong. That I was not changed. That I did not change. But in truth, I think I lied to her' (*The Sandman* #67:6).

Fig.5.6− Morpheus with Orpheus' blood on his hands after the killing
(*Brief Lives* Chapter 9 p.6)

After gaining this ultimate insight into his life, there is nothing to do for Morpheus than face the Furies. His death is, however, not the spectacular affair one might have expected, as he ends up sitting and waiting for his older sister, Death. When she makes her appearance, he tells her:

> I did not plan this my sister. I had imagined that I would be able to keep events in check. I intended to play a waiting game, in which, ultimately no harm was done. Had I remained in the Dreaming, the Kindly Ones could have done no damage to me directly, nor been able to do anything irreparable to the Dreaming. No one was hurt (whom) I could not have restored. But I was forced to leave the Dreaming. Since I killed my son … the Dreaming has not been the same … or perhaps I was no longer the same. I still had my obligations… but even the freedom of the Dreaming can be a cage, of a kind, my sister.
>
> <div align="right">(The Sandman #69:5-6)</div>

Morpheus admits his fallibility and state of mind when he says, 'I am tired, my sister. I am very tired.' Ultimately, however, he makes the choice to take Death's hand and thereby attribute his demise to his own inner suffering rather than attribute it to the external effects of his encounter with the Furies.

The journey has thus come to an end and Morpheus has successfully transformed into a human, even though it may be only for a short time. Campbell claimed that most myths are life-affirming, but it is difficult to deduce an affirmation of life from a story in which the protagonist orchestrated a complex suicide. Morpheus' journey can, however, be classified as 'life-affirming' if one looks at it in the light of Campbell's first function of mythology: see the world for the majestic wonder that it is. One must also remember that Morpheus did not 'die' in the strictest sense of the word, as Daniel took his place as the new Dream. Daniel, though now an immortal, was once a human and is therefore a more balanced and compassionate immortal than Morpheus ever was. In Daniel we see what we wanted Morpheus to turn into, but couldn't.

Fig. 5.7− Unburdening his soul: Morpheus and Nada discuss Orpheus' death and its implications

(The Sandman #69:6)

Ten billion years of existence as an immortal did not equip Morpheus with knowledge of the reality of the human condition, a condition that, once acquired, he couldn't reconcile with the ages that he has lived as a cold selfish immortal. Would we miss him? I tend to share the same sentiment as Stephen Rauch (2003:46), 'even while we mourn his loss, from death comes life.'

5.3 The Role of Humanity in the Contemporary Myth

At this point we should address a few contradictions when it comes to the issue of humanity in the text. Morpheus undergoes this dramatic journey and transformation into a human, but almost immediately dies afterwards. With Morpheus dead, the position of Dream is taken by the once-human Daniel. Morpheus' journey towards humanity, his death and then subsequent replacement by a mortal, may be viewed as representing the 'death' of traditional mythology and its old gods. Morpheus' death is therefore not a re-affirmation of mythology, both old and new, but the birth of a new myth of humanity.

This emphasis on humanity prompts the reader to prize humans over immortals, even though they are exposed to the traumas, societal illnesses and situations demonstrating how utterly meaningless life can be. In response to the first paradox, I have already determined that the guilt Morpheus acquired as an immortal could not subside in his newly acquired mortal state. One of the primary characteristics of humanity is, therefore, being able to feel or live with emotion. Hence our need to consider characters who exhibit emotional sensitivity. This should partly explain why Death as a character became so popular; in comparison to Desire's heartlessness and Morpheus' limited adolescent brooding, Death is the most humane character in the series. Also there is, yet again, the issue of relationship. Morpheus has spent the greater part of ten billion years as a solitary being and could, therefore, not adjust to the relational nature of humanity. As Reynold Nieburh said: 'Community is an individual as well as a social necessity; for the individual can realize himself only in an intimate organic relation to his fellow men' (1941:244). Humans are social creatures, and we define and educate ourselves through these intricate relations that we form with others and extract the only true happiness we can experience as a species through the rewards of our relationships.

Another important characteristic of being human is that we have the ability to heal, to become whole beings again. The process of being wounded and healing separates us from the immortals, who lack the capacity to change and are limited in their expressions. We do, however, envy their greatness and power and lament our own small existence, but if *The Sandman* teaches us anything, it is that within the briefness and frailty of our lives exists a potential for greatness. In the shortness of our lives lies the preciousness of our existence and the desire to give our lives meaning and to accomplish something far greater than ourselves. It is in this striving towards greatness that we seek expression

through mythology, by, in a sense, creating ideals we cannot accomplish. Myths are therefore not only the creations of humanity, they are a representation of humanity.

5.4 Jungian archetypes in *The Sandman*

We have come to a point where we must turn to Carl Jung to assist us in shedding some light on the main plot of *The Sandman*. The first Jungian archetype that can be applied to *The Sandman* is 'The Shadow', which Jung describes as being 'everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him directly or indirectly' (1959:284). At first, it can be deduced that Morpheus refuses to acknowledge his need to change, and even after the change is instigated he refused to acknowledge that he has indeed embarked on a journey towards change. One way of considering Morpheus' 'shadow', then, is that it represents his inherent vulnerability and growing emotional state – in short his hidden or submerged humanity. Later on, when his transformation has sufficiently progressed, Morpheus is extremely reluctant to address his past transgressions and the harm that he caused. This becomes visible during his reluctance to face Orpheus and his initial disillusionment when Death suggests that he has treated Nada unfairly. Thus Morpheus' shadow also represents the burden of guilt that he carries around when he becomes a human, with a human perspective and human concepts of moral and ethical behaviour. One would imagine that within the freedom allowed by the comic medium there would be a more imaginative way to represent this aspect of the character. This was perhaps what Gaiman was trying to communicate when he set about creating one of the most intriguing mysteries of the series, namely the identity of the shadowy figure that employs Loki and Puck. It has been widely speculated that Morpheus consciously or unconsciously orchestrated his own demise by calling on Loki and Puck to kidnap Daniel and subsequently spark Lyta's vengeful response. When parts of the plot to kidnap and kill Daniel are revealed to him, however, he seems genuinely unaware. This is consistent with the notion of the shadow archetype in Jungian psychology as the shadow manifests itself in varying levels of consciousness. As Jung said: 'everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual conscious life, the blacker and denser it is' (1938: 93). This could explain why the shadowy figure in *The Sandman* only appears for one brief, but strategically important, moment. If it is Morpheus' unconscious shadow that has manifested itself, it would explain why this figure's agenda is so dark and potentially disastrous. What Jung meant in the above quote is that, if we do not supply an outlet for the darker, more destructive aspect of our psyche, it might grow too strong and

subsequently find a way to destroy us. This could indeed be the case in *The Sandman*, as Morpheus in no way externalised his internal struggle until he started his humanising process. At this stage, however, he was not able to deal with this dark aspect of his existence that had the opportunity to gain incalculable strength over billions of years. It is therefore conceivable that he had to find some unconscious way of releasing this 'darkness.' In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1959), Jung describes instances when the Shadow, which is a collective for everything we cannot face about ourselves, separates from the conscious self and is forced into the subconscious, which allows it to act independently of the conscious will. Stephen Rauch (2003:49) offers the following insight into the occurrence of a free-acting Shadow archetype in *The Sandman*:

> This phenomenon is probably quite rare, but it would be more likely the more a person represses and forces (it) down into his unconscious. And although Dream is a manifestation of consciousness, he is (at least before his imprisonment) one of the least introspective characters you will ever meet. And as a being over ten billion years old, his shadow must be a mile long (even his word-balloons are black). This would seem to fit the mould of a being whose shadow is not incorporated into his conscious personality, so it splits off and acts on its own.

When considering the main narrative as a whole, one cannot help thinking that Morpheus, consciously or subconsciously, set up the entire plot that would lead to his death, like allowing Loki to remain free, but in his 'debt.' This further points to Morpheus as the instigator of the plot, because Loki had a reason to obey him (due to debt he owed). It is thus conceivable that Morpheus' Shadow, acting independently, was responsible for Morpheus' demise and that Morpheus was thus in some way responsible for his own death.

Even though Morpheus' Shadow might conjure notions of maliciousness or evil, the Shadow in Jungian psychology doesn't always conform to this notion. Jung said that 'the shadow is merely somewhat inferior, primitive, unadapted, and awkward; not wholly bad. It even contains inferior, childish, or primitive qualities which could in a way vitalize and embellish human existence…' (1938:95). Inferior in this sense does not really refer to weakness in a negative context, but rather refers to aspects of oneself that are abandoned and not fully developed. Interestingly, Jung also

connects the notion of 'childishness' to this inferiority, which puts Morpheus' transformation into the child, Daniel, in a different light.

Jung's process of individuation – becoming a whole being by merging the conscious and unconscious– is also strongly reflected in Morpheus' journey towards becoming human and conscious of his being. Jung said: 'I use the term 'individuation' to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual', that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole'' (1959:1610). Therefore, by reconciling himself with the destructive elements of his psyche, Morpheus becomes a whole entity and a human being. Morpheus' transformation was indeed a lengthy and painful process (spanning 75 issues), but, as Jung said 'Nature herself demands death and a rebirth' (1959:130). The story could therefore not have taken place without this aspect to it. DA Leeming, in his, *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (1998), emphasises the death of the hero saying that , as the hero 'teaches us something of the positive nature of death as the catalyst for new birth through spirit. As always, the hero is the symbol of man in search of himself' (as quoted in: Rauch 2003:50). It seems that here, and throughout the whole series, Gaiman has made an attempt to not only demystify death but to circumvent traditional notions surrounding this controversial issue and present us with more positive attributes.

The other Jungian archetype that may be applied to that of *The Sandman* is that of the 'child.' Jung explained that the archetype of the child is 'a picture of certain forgotten things in our childhood … not only something that existed in his distant past but also something that exists now' (1959:161). Based on Jung's (1956:164) view that 'one of the essential features of the child motif is its futurity' in the sense that the 'child is the potential future', Daniel is representative of the archetype. Daniel is not only a manifestation of the future Morpheus, he is at the same time small, yet potentially powerful. Even before his mortality was taken from him and he was still a normal human baby, he was instrumental in saving Matthew's life. When the immortal Daniel was questioned about his powerlessness when he was still a human baby he responds: 'And you were once a man, Matthew. Were you entirely without power, even then?' (*The Sandman* #71:15). Rauch (2003:51) claimed that Jung's notion of the child being small and weak, and at the same time, extremely powerful, conforms to our perception of the Daniel character, who is an all-powerful immortal, yet still only a child. It seems that, on closer inspection, Gaiman tried to directly emulate this archetype in Daniel according to Jungian understanding; as Jung said, 'Though the child may be 'insignificant', unknown, 'a mere

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child', he is also divine.' (1959:170) In a sense, Daniel's metamorphosis into a powerful immortal speaks of the potential of every human to reach unprecedented heights, as it was his humanity that allowed him to be transformed. The purpose of the Child archetype in mythology is to inspire us and make us aware of our own hidden potential to achieve greatness. I think this message was successfully related through the story of Daniel in *The Sandman*.

5.5   Morpheus' Hero's Tale

In the introduction to *The Kindly Ones*, Frank McConnell called *The Sandman* and its tale of transformation 'a magnificent parable about the humanisation of myth: about how the values of regret, responsibility and the awful duties of love outweigh even the power and majesty of the gods we invent and then worship.' In a similar vein, Joseph Campbell (1949:391) said that in mythology 'not the animal world, not the plant world, not the miracle of the spheres, but man himself is now the crucial mystery'. It is important to remember that the Hero's tale is essentially about hopes, fears and transgressions; that is, the lives of humans. Morpheus' realisation that there is something missing from his life and his journey of discovery to find this lacking element, is at once 'moving, strange, funny and inspirational' (Rauch 2003:51). His transformation, however, does not purely relate to inward change, but also to physical transformation. When Morpheus is attacked in *The Doll's House* by the Corinthian, he hardly notices a knife wound inflicted by the malicious nightmare, but in *The Kindly Ones*, he bleeds profusely after having been struck with a whip by one of the ladies and even retains a scar. The physical aspect of his existence was the only remnant of his immortality that had to fade away, and when the ladies managed to maim his body in the way that they did, it signalled that Morpheus was at last completely 'human.' His newly acquired 'flesh and blood' echoed his spiritual and mental transformation through its manifestation.

We have already established that Morpheus had, at least to an extent, a hand in his own undoing and that his unstable emotional state has propagated the main narrative. Rauch (2003:52) offered the following quote from Terrence Real's book *I Don't Want to Talk About it: Overcoming the Secret Legacy of Male Depression* (1997:35), had the following to say of the traditionally masculine view of expressing emotion:

As a society we have more respect for the walking wounded – those who deny their difficulties – than those who 'let' their conditions 'get to them.' Traditionally, we have not liked men to be very emotional or very vulnerable. An overtly depressed man is both – someone who not only has feelings, but has allowed those feelings to swamp his competence. A man brought down by life is bad enough. But a man brought down by his own unmanageable feelings – for many, that is unseemly.

Morpheus, like Real explains, has become more conscious of his own emotions. However, he quickly becomes overwhelmed by these emotions once he becomes aware of them and, as already suggested, this greatly contributes to his inability to function as a human and implicitly 'causes' his death. One cannot simply look to mental depression when attempting to finger the cause of Morpheus' death, though; one also has to consider the fact that he had a great many responsibilities that he now has to abandon.

When Morpheus makes the conscious decision to no longer ignore his changing mental state and the transformation he has undergone, he realises he can no longer perform his duties and wisely decides to find a replacement for himself. One might look at this as a great failure on Morpheus' part, especially considering the context of the Hero's journey, but it should rather be regarded as a great victory, as Morpheus was able to reclaim his emotions and gain his humanity. Gaiman has made a valiant effort in redeeming the once stale and formulaic Hero's journey. If one subscribes to Campbell's view that the story of the hero is the only story worth telling, it is easy to understand why Gaiman chose to apply his writing genius to reinventing this particular genre of mythology.

Fig.5.8– Checking on his successor: Morpheus visits Daniel and infuriates his mother

(*The Collected Sandman* Vol.4:51)

After all, any story that recounts instances of change and involves a protagonist who has to sacrifice a part of his being while facing the enigmatic, can be considered part of hero mythology. Perhaps all stories worth noting, that contain some inherent meaning or any message for humanity as a whole, may be termed hero myths. As Stephen Rauch (2003:53) said:

> We should not be afraid, then, to call *The Sandman* a hero myth, recognizing at the same time the Dream's journey is about myth, which is after all what Dream is in the first place. What we have, then, is a hero myth about myth itself, as *The Sandman* is a story about stories, and Dream the personification of story-telling.

Rauch identifies here a key aspect of postmodern fiction in *The Sandman*, namely metafictionality. By making internal references to its application of the Hero myth, especially to its inversion of the Hero's journey, *The Sandman* does appear to be a deconstruction and critique of mythology, as opposed to a whole myth on its own. *The Sandman* is, therefore, a fiction about fiction; a supposed mythology about mythology. It achieves this by not only self-referencing, but also by transposing *The Sandman* onto those myths and mythic elements that it is referencing. By retelling the tale of Orpheus largely in its original version and then incorporating elements exclusive to *The Sandman*, in that retelling, the reader is at once faced with a familiar tale as well as one that is completely new. Through the use of this backwards-forwards referencing, Gaiman is deconstructing these myths and shading them with irony, satire, allegory and humour.

But what about heroism? Should a tale with a hero not include some heroic exploits? This is a complex issue in the case of *The Sandman*. When one considers Morpheus, his abilities and powers bring him closer to a god, as opposed to more traditional heroes having extra-ordinary, but essentially human abilities. Morpheus as an all-powerful being was a response to a time in which superheroes were given less powers in order to enable their creators to write more 'human interest' stories around them. The 1990s offered some unconventional approaches to time-worn characters like Superman and Batman, but Gaiman remained characteristically and consistently deviant toward trends in the medium. In a time when superheroes became more 'human', Gaiman wanted to experiment with a character that was not only super-powerful, but was actually an all-powerful god-like being. Comic book creators only realised in the early 1990s, that which is common knowledge

today: characters that are too powerful and do not display any human characteristics, make it difficult for their following to identify with them. According to Rauch (2003:53), Gaiman was a step ahead of the pack and managed to circumnavigate the alienation that superheroes were experiencing by 'creating a character whose essential development was to become aware of the importance of humanity, and to gain access to his own.' Morpheus' heroic status is further complicated by the milieu of his conquests. Traditionally, heroes follow the convention of leaving their homelands and journeys to strange foreign lands. The difference with Morpheus is that, apart from some of his exploits that take place in the waking world of contemporary America, most of his adventures take place within the Dreaming, which is his home.

Morpheus' status as hero is, however, not completely negated. According to Campbell (1949:392), an essential part of the hero's saga is dedicated to 'atonement with the father' and it is appropriate that the reverse takes place in *The Sandman* (keeping to the already established inverse hero's journey), as Morpheus seeks atonement with his son and not the other way around. Up to now, we have stated that Morpheus' journey and quests have been largely an inward journey of self-discovery and not, as in traditional mythology, a physical journey. The fact is that Morpheus also undertakes some 'physical quests'; he sets out to regain the stolen tools of his office after his imprisonment (*Preludes and Nocturnes*), he journeys back to hell to rescue Nada and he goes on a grand quest in the waking world, with Delirium, in search of Destruction. These quests are, however, not greatly significant in themselves or allegorical (as is the case in classic hero tales), as Morpheus' greatest conquest occurs within himself (Rauch 2003:54). In view of more traditional tales of heroism, any act of facing the unknown can constitute heroism, but perhaps facing the unknown within constitutes the most heroic deed of all. In that way, then, we can apply Campbell's standardised formula of 'separation-initiation-return' to the inward journey that effects the personal transformation of the hero from within (1949:30). It is likely that this is what Campbell (1949:25) referred to when he said:

> Furthermore, we have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we have thought to have found an abomination, we shall find god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we

shall come to the centre of our existence; where we had thought to be alone,

we shall be with the world.

As Campbell (1949:356) said: 'The mighty hero of extraordinary powers … is each of us: not the physical self visible in the mirror, but the king within.' It becomes clear at this point that by appearing to be an extremely unconventional hero figure, by containing none of the superhero elements (secret identity, costume, clear placement in the good-evil battle), Morpheus is still intimately connected to the 'narrative of the hero path, a kind of tale as old as mythology itself' (Rauch 2003:54).

In addition, Morpheus' status as hero is bolstered by the fact that he adheres to the convention that a primary attribute of heroism is to become accepting of one's own death. As Campbell said: 'The hero would be no hero if death held for him any terror: the first condition is reconciliation with the grave' (1949:356). Robert Olson agreed with this and said that the true hero is a person who 'escaped the banality of everyday existence by recognising his finitude and courageously facing up to the fact of death' (1962:139). Olson does not mean that the hero should make peace with the general reality and tragedy of death in the world; he means that the hero should only come to terms with his own mortality. Finally, Paul Tillich adds that 'courage always includes risk, it is always threatened by non-being' (1952:155). I believe that Morpheus was continually aware that his transformation would eventually bring about his death, and even though he may not have been overtly aware of this fact at the inauguration of his quest, by the conclusion of *The Sandman* he knew that the final test of being human is, in fact, dying. Knowing this and still continuing towards the ideal is characteristic of the noble and tragic hero.

Fig.5.9— Morpheus and John Constantine, hot on the trail of Morpheus' stolen tools
(*The Sandman* #2:14)

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CONCLUSION

Before the exploration of space, the moon and beyond, and before the advent of Christianity, the stars were the residence of all-powerful gods and mighty heroes. They were believed not only to be the masters over this vast domain, but also over the earthly fates and dreams of all mankind. By occupying the conscious and unconscious minds of the planet, this pantheon of deities was the very cause and reason for the human condition – the authors of humanity's future and past. Of these gods and immortal heroes, magnificent monuments were created on earth as they manifested in dreams, and their divine exploits became the stock of mythology. But in time, man has replaced these gods and heroes with new ones, as well as new religions, new mythologies and scientific explanations that would provide different, but no more certain answers than those of his Greek, Roman or Egyptian ancestors. While new monolithic and benevolent gods are now elected and science replaces traditional mythologies, I argue that modern humanity still awaits a revelation about the meaning of their lives. With eyes turned up to the sky, I assert that many, if not all, are ready to accept the truly incredible, namely that human destiny is written in the stars. But how is one to look and see? With old eyes or new?

A new mythological vision may just be found in 'contemporary mythology'. This newly developed term refers to the narratives of postmodern fiction, which resemble, either in content or in cultural significance, traditional mythology such as Greek and Roman mythology, or religious mythologies ('Contemporary Mythology': www.en.wikipedia.org /wiki/ contemporary_mythology). In the same way that traditional mythologies provided elucidation on the world and its origins, contemporary mythology provides modern man with a metaphorical language that facilitates his exploration, sharing and comprehension of his perception of the world. In addition to this, contemporary mythology also provides a point of departure for the discussion of social and philosophical ideas relevant to the 21st century.

With societal values, symbols, modes of expression and understanding about the physical world changing over time, it becomes conceivable that a contemporary mythology is more relevant to modern man. The myths of ancient Greece and Rome used the symbols and cultural expressions

relevant to their time and social context, and while many may still be relevant today, they express a vision of the world that no longer rings true. Though many traditional myths still have great resonance in the modern world, contemporary mythology is more likely to be connected to common cultural experiences ('Contemporary Mythology':www.en.wikipedia.org /wiki/ contemporary _mythology).

Put plainly, more people in Western civilisation are intimately acquainted with films like *The Matrix* and *Star Wars* than are familiar with the narratives of Greek mythology. Also, the values presented in religious mythology may seem outdated and distant to some, or may even have acquired negative connotations through their alienating or excluding certain racial and cultural groups. A contemporary mythology and its depiction of spiritual struggles, like the ones depicted in works such as *The Sandman*, may then be used by modern man to discuss and understand his own spiritual experience of the world.

Contemporary myths are often recreations of traditional myths. *The Sandman*, and its 're-application' of narratives from traditional myths, is therefore not unique in this regard as narrative elements like the Hero's journey may be found in countless works of postmodern fiction – particularly in graphic novels and comic books. For example, in Native American mythology, it was common for a hero to utilise an animal mask in order to enable him to take on the spiritual essence of the animal. In a contemporary myth like the tale of Batman as example, the hero uses a mask and costume to endow himself with the power and iconic force of the animal he represents through his appearance ('Contemporary Mythology': www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/contemporary_mythology). The same animal motif may be found in other comic book titles like *The Incredible Spiderman*, *The X-Men*, etc. Similarly, the iconic tale of Superman echoes the Greek myth of the 'changeling', specifically the myth of Hercules. The primary narrative of this myth includes the incidence of a non-human child (Superman, Hercules) raised by humans and then growing up to become their champion. Also, many works of science fiction that deal with space exploration, particularly *Star Trek*, may be described as futuristic versions of Homer's *Odyssey*.

Contemporary mythology, or postmodern fiction incorporating traditional mythologies in their narratives and characterisations, cannot, however, be approached in the same way as the mythologies of old since mythology no longer serves as the hub of civilisation in the present-day world. Our

already segregated society has become even more separated in their varied beliefs, and while this may point to a return of polytheism, it also points to a general lack of belief in the spiritual and metaphysical. This does not imply that the concept of mythology is negated in the 21st century, as elements or archetypes in traditional mythology can be found in a wide range of creative expressions, including literature, cinema and even the packaging of consumer products. Characteristic to postmodernism, these expressions and their use of archetypes have transcended the boundaries of high or fine art to include more popular mediums like the graphic novel.

 Another distinction between the traditional and the proposed contemporary mythologies relates to the way they deal with 'reality'. Where traditional mythologies perceived the tales of exploits of their great heroes and the vengeful acts of their fearsome gods as reality, postmodern fiction is, as Roger Webster (1990:125) says, 'entirely composed of surface: there is no inner meaning or depth, simulation has taken over from any sense of real'. Even though I do not believe that a contemporary mythology presents no potential for depth and meaning, I do agree that works like *The Sandman* are 'simulations' of traditional mythology. These simulations, and assimilation, of traditional mythologies and their constituent elements and patterning, help writers like Neil Gaiman to make valid social observations through the deconstruction of these myths and their re-contextualisation for a present-day society. That is the true value of a contemporary mythology and the reason some might venture to call *The Sandman* a proper 'myth'.

As the main question of this study is the archetypal hero in Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*, it was necessary to consider the world of dreams, where archetypes become manifest. Carl Jung, expanding on the patterns that Freud found in the dreams of his patients, identified certain fundamental patterns or archetypes. It is argued that these archetypes spawned, from the 'collective unconscious', have been seeping into the conscious minds of artists and writers since the dawn of time, and so found themselves in the creative expressions of every culture on the planet. Contemporary artists and writers also studied classical culture and drew on its mythologies in the process of writing and making art. Nowhere did these narrative and visual patterns find themselves as clearly expressed as in the mythologies of ancient civilisations. It took thousands of years, and myth critics like Joseph Campbell, to shed light on the relation between dreams and mythology, and contemporary works like *The Sandman* to embody this relation. By incorporating the ancient myths, and placing stories and the act of storytelling at the centre of *The Sandman,* and then by making Morpheus the embodiment

of dream and his home, The Dreaming, part of an interpretation of Jung's collective unconscious, Gaiman enables *The Sandman* to come full circle – from dream to myth and back again.

This embodiment of the relation between myth and dream was to take the form of an inverse Hero's journey that took Morpheus from god to man. This holds significant implications for the model of the Hero's journey, which now has to be re-applied to an inward journey of realisation and not an outward journey through perilous lands. Heroism can no longer be thought of in terms of slaying monsters and rescuing maidens, but rather in terms of being brave enough to instigate change and to strive towards dignity and compassion for all humanity.

Campbell's perfect myth was one that validates its social context; *The Sandman* went a step further, by not only validating the social order, but also critiquing it and providing a vision, in the form of an augury, of an improved social order in which all will be treated with equality. His vision is of a world where the walls of race and class have crumbled to make way for the dawn of humanity as a singular unified force, yet varied in the polytheistic beliefs of its members. In this way, *The Sandman* and other contemporary mythologies have become vehicles for social change, celebrating a 'new heroism' – that is, all the things that have made humans, human.

Consequently, this study drew on the work of David Miller, the pioneer of a new polytheism, which is naturally a departure from monotheism. Miller claims that global society is standing on the brink of a great dilemma – the spiritual decline of all of mankind. According to Miller, this is a good thing because through the loss of one god and one mythology (monotheism) we open the ways for a more varied approach to spiritualism (polytheism) and, by implication, for a greater kinship between men. In Miller's utopian society, the absence of a monotheistic belief system would remove some of the greatest barriers that segregate society and some of the greatest causes for hatred and discrimination among the people of our planet. It is a great ideal, but wholly unworkable. Works like *The Sandman* do, however, advocate this multi-cultural and multi-belief mindset, if not to change the world, then perhaps only to make us aware of the commonalities in our beliefs and in doing so, promote a greater understanding of each other. This polytheistic approach was of course, characteristic of ancient civilisations which worshipped many different gods, and by including this as such a strong theme in *The Sandman*, it more clearly reflects a 'true myth' through the synthesis of old and new.

Other old elements that have brought *The Sandman* closer to the somewhat elusive classification of contemporary myth are, of course, the archetypes that have been re-applied to their new literary context – the Child, the Trickster, the Sage and many others have all been resurrected in *The Sandman*. Here Campbell and Jung shed some light on the issue once again, as these archetypes are notoriously difficult to identify and analyse in a modern context since we no longer simply has conventional heroes to contend with, but also new incarnations like anti-heroes, super-heroes, cyber punks, etc.

This study also considered one of the primary mediums that contemporary myths use to propagate their new hero tales. Traditional mythology made use of visual and written mediums to tell their stories, and so too do contemporary myths. One such medium, the graphic novel, brings together the visual and written in perfect synergy. Laura Mulvey also shed light on how the theories of psychoanalysis could then be applied to gain a greater understanding of why the medium is so powerful, and how devices like framing could be used in the medium to help the reader identify with the character it depicted.

The tale of *The Sandman* and the mediums it appropriates needed to be contextualised to promote a greater understanding of the forces that shaped this tale. Through the evolution of the comic book, from its formulaic one- dimensional superhero exploits to its tortured, horrific representations of the inner struggles of the troubled human psyche, we have come to understand *The Sandman* as a product of our social development. In contextualizing this work and its main protagonist, this way the role of fantasy and folklore, in *The Sandman* and its sister-titles within Vertigo, was also established.

In addition, the role of stories and the act of storytelling were explored as central themes in *The Sandman*. Folklore emerged as an important element, both in the narrative of *The Sandman* and in the characterisation of The Endless. Based on this, I set out to establish the criteria for contemporary mythology and examined whether *The Sandman* may be classified as a form of contemporary mythology. The main criteria include the requirement that a contemporary myth consist of elements from old mythology, like polytheism and the presence of ancient gods. *The Sandman's* unique social commentary, as well as the introduction of The Endless, supplied the required new elements and brought the work closer to achieving a synthesis between old and new.

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The study reaches its end by tracing the steps of Morpheus on his own Hero's journey. He does not confront the usual monsters and beasts; instead, his obstacles are internal, his battle is with himself. The heroes of traditional mythology progressed from being mortals to achieving almost god-like status. Morpheus' journey seemed to head in the opposite direction as he progressed to a better understanding of humanity by becoming more human himself. Sadly, his ultimate goal of humanness is only actualised when he suffers the ultimate fate of every human, namely death. His progression towards humanness, and inevitable death, also seems to symbolise the 'death' of the old mythologies and gods as Morpheus, the billion-year-old 'deity', gives up his post to the once-mortal Daniel.

Returning the volumes to the shelf, what is the reader left with? Perhaps with the realization that finding meaning in a world seemingly devoid of it is only possible if you act with kindness and compassion towards others. As Campbell (1972:219) claims: 'the fundamental human experience is that of compassion.' One does not have to look far to find compassion in *The Sandman*, as the crux of the tale deals with compassion in its most exaggerated form: Morpheus' mercy-killing of his son. Mikal Gilmore (1997: 9-12), in the introduction to 'The Wake', said:

> Morpheus died for love … he could not understand how to care for his own heart – he could not grasp its limitations or vanities or real needs – nor could he understand or respect the true patterns in the hearts of others … until, that is, the end … In the end, Morpheus's heart could not be fixed or healed … and Morpheus, in these tales, has come to understand the futility of living with a heart that cannot be fixed – especially living endlessly with such a heart.

In today's world, where politics and organised religion have failed to unify people and provide meaning to their existence, love and interconnection between beings of all shapes and sizes – which are central themes in *The Sandman* and relate to both the sociological and psychological functions of mythology – are presented as possible alternatives. Even though Morpheus could not orchestrate this in his own life or during his own lifetime, his greatest gift was to ensure that he is replaced by someone who could do so.

Fig.6.1- Morpheus, 'dying' for love
(*Brief Lives* Chapter 2 p.1)

To succeed in locating the archetypal hero within the often amorphous realm of contemporary mythology, I showed how this mythology incorporates traditional mythological elements and synthesises them with the new. I further sought to evaluate the role of old and familiar elements, particularly the archetypes, within *The Sandman*. These are the main contributions of my study. I do, however, hope that this study has also made a contribution to research on the graphic novel, by illustrating that the medium is a worthy subject for scholarly study.

In conclusion, I cite Stephen Rauch (2003:146), whom I consider an authority on *The Sandman*, in support of the main hypothesis underpinning this dissertation:

If this isn't myth, then nothing is. For if the way has been lost in the modern world, then the final legacy of *The Sandman* may be the reclamation of our emotions in an emotionless age, by simultaneously addressing the heart, mind, and soul. Indeed, no greater comment or praise could be made about any myth at any age.

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