A Structural Study of Myth in Neil Gaiman’s Adult Novels and Graphic Compositions: Relating Claude Lévi-Strauss to Contemporary Fiction

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

of Millersville University of Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

of Master of Arts

By Lee T. Atkins

April 2016
This Thesis for the Master of Arts Degree by

Lee T. Atkins

Has been approved on behalf of the

Graduate School by

Thesis Committee:

_____ Dr. Dominic Ording___________________________
Research Advisor

_____ Dr. Katarzyna Jakubiak________________________
Committee Member

_____ Dr. Timothy Miller___________________________
Committee Member

*Signatures on file

______April 6, 2016_____
Date
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

A STRUCTURAL STUDY OF MYTH IN NEIL GAIMAN’S ADULT NOVELS AND GRAPHIC COMPOSITIONS: RELATING CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS TO CONTEMPORARY FICTION by

Lee T. Atkins

Millersville University, 2016

Millersville, Pennsylvania

Directed by Dr. Dominic Ording

Contemporary authors of fiction are no strangers to myth, folklore, or other cultural narratives appropriated in their prose. The authenticity of the cultural narratives borrowed varies; yet incorporating familiar narratives can be engaging for readers and give them access to the original narrative. Using Claude Lévi-Strauss and his 1955 publication, “The Structural Study of Myth,” as a lens we focus on that notion that cultural narratives (myths, folktales, etc.) are connected by structural narrative trends called gross constituent units. With this focus, this thesis centers on various novels and graphic compositions by Neil Gaiman and how he uses cultural narratives to not only create popular fiction but to also deliver recognizable cultural narratives to new audiences. Lévi-Strauss’ argument follows an arch of recognizing the narrative structure of myth from a point of imaginative chaos to a precise categorical process by which all narratives can be deconstructed, so too does the progress of this project follow Gaiman’s prose career chapter by chapter in which we transition from his most imaginatively chaotic pieces like The Sandman and Neverwhere, through American Gods and Anansi Boys, to the refined originality of The Ocean at the end of the Lane. Showcasing other contemporary theorists that arguably follow in Lévi-Strauss’ footsteps like Darwinian literary theorist, Jonathan Gottschall, the organic quality of story and how story evolves will be explored in order to give Lévi-Strauss’ theory contemporary fortification, and further explain how cultural narratives like the ones Gaiman extrapolates upon share an integral relationship with the development of social structures.

Keywords: Neil Gaiman, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jonathan Gottschall, Myth, Folklore, Culture, Cultural Narrative, Gross Constituent Unit, Dreams, Anthropology, Graphic Novels, Cultural Studies, Darwin, Darwinian Literary Theory.

Signature of Investigator _____ Lee T. Atkins _________ Date ___ April 6, 2016 ___
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One:</td>
<td>Page 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two:</td>
<td>Page 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three:</td>
<td>Page 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four:</td>
<td>Page 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five:</td>
<td>Page 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited:</td>
<td>Page 73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following people for their professional and personal support:

To Dr. Dominic Ording, thank you for agreeing to oversee this ambitious project and for always being a mentor and friend to me since I began my studies and assistantship at Millersville University.

To Dr. Timothy Shea, thank you for signing your children up for swim lessons.

To my thesis committee members, thank you tenfold for your patience with me over the last year and I have worked to complete this project.

To my fellow graduate assistants, particularly Lija Stolz fus, and Nick Rose, thank you for showing me how to survive graduate school and reminding me to laugh at any and all frustrations that may have presented themselves in Chryst Hall.

To Mr. Neil Gaiman, thank you for being a constant inspiration to an aspiring writer.

Finally to my parents, thank you for letting me live in your house, eat your food, and take advantage of you financially—thank you for all your support you have ever offered. Thank you.
Chapter One: Introduction

First published in 1955 in *The Journal of American Folklore*—versions of this theory would reappear continuously in other various publications—Claude Lévi-Strauss’ “The Structural Study of Myth” introduced literary scholars and anthropologists to a profound postulation that all myths can be systematically deconstructed and categorized for recognition and analysis. Myth elements can inherently be cataloged via their *gross constituent units* (431), and so by extension Lévi-Strauss asserts that deconstructing mythology into recognizable and common categories also creates a spiraled\(^1\) link among them (429). The socio-political, cultural, and religious implications of this theory are numerous. Many of these implications are extrapolated further by Lévi-Strauss, and his contemporaries such as Roland Barthes and Joseph Campbell: for the sake of brevity, the latter two stated above will not be featured in this project as Levi-Strauss is simply the integral lens for the greater subject of this project. It is important for readers to note the importance that Campbell and Barthes retain, as their theories do impact this projects’ long term gaze and further research is planned.

One implication which is not necessarily stated by Lévi-Strauss within “The Structural Study of Myth” can be observed in the wake of his assertions within scholarship and authorship alike in the last half-century. Lévi-Strauss does not explicitly state this in his own discourse, but I believe the observable evidence is clear and Gaiman himself expounds on this notion: “We are in an age of confluence [in regards to authorship and literary study]” (*How Stories Last*, Soundcloud).

---

\(^1\) Word choice of shape significant due to natural outward expansion; vice et versa tracing myth and myth element relations take you back via the same natural spiraling shape.
There are divisions within authorship and academia, which many academics may argue are divisions of propriety, that exist(ed) between disciplines; they exist between cultural narratives; they exist between texts. These divisions of authorship and academia provide vantage points for theorists, critics, scholars, and educators who could then say here is the line that should be drawn between these two things. Here is where one may observe arguable comparison between two things, but linguists talk about this on that side, and rhetoricians and writers talk about that in another mode of discourse (linguists and rhetoricians are just two examples). We may collaborate or borrow or steal, but established propriety yields sequestration among disciplines. In other words, authors and scholars are sequestered by their realms of expertise. These realms are defined by genre, period, or both. It is very difficult for these divides to be bridged and maintain reverence or respect within scholarship. Evidence for this can be seen in the structure of university English departments. Professors do not teach everything—they teach toward their expertise. The divides stated above are weakening and we can thank scholars like Lévi-Strauss for such a change. “The Structural Study of Myth” is but one example of a bridge over these divides. Of course fiction has always maintained the power to flow in and out of these divides, but such freedom has not always been accompanied by respected or accredited scholarship. Why does Lévi-Strauss’ work with mythology matter? Has his work given authors and scholars a new found freedom to create theories and narratives that have never previously existed? Of course this is quite obviously not the case. Writers have been conflating mythology and other themes for a much longer expanse than Lévi-Strauss’ ideas have been permeating academia: Homer, Shakespeare, Keats and Tennyson, Eliot—these are but a peppering of authors throughout literary history who used mythology in their contemporary works. The difference that theories like Lévi-Strauss’ create is that such a conflation is not only more pronounced
within literature, but it is now possible to place Homer, Shakespeare, Keats and Tennyson, Elliot, and beyond (Herbert, Tolkien, Rowling) in the same realm of expertise—in the same classroom!

Antiquity can be reasserted in the present in a way that is not only fantastic but it is also important. Relevance and reverence can be attributed to myth-compositions such that there is no longer a proprietary restriction between these texts. Additionally, various lenses can combine, collaborate, borrow, and steal. These imperfect divides can be bridged and the proverbial Dons of academia no longer have the final say in why one temporal period or school of thought or author is more important or influential than another.²

In context of these assertions, the following chapters of this thesis will be using Claude Lévi-Strauss’ “The Structural Study of Myth” (and other authors and titles related) as a convex lens with a gaze that expands as it deepens rather than the more traditional concave lens that narrows its focus to a point of confinement. Such a gaze, which will hopefully be returned to in future research, will first fall upon the works of the very difficult to categorize cult author, Neil Gaiman.

It is important for readers to understand why Gaiman is the perfect focus for the theories that will be explored in this project. There are, of course, many contemporary authors that navigate the realms of mythology from various pantheons and periods of antiquity. Gaiman not only forged the path for many other Science-Fiction and Fantasy authors of his generation, he

² It is important to assert, for the audiences sake, that this claim does not mean to suggest that just because these divides can now be bridged in new ways does not mean they now-and-forever should be bridged. The importance of genre specific and period specific scholarship and expertise did not die with the coming of Lévi-Strauss and I do not believe it should. However, “The Structural Study of Myth” does create a new pathway for genres and periods to connect with each other and by extension such a connection allows for more contemporary literature, scholarship, and genre/sub-genre to be deemed important—which is essentially what this thesis aims to prove, and you will see how such a connection exists and is important in the coming chapters.
stands alone because of his achievements within the medium and sub-mediums of print. From his early career as a hungry journalist where he wrote for various Sci-Fi/Fantasy and pop-culture magazines, journals, and comics such as *Knave*, *Vertigo*, and *DC*; and his later milestones as a globally recognized and awarded novelist, playwright, and composer, Gaiman has consistently found groundbreaking success by remaining outside of a singularly definable genre, and cutting-edge with whatever project he involves himself in. A unifying staple of Gaiman’s style, which can be found in any of his graphic novels, adult or *YA* novels, or children’s fictions is his Tolkien-esque aptness for world-creation and profound understanding not only of a plethora of myth canons, but also how myth works to drive narrative. Such an understanding could possibly be attributed to luck, as it is clear Gaiman’s rearing is responsible for vast knowledge of Judeo-Christian, pagan, and non-western mythology. Whatever the reason may be, it is clear Gaiman displays a thorough understanding of myth, its function within culture and literature, and its construction.

**Neil Gaiman:**

Neil Gaiman was born on the tenth of November, 1960 in Hampshire England (*The Art of Neil Gaiman* 22). As a lover of stories from a very early age, Gaiman was exposed to children’s fiction and also comics by the age of three (23). This love of story only grew and soon included various comic publications such as *Smash!, Fantastic*, and *Pow!* which introduced him to heroes like The Hulk, Spider Man, and his personal favorite, Batman. By the age of seven he had discovered the science-fiction of major genre influences like Ray Bradbury and Arthur C. Clarke, and he devoured C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* series (24-25). Raised in a Jewish family and educated in the “High Church of England schools”, Gaiman not only let his love of story influence a need to understand Hebraic history and mythology, but also
that of Judeo-Christianity and many other religions and cultures as he grew and traveled throughout adulthood. Cyril Camus, from the University of Toulouse, argues that such an experience rendered Gaiman an “Outsider.” (Camus 77). An outsider of Christian mythology, and as a reflexive reaction also an outsider to his own Jewish family, Camus argues that Gaiman is akin to a modern Kafka (79). The difference between Gaiman and Kafka, Camus continues, is that Gaiman enjoys the view of the outsider: “I actually love feeling like an outsider. For example, I really enjoyed the first six years I spent in the U.S. because everything was so alien” (79). According to Camus (and Gaiman), Gaiman’s outsidership allows him to maintain a nonbiased view of the culture or text he is exploring and by extension such a view gives Gaiman the ability to maintain a holy curiosity for the subject.

Shortly after finishing school in 1977, Gaiman broke into the world of freelance journalism (32). Knowing he wanted to write (specifically, he wanted to fulfill his lifelong dream of writing his own comics), Gaiman aggressively inserted himself into the popular subculture publications of the time like Knave—a Men’s magazine that often included columns and articles with interviews of musicians prominent in the thriving punk era of England (of which Neil was a participant) and comics, with soft-core pornography here and there (39). Gaiman was drawn to this magazine because he found it interesting and different from other publications like it which featured writers he was familiar with in the science-fiction genre: “There’s really interesting articles and they’ve got [science-fiction writer] Dave Langford writing for them; this isn’t like the other ones” (39).

As coincidences go, this unlikely beginning would be the launching point of an early career as a writer which led to various interviews for Knave and other subculture publications with names like Frank Herbert, Clive Barker, and Ramsey Cambell. Eventually this led to his
own publishing of early works such as a biography of *Duran Duran*—which Gaiman admittedly still suffers of embarrassment from (59)—and a reader’s companion to Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy*, titled *Don’t Panic: The Official Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy Companion* (60). All of this culminates as the foundational experiments of a future literary rock star honing his craft. Anyone who read Gaiman’s early interviews and publications as they appeared on the market would likely never suspect that this same writer would later be responsible for the comic-genre definitive series *The Sandman* which ran from January 1989 to March 1996; additionally, critically acclaimed novels like *Neverwhere* (1996) which would also go on to be a BBC miniseries and an awarded radio-play production, *Anansi Boys* (2005), and the iconic best seller, *American Gods* (2001).

Major titles including the ones mentioned all share a common theme that has become a staple in Gaiman’s work—they are completely original pieces of writing with characters as lovable and universes as complexly detailed as anything found in Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, or J.K. Rowling, yet they simultaneously contain rich cultures from many civilizations around the world due to their incorporation of theological and cultural mythology—in short Gaiman has become a master of the cultural narrative. This captivating conflation of old and new is inherently applicable to the theories discussed in Claude Lévi-Strauss’ 1955 publication. As such, it is important for audiences to understand exactly how “The Structural Study of Myth” will function as the major lens through which Mr. Gaiman’s writing will be respectfully deconstructed.

**Literary Analysis:**

Briefly stated in the beginning of this introductory chapter, Lévi-Strauss makes two very important assertions concerning the nature of mythology. “The Structural Study of Myth” identifies a specific method for deconstructing a myth into objective categories, and asserts that
because of this ability to categorize a deconstructed myth via similarities this implies one can find a relationship between large collections of myths from different periods and different cultures. Such a hypothesis allows Lévi-Strauss to draw one very important conclusion that is not only monumental within the disciplines of cultural studies and literature, it is also an integral truth to the construction of this project overall. That conclusion is this: If myth can be segmented or categorized by structural elements that Lévi-Strauss calls Gross Constituent Units which are objective ideas that can relate one myth to another via their common thematic nature, then it should also be true that such objective ideas (GCUs) can be found in any subjective version of that myth that is being told. Therefore, as Lévi-Strauss posits, all versions of a myth are the true version. In other words, as long as the meaning of said GCUs can be found in the myth that is being told then it does not matter if this is first time the myth has ever been constructed or the one hundredth time, both versions would still be the myth. By extension the myth cannot only be retold with different diction, language, or length, it can also be akin to another myth containing the same GCUs (or themes), and finally (and possibly most importantly) it can be expanded. This is paramount in understanding why Gaiman’s work is important within the twenty-first century world of literary studies, and hopefully readers will understand why as this project unfolds.

Lévi-Strauss introduces his thesis that a relationship can be found between different myths and different myth versions by explaining that the theory behind his assertions is actually borrowed from the discipline of linguistics. Opening with a rather scathing critique on the failure of anthropologists who had attempted to offer any semblance of a theory for the nature of mythology, he accuses his predecessors from the modern era of tarrying in the field of mythology (428). Lévi-Strauss declares that progress with mythology has been stagnant for many years and myths themselves have been reduced to “a picture of chaos.” It is most
interesting and poignant for this project to point out that the following assertion by Lévi-Strauss that was briefly paraphrased above also represents the initial way that Gaiman plays with myth in his works *NeverWhere* and *The Sandman*. As such, readers will see that the arc of this project as it follows Gaiman’s development of myth with each of his works showcased in this thesis also follows the arc of progression that Lévi-Strauss constructs in his work “The Structural Study of Myth”:

Of all the chapters of religious anthropology probably none has tarried to the same extent as studies in the field of mythology. From a theoretical point of view the situation remains very much the same as it was fifty years ago, namely, a picture of chaos. Myths are widely interpreted in conflicting ways: collective dreams, the outcome of a kind of esthetic play, the foundation of ritual…. Mythological figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinized heroes or decayed gods. Whatever the hypothesis, the choice amounts to reducing mythology either to an idle play or to a coarse kind of speculation (428).

Very unforgiving to be sure. Lévi-Strauss then immediately steers the problem of defining myth toward his favor by relating the problem, as stated above, to a similar roadblock philosophers in the field of linguistics had struggled with “in earlier times.” Proving himself to be a skillful tactician in the art of debate, our resident anthropologist steals the study of mythology from religious anthropology—he attributes the field with the failure of being able to overcome a “contradiction” apparent within mythology:

On the one hand, it would seem that in the course of a myth anything is likely to happen. There is no logic, no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any subject; every conceivable relation can be met. With myth, everything becomes possible. But on the other hand, this apparent arbitrariness is belied by the astounding similarity between myths collected in widely different regions. Therefore the problem: if the content of a myth is contingent, how are we going to explain that throughout the world myths do resemble one another so much (429)?
Lévi-Strauss’ motive is quite clear at this point. Not only has he shown readers the failure of his predecessors by illustrating a contradiction in what definitions of myth may have been offered so far, but he also uses that very contradiction to create the first half of his postulation that myths are observably similar. The fact that they are observably similar has been established prior to Lévi-Strauss’ 1955 publication. Our anthropologist creates a structure that shows us the similarity between myths, and then gives us the tools to categorize them (GCUs). Lévi-Strauss supports his overall argument by stating that the recognition and use of Gross Constituent Units was established by linguists to help circumvent a similar contradiction in their own field of study that had once prevented them from progressing as an established school of scientific thought:

Ancient philosophers were reasoning about language the way we are about mythology. On the one hand, they did notice that in a given language certain sequences of sounds were associated with definite meanings, and they earnestly aimed at discovering a reason for the linkage between those sounds and that meaning. Their attempt, however was thwarted from the very beginning by the fact that the same sounds were equally present in other languages though the meaning they conveyed was entirely different. The contradiction was surmounted only by the discovery that it is the combination of sounds, not the sounds themselves, which provides the significant data (429).

Lévi-Strauss moves from here to establish for readers how the narrative structure, or the language, of a myth is constructed by once again relating it to linguistics. He draws upon Ferdinand Saussure and the notion of *langue* (referring to the structural elements of language and existing as revertible in relation to time) and *parole* (referring to the statistical elements of language and existing as non-revertible in relation to time) (430). Lévi-Strauss argues that a similar understanding can be applied to the narrative structure of myths.

We have just distinguished […] different time referents [for language]. Keeping this in mind, we may notice that myth uses a third referent which combines the properties of the first two. On the one hand, a myth always refers to events alleged to have taken place in time: before the world was created, or during its
first stages—anyway, long ago. But what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future (430).

While this note is a digression from our main focus of Gross Constituent Units, and the idea of the true version of a myth, this recognition of the narrative structure of myth is integral in understanding the gravity of Gaiman’s prose construction—in his various volumes it is clear that Gaiman also understands this to be true of mythology because of how his stories are structured. Characters and events in his stories possess the gravity of the past and yet their modern appropriations give them grounding in the present and foreshadow of the future. Again, the Tolkien-esque ability to create such characters and their environments in a temporally revertible, non-revertible, and telling fashion which mirrors Lévi-Strauss’ notion of what a myth is and should be.

From here Lévi-Strauss delineates how the GCUs which he attributes to mythology are once again derived from the GCUs of linguistics. However, where linguistic GCUs can be recognized in the surface phenomena of a text (i.e. the words and sentences), GCUs present in myths are located sub-textually and can only be identified with the understanding of the discourse in entirety. Myths must be read as multidimensional, as Lévi-Strauss put it, in order for GCUs to be recognized: diachronically and synchronically are the various dimensions of reading a myth text that he illustrates and he uses the analogy of reading an orchestral score to explain:

By getting at what we call harmony, they [future anthropologists discovering an orchestral score for the first time] would then find out that an orchestra score, in order to become meaningful, has to be read diachronically along one axis—that is, page after page, and from left to right—and also synchronically along the other axis, all the notes which are written vertically making up one gross constituent unit, i.e. one bundle of relations (432).
Lévi-Strauss then uses Oedipus as an example and diagrams how this myth can be read diachronically and synchronically in order to understand its GCUs. Arranged on a grid, the story can be read left to right and understood as a linear narrative. The vertical columns of the grid however are arranged to bundle related ideas or themes together. Yes of course this does seem rather confusing, and from here Lévi-Strauss only continues to warp the understanding of readers with more and more complex permutations of the multi-axis deconstruction of a myth. However, and most importantly, what is quite clear from the remainder of “The Structural Study of Myth” is that the similarities between different myths from different parts of the world can be systematically organized using this method. Furthermore, such a system can also illuminate various versions and interpretations of the same myth. Yet because the GCUs represent objective ideas, then as previously stated the subjectivity of the delivery of the myth does not change the underlying meanings. As such all versions of the myth are the true version and “a myth remains the same as long as it is felt as such” (435).

A Point of Departure:

So what does all of this have to do with Neil Gaiman? The point of this thesis is not only to identify the various versions of myth that Gaiman incorporates in his fiction, but also to see how they relate to other versions of themselves. By doing so we will also explore the progression of how Gaiman himself structures myth within his stories. From his early works like Neverwhere and The Sandman which show Gaiman’s ability to unleash the raw imaginative chaos of myth construction, to a more controlled and historically reverent construction which can be seen in books like American Gods and Anansi Boys (the latter two titles are just as imaginative as Gaiman’s earlier works, but the myth construction is less chaotic and stream of conscious). The final Gaiman chapter of this thesis exploits a true construct of myth that no longer relies on
borrowed pantheons or variations, but instead is a completely original narrative that holds the same revertible and non-revertible qualities that Lévi-Strauss said can be identified in any piece of authentic mythology—which is showcased in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*.

Neil Gaiman creates original, and by the Lévi-Straussian definition, true versions of myths that can be traced backward and forward again via the methods exemplified by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In doing so he not only proves his worth as a globally recognized and beloved author, Gaiman also builds his own Babylonian gates over the divisions of academia by making what was already timeless relevant to the twenty-first century scholar and student; Gaiman’s work (much like the myths he incorporates) are simultaneously diachronic and synchronic. His career is defined by the rules he has broken in order to forge new pathways for fiction and how it can and should be discussed. The following chapters will hopefully show readers why I believe Neil Gaiman is such an important author for literary study today.
Chapter Two: Out of Chaos

In the previous chapter we made a preliminary exploration into the definition of myth and how it functions according to our primary theorist Claude Levi-Strauss. Myth, without the categorization of GCUs is, at its core, imaginatively raw (in that the plot and setting of myth can seem very dream-like in its transitions and developments), and chaotic-- myth is a place where anything can happen and “anything is likely to happen [...] every conceivable relation can be met” (Levi-Strauss, 429) because myth like any story is bounded only by imagination. While this statement was made in an attack against anthropologist predecessors of his structural theory, it also offers an excellent and almost serendipitous starting point for our arcing gaze of Gaiman’s work. Our gaze is arcing in that the path we are taking to view Gaiman’s career can also function as a path following the conceptualization, construction, and implementation of Levi-Strauss’ theory in the “The Structural Study of Myth.” As such, we will be exploring two of the first, and some of the most recognized titles in Gaiman’s canon that exemplify said definition of myth. In The Sandman, and Neverwhere, Gaiman takes readers on a unique and fascinating journey into the completely unpredictable and complex dreamscape of myth. Such a setting shows us how easily Gaiman fuses pop culture, or contemporary culture, and a vast spectrum of classical literature and philosophy. The Sandman and Neverwhere rely on the notion of truth behind a veil of reality. In other words, these titles (in true science fiction fashion) explore revertible and non-revertible (timeless) social themes, historical events, and of course narratives from various myth

---

3 This arcing gaze refers literally the arcing direction that this project follows: as we make our way through the definition of myth (as stated by Lévi-Strauss) and it becomes more refined we also make our way through Gaiman’s career as it does the same.
canons to create something relatable to contemporary readers and significant as commentary on the stories from which they derive lineage.

To give readers a historical context for this claim I will give a brief example from elsewhere in literary history. Johannes Kepler’s *Somnium*, published posthumously in 1634 (Chen-Morris, 225), this novel serves as context for the significance of the dream(state) to function as a medium for myth to bleed seamlessly in and out of narratives by which they perpetuate themselves through time and discourse (i.e. Lévi-Strauss’ spiral structure of myth versions). As stated above, this point in the study is focused on the initial and *unrefined* “chaos” of myth narrative, which as I said directly coincides with the initial rawness of Gaiman’s surreal narrative structures—a characteristic of myth itself and also one of the broader GCUs linking all of Gaiman’s work from here forward. To understand this postulation, we need to begin with brief summarizations of *The Sandman* and *Neverwhere*’s narratives.

**Concerning *The Sandman***:

Neil Gaiman’s awarded and genre (re)defining comic series *The Sandman*, which is now traditionally found in a 10 volume trade paperback collection extended by two follow-up graphic novels⁴, details the events surrounding the seven Endless. Immortal entities beyond the definition of deity, they are the anthropomorphized representations of seven aspects of the human experience: Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair, and Delirium. Published under *Vertigo* comics, *Vertigo* is a sub-publication of *DC*. Each personification maintains a realm akin to their nature and purpose as such the main protagonist—Dream, Morpheus, or The Sandman himself—resides in the “infinite and yet bounded” (*Preludes and Nocturnes: The Sandman Vol.*

---

⁴ Title also includes ongoing stand-alone works, prologues, and spin-offs.
I 27) plane called “the Dreaming.” This place exists simultaneously as a physical realm beyond time and space, and within the subconscious of the mind where dreams take place. Morpheus, or Dream, is the caretaker of the Dreaming and all dream constructs that have ever been and will ever be. Through the series readers learn and understand why and how dreams, or raw imagination, can be so powerful and significant. To extrapolate this significance Gaiman’s Endless interact with characters from historical reality, classical literature, religious mythology, and the DC Universe. *The Sandman* is Somnium incarnate in that Gaiman’s narrative structure relies on the myth element of surrealism or the extremely permeable veils of reality. Such a narrative structure not only conceptualizes what dreaming is in relation to perception and reality it also serves as the perfect format for Gaiman to introduce and reinforce the Lévi-Straussian revertible and non-revertible characteristic of myth that we have mentioned. Gaiman himself says of *The Sandman*:

*Sandman* is intentionally an attempt to create a—hopefully valid—mythic structure, and one that is inclusive. Partly that is because I have the *DC* Universe to play with but also … one of the things I wanted to specifically look at was, what does the twentieth century do with, to, and about myth? […] Myths and legends live on in a kind of Dream Country5. And that’s what it’s about. You know, myths, and legends still have power; they get buried and forgotten, but they’re like landmines (*The Art of Neil Gaiman* 96).

The above statement not only affirms the point of this thesis overall with the very intention of the author of this thesis puts to question, but it also affirms the starting point and direction that the rest of this project will take. You will see that via the *The Sandman* (and *Neverwhere*) myth structure and continuity is rooted in the perpetual landscape The Dreaming—as a concept, not just a narrative device from one of Gaiman’s works. In a recent interview

---

5 *The Sandman Vol. 3: Dream Country*
concerning the longevity of story for the Longnow foundation⁶, Gaiman makes an eloquent (unsurprisingly) and blanket statement that because early man could not discern the difference between sleeping and waking we interpreted dreams as real and thus were poised to describe these experiences and create narratives about them. Gaiman’s point, other than to establish why things like story or myth have been around so long and are so important, was to give the audience a pretty or nice anecdote as to why early myths were created. He does not credit any anthropologist with this theory nor does he give a source. Given this context we as an audience of Gaiman’s lecture, and we as an audience of this writing understand that such a statement has no proof behind it, it simply sounds nice and interesting. Yet what we can take from Gaiman’s postulation are two integral points that can become staples for this chapter: first, Gaiman understands the relationship between myth and dreams; second, Gaiman understands that the narrative structure of dreams is essential in understanding the narrative structure of myth.

Thus we as readers see Gaiman experimenting with a narrative that holds that revertible and non-revertible characteristic of myth by creating a narrative that exists in all times and places throughout real and imaginative history. One way to achieve such a task, and obviously a successful one given the titles critical acclaim, would be to embed said narrative in a macrocosm of dream.

**Concerning *Neverwhere***:

*Neverwhere* is unique in that it represents a number of significant milestones in Gaiman’s career. Casual readers of Gaiman’s work might believe that *Neverwhere* was Gaiman’s first solo-

---

⁶ The Longnow foundation, created circa 1996, is a group that brings together authors, thinkers, and researchers of today who value the responsibility of long term points of view in regards to cultural awareness, movements, and publications. See Longnow.org
authored novel (Good Omens was a collaboration with the late Terry Prachett, and all previous works were in the genre in comics or short fictions), however according to Gaiman himself

Neverwhere is still essentially a collaboration because of why it was written (The Art of Neil Gaiman 214). The original idea for Neverwhere was proposed to Gaiman by the BBC as a fantasy television series in which Gaiman would be the writer. However, Gaiman who was very displeased with the preproduction notes and the very unsuccessful final product took it upon himself to reclaim the story and produce a novel (originally published in 1996):

... While his is the only name on the cover of Neverwhere, he still doesn’t regard it as his first solo novel. “Even Neverwhere felt like a collaboration with the guy who did the scripts. I wasn’t doing this thing of starting with a blank piece of paper and putting words down until there was a novel. What I was doing was taking a bunch of drafts of a TV show and finding all the bits I liked and putting them in, fueled with a certain amount of resentment and grumpiness at all the of places where things that I’d asked and things that I’d wanted has been ignored, thrown away, skipped [etc.] (214).

Furthermore, Neverwhere is unique in that it represents a completely original interpretation of London from a mythic point of view that is only derivative if one is truly intimate with the folklore of London itself from centuries past. Without said knowledge, Neverwhere is as original as Ocean at the End of the Lane (which is the final subject of this thesis and represents Gaiman’s most authentic myth construction). Here again Gaiman is Tolkien-esque in that he has created a mythology for London that has not been seen before7.

The plot of this fantasy novel follows a quest-arch centered on the underdog character Richard Mayhew (this is a trend in many of Gaiman’s novels) who is quite content with his

7 According to interviews found in the Special Features of Peter Jackson’s Lord of The Rings film trilogy box-set, Tolkien invented a mythology for Britain because he felt that it was lacking its own authentic mythology. Tolkien recognized that many of the myths Britain claimed, including the Arthurian legends, were derivative of other cultures. Similarly, Neverwhere represents Gaiman’s attempt to do the same for a contemporary London.
boring life until his understanding of reality itself is suddenly shattered when he meets a young
girl named Door. Hailing from a world unbeknownst to most, Door is from the London below—a
surreal and magical antithesis of London Above. The mismatched pair, along with other
cartoonish companions who have become beloved characters of Gaiman’s fans, brave the perils
of ruthless killers, other-worldly forces, and renegade angels in order to find out why Door’s
family was assassinated. Gaiman creates a world that gives London a folklore that exists in a
place where modern industry is fused with courtly caricature; it is a steampunk world filled with
the politics of the Tudors, wrapped in magic, Judeo-Christian mythology, and classic British
tongue-n-cheek humor.

Influence of Mythology from a Literary Aspect:

Both *The Sandman* and *Neverwhere* play with and on mythology in a way that not only
exemplifies Lévi-Strauss’ idea that the spiral structure allows for one audience to easily see the
origin of the story, they also create myth on their own as starting points of new spirals. Particular
examples from each source are key and readers will be able to see how contemporary links in the
spiral actually facilitate an understanding of the derivative for an audience who may struggle
finding a connection to that derivative any longer.

Beginning with *The Sandman* we will be focusing on an episode from volume three of
the trade paperback collection, *Dream Country*, entitled “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” This
episode was considered so iconic that it won the World Fantasy Award in 1991 for best short
story. This bestowment marks the “first (and only) comic book to ever be awarded a literary
award” (“Neil Gaiman’s ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’: Shakespeare Integrated into Popular
Culture” 71). It is worth noting that award being granted to a piece of work from the genre of
comics was so controversial to many in academia that the rules of the bestowment of the World Fantasy Award were amended after 1991 so that only written (non-graphic) text could win (71).

As the title suggests, Gaiman’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” is of course an homage to Shakespeare’s famed comedy. Accompanied, of course, by the beautiful colors and illustrations of *The Sandman* comics, this work is actually a reimagining of the first time Shakespeare’s play was ever performed—an event orchestrated by the King of Dreams himself. As payment for his favors, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” was actually commissioned by Morpheus for the *fae* or faerie folk. Common to *The Sandman* world (existing in the *DC* Universe), the lines of mythology and reality often mix. As such, the audience for the inaugural performance are the true versions of King Ouberon and Queen Titania themselves (and their host of fantastic characters including a Hobgoblin named Robin Goodfellow). As we read through the comic we not only get original composition from Gaiman, focusing on Morpheus and his interaction with the fae and behind the scenes plot lines of Shakespeare’s troupe of players (including his own son Hamnet), but there are also literal excerpts from Shakespeare’s play as it is being performed:

As Shakespeare talks to the Dream Lord, the players and Hamnet get ready to put on their play, which will be performed “on the downs of sussex” […] For the audience, Morpheus has invited the real fairies depicted in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to watch the first performance of that play. Gaiman intercuts between the fairies watching and commenting on the performance, the performance itself (which draws on the text from Shakespeare’s play), and the actors backstage (71).

What I find to be particularly resonant with this work is the commentary we get from the fae as they are watching the play unfold. Focusing on one Peaseblossom who plays the confused onlooker and a nameless character who acts as the Socrates to Peaseblossom’s Phaedrus, readers
are given explanation of the events of the play in the vernacular of *The Sandman* juxtaposed against the direct quoting of Shakespeare in the performance. The result is an assurance to readers familiar or not with Shakespeare’s original work of the complex plot in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” This sparknote effect is not only courteous of Gaiman and helps to give context to the broken excerpts of the play that we are given, but this also augments a central point of Gaiman’s work and other authors like him who play with Mythology (and in this case, by extension, intertextuality). The Socratic commentary provides relevance to a contemporary audience (in this case late twentieth and early twenty-first century audience) who are losing touch with classical works of literature. This is a point that we will return to again in future chapters—particularly in the concluding thoughts—but it is important to point out evidence of this phenomenon as we see it so readers can begin to understand its significance as we work our way through Gaiman’s canon and Lévi-Strauss’ philosophy.

“A Midsummer Night’s Dream” from *The Sandman vol. 3: Dream Country* is a fine example of Gaiman’s myth-oriented intertextuality, but it is certainly not the only example. Throughout the series audiences are also graced with recurring appearances by Cain, Abel, and Lucifer but also other Judeo-Christian characters from works such *Paradise Lost* such as Beelzebub, which not only illustrates a link between biblical lore and *The Sandman* but also various points in that specific spiral as those myth-narratives evolved (i.e. *Paradise Lost*). The complexity of this narrative’s lineage is further expanded by other pantheons and folk-heroes as well. Accompanied by the vast *DC* Universe, such a conflation is paramount in defining the raw chaotic imagination of myth that *The Sandman* represents in light of Lévi-Strauss’ theory, and this series of work also stands as an example of the convergence of GCUs within the myths showcased in *The Sandman* because Gaiman is able to find common themes that unite these
myths in a way that creates a cohesive and streamline narrative in each issue that is as intimate as a short story but as vast as the all of The Dreaming itself which extends beyond the imagination, beyond time and space. The *Sandman* title represents the cosmological scale explosion of Gaiman’s imagination in all directions reaching all points of literature, history, and by extent mythology. It actively recreates narratives of antiquity and places them in context of the socio-economic and cultural phenomena of the late twentieth century.

We have established, in context of the *The Sandman*, a potential Lévi-Straussian spiral and now that we have done so, here it is appropriate and essential for the audience to recall the two extremely important staples established under Gaiman’s statement concerning early man and the importance of dreams: the relationship between dreams and myth, and the understanding both dream and myth’s narrative structures in context of that relationship. In the introduction we established that Lévi-Strauss’ initial understanding of myth is that is imaginatively raw, chaotic, and a place where anything and everything can happen. Additionally, we can see from previous citations that Gaiman’s intentions for *The Sandman* were to create a chaotic world contrived of myth and imagination—the *dreaming*. Thus we can see that *The Sandman*, one of Gaiman’s first experiments with storytelling, is also an interpretation of the storytelling nature of dreams.

In his exploration of story and storytelling in relation to the human experience, author and educator Jonathan Gottschall (Washington and Jefferson College) holds a particular reverence for dreams and their relation to narrative. In the fourth chapter titled “Night Stories” in said exploratory work *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, Gottschall navigates the evolution of dream theory via various experts including Freud, and tries to arrive at a final postulation (not necessarily an answer or concrete thesis) as to why the narrative nature of dreams are important to being human (and to the overall nature of narrative itself). Gottschall
uses his knowledge of literature and rhetoric to interpret the theories of various psychologists, and dream theorists and he arrives at some very interesting and poignant crossroads that, when contextually applied to Gaiman’s *The Sandman*, are fascinating.

To begin, Gottschall immediately establishes a relationship or commonality between dreams and fiction: “The novelist John Gardener compares fictional stories to ‘vivid and continuous dreams,’ but it’s just as accurate to call dreams ‘vivid and continuous stories.’ Researchers [which go unnamed] conventionally define dreams as intense ‘sensorimotor hallucinations with a narrative structure’” (Gottschall 69-70). Such a relationship is further solidified by Gottschall’s observation that dream theorists and writers of fiction alike, neither of them can begin to describe fiction or dreams without recognizing certain fundamentals such as a protagonist (the dreamer) and narrative elements like “plot, theme, character, scene, point of view, perspective (70). This “basic vocabulary of English 101” can be used to describe any dream regardless of realism or bizarreness. Gottschall essentially discusses two opposing contemporary theories on dreaming: RAT, or random activity theory, established by J. Allan Hobson and the opposing line of thought to RAT established by Antti Revonsuo. RAT establishes the argument that dreams are meaningless; they are the waste byproduct of the brain processing information from the waking hours of the day. Alternatively, Revonsuo argues that RAT is too simplistic and only accounts for the memorable yet statistically infrequent bizarreness of dreams (75). According to Revonsuo, dreams are completely realistic simulations created by our brains that function as training for real life experiences we have had. Biased toward Revonsuo, Gottschall continues by offering examples of various experiments performed on lower species of life such as cats and rats. These experiments not only proved that animals do in fact dream (as the experiment intended) but also said experiments showcased the constant
nature of said dreams\(^8\): fight or flight. For animals, according to Gottschall’s research, dreams are simulations of basic predatory and defensive instincts like “lying in wait, attack, rage, fright, pursuit” (77). The same observation can be said for the dreams of man, yet man’s superior position in the evolutionary process (as Gottschall alludes and I postulate) adds the variable of the bizarre because of our brains ability to imagine. Dreams, as Revonsuo argues, are not simply byproducts like Hobson theorizes. Instead they are an instructional simulation that teaches us to cope with the issues and difficulties of real life. Why do we remember the bizarre dreams and forget the others? Well, discrediting Hobson and putting it pragmatically as Revonsuo does: we remember them because they are in fact bizarre. Gottschall describes this pragmatism by illustrating implicit and explicit memory. In an anecdote describing the process of his daughter learning to ride a bike (85), Gottschall points out that while he explicitly remembers teaching her, because the process was \textit{bizarre} in that it was unique, his daughter only implicitly remembers the process in that the function of riding a bike is subconscious because of repetitive practice. Gottschall is obviously agreeing with Revonsuo on the purpose of dreaming with this bike riding analogy. If dreams are simulations used to help us navigate basic primal instincts involved in the difficulties of life then it is no wonder we only remember the particularly bizarre ones because the basic function of the simulation is rendered to the implicit memory, while the fantastic and imaginative nuances of a particular dream are more explicitly remembered. So what does all of this have to do with Neil Gaiman and \textit{The Sandman}?

 I believe Gaiman, whether his understanding itself is implicit or explicit, understands the relationship between dreams and stories just as Gottschall does. \textit{The Sandman} is explicitly memorable because of all its fantastic details and images, yet underneath the creative genius (I

\(^8\) See Jouvet’s Cats: experiment detailed by Gottschall 76-79.
say genius because it is clear that Gaiman achieved a visual and narrative representation of
dreaming) are the basic elements of story and dream: a protagonist navigating the fundamental
elements of fiction in order to achieve a goal. In this case, the example used above concerning
“A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” Gaiman is distracting his audience with the bizarre by taking
the already fantastic story created by Shakespeare and putting his own surreal spin on it. Yet,
under the vivid color, terrifying monsters, beautiful faeries and interpretation of Shakespeare’s
first “performance” of said play, Gaiman uses the protagonist of Shakespeare to give readers an
alternate view of the bard as a struggling artist who is failing at being an attentive father in favor
of achieving his dream—this basic narrative structure is far less unique or bizarre when the
faeries, demons, and the Sandman himself are forgotten. To be brief, Gaiman has taken a myth
(as stated above) and given it contemporary context while simultaneously reinventing the
excitement of the original narrative without losing the meaning or structure of the original play—
the spiral continues.

If The Sandman represents the unbridled explosion of Gaiman’s imagination reaching out
through a dream, then every work after that represents the accretion of myth elements as they
condense within their own spiraled microcosms that readers were exposed to in The Sandman
series. The first example of this is of course Neverwhere. I have chosen to place The Sandman
and Neverwhere in the same chapter because they share more similarities in their fantastic
experimentation than differences, which as stated before is something that represents the
beginning of Lévi-Strauss’ theory of myth being raw imagination and chaotic. Neverwhere like
The Sandman (and perhaps Stardust, 1999, a title not showcased in this thesis but also a work of
fantasy) is grounded in fantasy and magical realism, unlike the latter titles of this thesis which
incorporate fantasy and magical realism but also draw more heavily on science fiction as well.
As such the adventures of the cowardly underdog, Richard Mayhew, represent Gaiman attempting to establish a new place for the lesser known myth (perhaps folklore is more appropriate) of London in the late nineties, which certainly does not hold the same Arthurian charm as the England of previous centuries. From the Beast of London, to abandoned tube stations that were rumored to exist under the streets of real London (The Art of Neil Gaiman 214), Gaiman resurrected whispers and urban legends likely only known to native Londoners added some magic, and gave them to the world:

Creating a sort of mythic London was in many way much easier [...] One could isolate why one wanted to make it mythic, what one was going for. And I love it when people come up to me at signings and say, “I just got back from London. Before I went, I read Neverwhere, and we stayed in Earl’s Court and we got to go to Knightsbridge,” and it’s as if these places are actually taking on a mythic dimension for them (214).

In Neverwhere, Gaiman takes apparently mundane constructs of London and reinvents them in a sort of opposite version of London. There is a Night’s Bridge in London Below that is reminiscent to the bridge over chaos in Paradise Lost where falling off would render the traveler somewhere beyond return. There is also an Earl’s Court in London Below, presided over by an actual Earl whose fiefdom extends the entire transit system of London Below. In this quest-story, Gaiman makes London itself the main character, while Richard and his motley crew: The Lady Door, the Marquis de Carabas, and Hunter are simply along for the ride.

While equally fantastic although certainly not structured in such a stream-of-consciousness-style as The Sandman, Neverwhere pairs well with the previously mentioned titled not only because of Lévi-Strauss, but once again Jonathan Gottschall also. If The Sandman is a nightmare—the most bizarre and explicitly memorable of dreams—Neverwhere is probably one of those rarer yet memorable dreams where everything appears normal until you find yourself
flying, or cooking dinner but battling the horrible beast that lives inside of the refrigerator every
time you require another ingredient. Neverwhere, like many of Gaiman’s novels, is a coming of
age story shrouded in a world-turned-upside-down. Yet while Neverwhere arguably maintains
for more traditional elements of realism than the prose of The Sandman, Neverwhere does have
that essential dreamscape element of the “and then.” You open the fridge and then you’re
battling a spaghetti monster; you’re learning to ride a bike and then the bike is an ancient and
wise dragon of which you have always known; Richard Mayhew is begrudgingly walking down
the sidewalk with his fiancée toward a dinner with her terrifying employer and then a bloody girl
from a fantastic place known as London Below falls through a brick wall and into Richard
Mayhew’s arms. As Lévi-Strauss, Gaiman, and Gottschall state or allude: in dreams (and or
myths) everything and anything tends to and will happen.
Chapter Three: Coming to America…

In chapter one we were introduced to Gaiman and his writing (as viewed through a specific lens), and we began to dive into his imagination via *The Sandman* and *Neverwhere*. It is now possible for readers to go further into a Gaiman-microcosm (keeping Lévi-Strauss in mind readers will be able to see how Gaiman’s evolution as a storyteller has an applicability\(^9\) to Lévi-Strauss’ study). This chapter will be focusing on two of Gaiman’s largest works, *American Gods* and *Anansi Boys*; the latter is often thought of as a sequel or extension of the prior due to character continuity. Truly, these two titles are very independent structures that (like many Gaiman narratives) share very little other than authorship and style. *American Gods* is arguably Gaiman’s most recognized piece of prose; it is a dark and sometimes twisted road-story that continually crosses the border between magical realism and contemporary gothic by sewing together Americana folklore, ancient gods of various pantheons, and a skeptical ex-convict who is thrust unwillingly into an America where the surreal has now become the only real there is.

*Anansi Boys*, although sharing a central character from *American Gods*, is the whimsical antithesis to the thrilling aforementioned title. With a lighthearted tone *Anansi Boys* illustrates the ridiculous turns one’s life can take after discovering one’s late estranged father is a west African trickster god, and one’s previously unknown twin brother is a demigod who leads quite the rock star life and apparently inherited all the godly tricks and traits that one (being Fat Charlie Nancy) did not. Where *American Gods* is sinister like Stephen King, *Anansi Boys* is

---

\(^9\) This is far different from saying it is applicable, which is something I would like audiences to pay particular mind to. Saying the latter implies finality, i.e. Gaiman absolutely follows the rules that Lévi-Strauss postulates. Adhering to the former, *applicability*, simply allows for connections to be made without making the mistake of proclaiming intentional fallacy. It is the potential connections that are most important, because potential opens the doors for further research and versatility when discussing Gaiman in an academic setting whether that setting is academic to academic or professor to pupil—it creates a pathway for the open-minded.
wacky but intelligent like Douglas Adams. In either case readers can still find that very dark but sweet and endearing quality that has become Gaiman’s trademark.

The narratives found in these polar opposites, however, are not our focus as in previous chapters. Instead this chapter will concern itself with an item that these two titles share in common; coming to America stories as Gaiman calls them in the tenth anniversary American Gods edition’s prologue are small tales, proverbs, or legends either fabricated or restated throughout each book. Contextualized against the main narrative, Gaiman adds actual folktales or myths in his text. These stories give historical-cultural context to many of the characters showcased in each title, as such readers are presented with primary sources of sorts for the characters they are exposed to in the main narrative. If these coming to America stories are not taken directly from oral tradition or myth anthologies then they are sometimes completely original constructs told with the specific intention of illuminating the same character trait or historical context that an authentic canonized myth or folktale would. For example, the myths found in Anansi Boys concerning Anansi can probably be found in any collection of West African folktales, mythology, or proverbs; in contrast some of the coming to America excerpts in American Gods (not all) are actually fictions likely based on historical accounts and canonized myths/folktales (the first story we will look at will be an example of this latter type described). In either case these stories not only give readers context, they also expertly drive the plot forward via revelation concerning said mythical figure or folk hero.

---

10 In Anansi Boys these excerpts are specifically old myths and folktales about Anansi the West African Trickster deity; Gaiman transitions to these tales about the king of spiders by prefacing them with “Here’s another Anansi story...”, whereas in American Gods they are simply titled Coming to America [insert date].... In either case this scattering of stories serves the same purpose: The reader is given more background and characteristics about the supernatural character in question (sometimes accompanied by historical information about the culture they are akin to), and offers a strategically placed break in the main narrative of the novel.
These stories can stand as GCUs themselves or help categorize the GCUs of the larger narrative by giving the reader more omniscience concerning the nature of the fantastic characters in the story; GCUs such as these teach readers various primary sources for many of these myths but they also contextualize them for a twenty-first century audience because the expertly executed relationship between the myth found in the *coming to American* stories and their contemporary counterparts found in the larger narrative fortify each other by both being temporally revertible and non-revertible—a characteristic of myth discussed in previous chapters. This observation offers further fortitude to my argument via Levi-Strauss that any version of a myth told is the true version as long as the context is the same.

In accordance with the above observations the following sections of this chapter will explore three *coming to America* stories: two from *American Gods* and one from *Anansi Boys*, and the relationship these stories create with their respective native (i.e. the mythical of folk figure) and contemporary narratives (i.e. Gaiman’s story).

First we will look at the story of Mad Sweeney (or possibly someone very like him as the myth never specifically states the two men are one in the same), a real leprechaun who also has a poor attitude, an affinity for fist-fights, and a glory-to-gutter characterization that creates a very real feeling for a fairy-folk reduced to the life of a drifter in the twenty-first century mid-west. In the main narrative Mad Sweeney acts as comedic relief for Shadow and Mr. Wednesday as well as a hidden pawn working for Mr. Wednesday—whose real identity is Odin from Norse mythology. Like all the gods in this book who are not Native American or simply American Folk-Heroes, Mr. Wednesday is *the* Odin and he is not. He an aspect of himself transplanted here by the very first Norse explorers of the new world (which according to Gaiman’s own mythology actually predates Leif Eriksson). That is how all the gods arrived here in America, according to
Gaiman—they were brought here by the different cultures that have visited this melting-pot land over the centuries. They are modern aspects of themselves who, for the most part, have been abandoned by their cultures and dogmas. Left to linger on forever, behind the scenes as Wednesday himself calls it. All of this too, can be said for Mad Sweeney the Leprechaun.

Second, we will look a story that illustrates some of the horrors of slave transportation from Africa to the Americas. This story incorporates the naming and identification of numerous African deities instead of focusing on one—Anansi for example. The structure of the story functions as a very nice transition from our first excerpt to the last which does concern Anansi. The significance of this structure will be given in more detail later on, but for now readers can understand that if our first excerpt is actually a fiction based on history that gives context to a fabricated character belonging to an existing cultural lore and the final excerpt is a real myth that is told as a traditional folktale which gives context to a real mythic figure belonging to an existing cultural lore supplanted into a completely fictional and historically irrelevant novel, then the second except is simply what appears to me to be a hybrid of the two. Readers should understand while that explanation seems tangential and convoluted, it is important to understand so we can continue to follow the arch that was discussed in the introductory chapter and further details that will follow categorically should render said tangent far more diaphanous.

**Coming to America, 1721: Concerning Essie Tregowan, Colonial Transportation, and the Tallest Leprechaun You Never Heard Of**

Ever the master storyteller, Gaiman doesn’t simply partition his narrative with contextually irrelevant folktales and myths—as previously stated their purpose is far more strategic, but so is their implementation. Aside from his omniscient narrator, Gaiman utilizes a secondary narrator for some of the coming to America stories. Mr. Ibis, a secondary character in
the main narrative, is actually an aspect of Thoth the Egyptian deity of writing and knowledge. As such, Mr. Ibis often composes journal entries concerning historical accounts of other deities being transported to America in the minds of immigrants. These accounts, like the one you are about to be exposed to also contain large amounts of not necessarily history but historical context—point being, it can’t be said that Gaiman didn’t do his research.

A recurring theme that Gaiman weaves into his story is much of the culture, ideologies, and of course myths that one finds in America were transported here from elsewhere. Stories were brought here from across the oceans. Those stories planted new roots here in a new land and grew and influenced new stories. Some of these stories may have remained stories, while others may have become closer to history. Of course there is a difference between recorded history and what actually occurred, just as there is a difference between history and something that is merely historical. This coming to America story is historical, it did not happen… probably. Aside from it’s fantastic aspects it does comment on historical events, which gives said story the agency to be just as influential on the readers contextual understanding of a past America, a present America, and the contemporary characters reinvented by Gaiman; this story is temporally revertible and non-revertible. Mr. Ibis begins his journal entry with the following:

The important thing to understand about American history, wrote Mr. Ibis, in his leather-bound journal, is that it is fictional, a charcoal-sketched simplicity for the children, or the easily bored. For the most part it is uninspected, unimagined, unthought, a representation of the thing, and not the thing itself. It is a fine fiction, he continued, pausing for a moment to dip his pen in the inkwell and collect his thoughts, that America was founded by pilgrims, seeking the freedom to believe as they wished, that they came to the Americas, spread and bred and filled the empty land (American Gods 85).

This is simply a very eloquent way of stating what has already been said: this story, like much of history, is fiction. It is a fine fiction though, and it serves to remind readers how and why

---

11 Think of 1492 when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, etc., etc. Remember that history lesson in grade school?
America is the melting-pot that it is. It is a place which many of our news channels, history books, archived propaganda, State of The Union addresses, and founding documents claim to be a place of freedom and new opportunity. Much of Gaiman’s work also illustrates the surface may only be the ideal and there is probably a darker version of the story hidden somewhere to be forgotten— Influential enough to leave its mark, but placed out of sight and starved of attention much like the American Gods:

In truth, the American colonies were as much a dumping ground as an escape, a forgetting place. In the days where you could be hanged in London from Tyburn’s triple-crowned tree for theft of twelve pennies, the Americas became a symbol of clemency, of a second chance. But the conditions of transportation were such that, for some, it was easier to take the leap from the leafless and dance on nothing until the dancing was done. Transportation it was called: for five years, for ten years, for life. That was the sentence (85).

And so enters one Essie Tregowan—a thief and fraud—who found herself serving a life sentence of Transportation to the New World. Over her years of living her new life just to avoid the gallows, Essie held many titles (some more nefarious than others that won’t be detailed here) such as indentured servant, wife, and by the end of her long life, reputable landowner and farmer.

Despite living a life-on-the-run Essie Tregowan, who later became Mrs. & subsequently widow Richardson, never left behind the superstitions and stories of her Celtic heritage. In Gaiman’s universe this narrative transportation is exactly how the aspects of gods, faeries, mythic personifications, and folk-heroes got here, but in the real universe this is simply how cultures and their respective narratives grew, possibly changed, and survived. They, like their people, came to a new land and existed. Some faded quickly while others still linger in the subtext of a greater American narrative if there is such a thing, and others still may have changed so much they are unrecognizable next to their sources, but they exist in the annals of this new world. Before we address Mad Sweeney’s significance to this story and to Essie Tregowan, it is
relevant to briefly digress by giving readers a context for why this historical account is important. Instead of giving readers a story of a down-on-her-luck convict who finds a new life in the New World, why wouldn’t Gaiman give us a folktale or a fairytale about leprechauns? That’s what this is about right? Gods, demigods, heroes, etc. Mad Sweeney is a Leprechaun; don’t we want to hear about that? Well Gaiman’s point—his point to these stories, and his point to American Gods, and his point to why he writes in general—is aligned with Lévi-Strauss’ and my own: stories are organic in that they grow and sometimes change to survive but most importantly they do survive. If you adhere to, or even are just familiar with, Darwinian literary studies like Jonathan Gottschall is then you could say stories abide by evolutionary boundaries like anything else living. In his book The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human, Gottschall tackles the overall idea of why story seems to be so important to humanity and how it survives. In one chapter Gottschall focuses on sacred narratives, or stories taken from sacred texts (i.e. the Bible, the Torah, or the Qu’ran which are the texts for the three great western/monotheistic religions of the world). Gottschall states that, despite their many discrepancies and disagreements, each of these texts is a “collection of intense narratives about the biggest stuff in human life” (Gottschall 117). And Gottschall doesn’t limit his argument to the major religions of the world:

And, of course, it is not just the planet’s monotheisms that are built on stories. This seems to be true of all religions, major and minor, throughout world history. Read through the folklore of traditional peoples, and the dominant story type will be myths explaining why things are the way they are (118).

Gottschall goes on to showcase both naysayers and supporters of religion in order to illustrate how sacred narratives (or other cultural narratives like myths, tales, fables, etc.) function as the “glue and grease” (120) of human civilization. While some of these narratives may be perverted or misinterpreted over time, this is only a very unfortunate but irrelevant
consequence of narrative evolution/survival. Despite flaws, at their core these sacred/cultural narratives are dramatized blueprints of do’s and don’ts. Gottschall cites *Darwin’s Cathedral* by biologist David Sloan Wilson, stating that “[cultural narratives] emerged as a stable part of all human societies for a simple reason: it made them work better… story is the counterforce to social disorder” (121-138). Gottschall is arguing that story, whether it be sacred or profane, especially within the context of cultural narrative (i.e. myth) survives by functioning as a binding agent for social structures. Call it escapism, salvation, right, or wrong, Gottschall argues story aides in bringing order out of chaos—how very Lévi-Straussian of you, Professor Gottschall.

However, if one accepts story as the key to human social structure or simply a coping mechanism for humanity’s flaws, does this cohesion of story to human evolution mean that story itself is also organic and can *evolve* as Gottschall and other Darwinian literary experts might argue? To that I can simply and briefly offer the following: while Gaiman himself may not claim the designation of Darwinian literary scholar, or even be familiar with said narrative theory, he does give a very similar account of story’s inherent longevity in a lecture he gave for the Longnow Foundation\(^\text{12}\) in which he discusses how and potentially why story is one of the oldest *living* things in the world. Gaiman begins by establishing the average lifespan of story in contrast to other organisms: People tend to live anywhere from eighty to one-hundred years, some animals may live for a few hundred years, and many trees may even be thousands of years old. Stories, Gaiman playfully adds, often live much longer than even the oldest trees. By using Disney fairytales and their ancestry in western and non-western folk/fairytales Gaiman shows us that the Disney story of Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty may not be as gruesome as their Germanic ancestors, but by changing them from a cautionary tale to an endearing love story these

---

\(^{12}\) “The Long Now Foundation was established in 01996 to foster long-term thinking and responsibility in the framework of the next 10,000 years” (Longnow.org).
narratives will survive when their primary sources are long forgotten. Yes this is an example of man purposefully changing story, not necessarily story evolving by its own supposed will to survive. But consider the following: Gaiman also posits (while admitting his research is very topical and usually from Wikipedia in this case) while anyone can perform some simple internet searches to find that not only is Cinderella a very old story, but there are many stories that are very similar to Cinderella. Gaiman continues to explain that some theorists (who remain unnamed in Gaiman’s lecture) argue that it is possible the glass slipper version of Cinderella only appeared by a flaw of translation or a “homonymic shift” (*How Stories Last* 22:20) as the French word for glass (*Verre*) and the word for fur (*vair*) could have been confused and thus giving birth to the glass slipper version which is obviously far more unique and arguably far more memorable than a fur slipper which Gaiman says was likely part of the more original version—a version which “likely dates back” (15:03) to ancient China because there are “very few cultures where very small feet are characteristic of princess-hood” (15:06). Of course Gaiman is romanticizing the notion that stories are living things because he is Neil Gaiman and that is what he is good at. He admits these examples are anecdotal and drawn from less than reputable sources. But the idea he presents is far more important that its historical validity, after all a “homonymic shift” caused by human error is arguably as chaotic a form of narrative natural selection as Darwinian biological natural selection. Chance and necessity may have been present at the right moment for us to take an ancient Chinese story about a girl in fur slippers and allow it to become a fantastic love story about a princess in glass pumps—in a sea of Cinderella stories which one stands out to you?

Now, back to Essie Tregowan-Richardson and Mad Sweeney: how does this all fit? Briefly stated, is does not matter if Gaiman or Gottschall are correct in asserting that story has
some organic quality that allows it to evolve as Darwinian literary theory suggests; attribute the life of story to magic, science, or divine intervention—stories provide structure to the human condition, if you will, and the human condition provides (inaughtably) a medium for story to survive. This symbiotic relationship allows each party to develop and survive by the very action of its counterpart doing the same. As such, when we find Essie Tregowan, at the end of her eventful life she is greeted by a tall man clad in green who has come to escort her to whatever afterlife she will be awarded (*American Gods* 92), a leprechaun of the fae—brought to this New World through the traditions, stories, and superstitions up held by Essie herself—who may or may not be Mad Sweeney (their physical descriptions are very similar—including the stranger/Mad Sweeney’s almost comical height: leprechauns in Gaiman’s narrative are actually very tall). Now here my knowledge or Celtic mythology fails me, and while I am sure the very well mythologically-versed Gaiman does, I do not know if original (whatever that terms means at this point in context of all the extrapolation I have extrapolated thus far) stories of leprechauns attributed these faeries with larger than life height or what I am sure many American’s (including Shadow Moon, the protagonist of *American Gods*) would stereotypically expect which is dwarfism. The point remains the same, such a change in characteristic of this cultural (sub)narrative can be viewed the same as the above-mentioned/fabled homonymic shift. The Stanger’s/Mad Sweeney’s height gives his character an evolutionary advantage for survival in the memory, and what is the best way to implant an idea into the memory of a people? “The world’s priests and shamans knew what psychology would later confirm: if you want a message to burrow into a human mind, work it into a story” (Gottschall 118)13.

13 For the reader’s sake the above explanation of our first excerpt will stop where it has, although longwinded it was meant to be as brief as possible with the understanding that contextualizing the first excerpt in greater detail would allow for a far more concise exposition and further extrapolation of the latter two excerpts to come. Still, I would like to simply amend the above justification to include the following observation: Gaiman’s addition of this
So our “prince of stories” (*The Art of Neil Gaiman*) 1, Gaiman, has woven us a historical narrative that not only explains the origins of one of the mythical characters in this book, but it also contextualizes many of the themes of *American Gods* and this thesis project: myth, which in this chapter has been and will continue to be referred to as cultural narrative, as a form of story appears to share a symbiotic relationship with humankind whether it manifests itself through dreams (as exemplified in the previous chapter), or sacred narratives, or simple fairytales. And this relationship, this necessity for better or for worse that humankind has to use words that have been organized into ideas which have then been sequenced into narratives to find an order in the chaos that is reality. Reverting again to Lévi-Strauss, we stated in our introductory chapter that our cultural anthropologist’s own purpose was to glean some sort of order from the chaos of cultural narratives or myths. Can one argue that characteristic change in cultural narrative stands as a gross constituent unit by itself? Potentially, but without further research I would assert that if one allows for the notion that narrative change or evolution as Gottschall posits, is one path (if not the path) that Lévi-Strauss’s spiral theory can follow than such allowances only aide in the identification of GCU’s and the authenticity of revisited (not necessarily reinvented) mythologies and cultural narratives in works such as Gaiman’s.

Now that we have established a proposed reason and function for the additions of these *coming to America* stories peppered throughout *American Gods* and *Anansi Boys* we can move story was to contextualize that American/Human social structures constantly grow and change just as their stories must also grow and change. Cinderella may have cast aside her fur slippers for glass ones, or Leprechauns may have stunted or augmented their average vertical growth for the sake of Gaiman’s character to be as memorable as possible, it is also worth noting that if readers of *American Gods* assume the dapper and green clad stranger in Essie Tregowan’s story and Mad Sweeney, the alcoholic, self-proclaimed leprechaun, who dons the middle-America-blue-collar-drab and loves a good fist fight to close out his bar-tab are one in the same personified aspect of a transported cultural narrative, then one can posit that Mad Sweeney may be the seminal representation of what an American God is: a once far more Romantic ideal beaten down by the ever changing “American Dream” forced into a fallen-from-grace position of confidence artistry and fraud. Yet in the end, despite his transgressions, we as readers do experience Miltonian sympathy for the vagrant with a tragic charm.
on to, and more concisely through, the latter two excerpts by focusing on their narrative structure instead of their content—I am sure readers will agree that analysis of the latter has been quite exhausted. Throughout this work in entirety an arching gaze has been mentioned in context of Lévi-Strauss’ progression of analyzing and defining cultural narratives (myth) from a point of chaos to a point of categorical order; that progression’s relationship to the track of Gaiman’s work was also established in the introductory chapter of this thesis. Briefly restated, Lévi-Strauss’ theory progresses from viewing cultural narratives as chaotic plots where anything and everything can occur to a far more accessible (albeit complex) and categorical model that allows for the predictability of a fundamental myth structure and the variance of similar cultural narratives could actually point toward the evolutionary natural selection of myth (or any other cultural narrative). This fundamental structure is where we will shift out focus next.

**Coming to America, 1778: Transported, Transplanted, or Traded—a Creole of Cultural Narrative Structures**

Some stories are told this way, and some stories are told that way, in the end all that matters is the message being conveyed (whether the message is thematic, or it is a moral, or a social commentary, etc.) right? If so then what is the point of discerning one form of narrative from another? The Essie Tregowan excerpt, like many of the coming to America stories in *American Gods*, is essentially a short story. It is a narrative that is filled with as much history and depth in both character and plot as any epic novel (a genre which has its own set of unique and defining characteristics of course; the tangential possibilities are gargantuan) yet it is encased in a microcosm, of perhaps ten thousand words or less\(^{14}\). I would argue that the Essie Tregowan

\(^{14}\) Although this claim bears no credible sourcing, ten thousand words or less is an unofficial line in the sand that I have often heard in literary circles and English departments that loosely separates a short story from a novelette, and then a novella, and so on and so forth unto the novel. I do not believe partitions of ten thousand words
excerpt can be claimed by the subgenres of either the modern short story (1900-1969)—a form
of short story steeped in modernist realism—or the contemporary short story (1970-present)—a
form of short story much like is predecessor but more focused on the individual within social
movements like the women’s movement, and others which also extend their reach toward
postmodern (*The Art of The Short Story* xxiv). In either case, Essie Tregowan’s microcosm of
narrative existence is packed with rich and vivid detail of the individual and it’s plot (admittedly
more of a chronological account) is slowed down in favor of the focus to be closer to the
individuals inner monologue (as it is with realism) than on an objective survey of an omniscient
narrator which is a stylistic shift from many of the precursors to the short story like the tale,
fable, folk/fairytale, or myth. Readers should note that up until this point we have been using
terms like myth or folktale (or cultural narrative) at times almost synonymously if not
interchangeably. In general, within the boundaries of this research if nothing else, I have been
referring to the broadest definitions of both the myth and folktale in that I am referencing types
of narrative that are considered cultural artifacts and thus are cultural narratives. They are stories
that by definition explain why things are the way they are, as Gottschall states, and they aide in
explaining superstitions and teaching lessons. Perhaps in my own mind alone, I have made the
categorization of myth figure and folk hero, with in the context of Gaiman viewed through Lévi-
Strauss, as a hierarchal measurement of the character-in-question’s own divinity. Here at this
point, when we discuss the microcosm of short story itself (especially in reference to the excerpts
from Gaiman’s work) and we are focused on narrative structure it is monumentally important for
readers to understand the short story and all of its precursors *do* have specific signifiers as
established by academia. For example, the *myth* as a precursor to short story genre is

________________________
indicate the definite separations of these narrative structures, but for the sake of this argument let us say those
compositions of ten thousand words or less can be called a short story in terms of genre.
traditionally an oral narrative from antiquity that were circulated over long periods of time and eventually recorded (anonymously). Their main function, as stated above, was to explain the world to primitive humankind—illustrating the (often bizarre) consequences of human or divine disobedience against the latter party (16). Their plots can be described as cause-and-effect oriented. This is not to say ancient myths lack dialogue and detail, but when compared to the contemporary fiction—even that which has mythic qualities—ancient myths as precursors to short story are incredibly skeletal when it comes to content.

Folktales (and/or fairy tales) are often still cause-and-effect when it comes to plot and action, in other words narration in context of description or proclamation is still very pragmatic: in the excerpt we are about to discuss, Wututu and her twin brother Agasu were strong and magical because they were twins (American Gods 286). Twins are magical. If you are of Wututu and Agasu’s tribe in West Africa you know this. It is part of your cultural identity. As such, a folktale does not need to explain to readers why twins are magical, or how they are magical. They are magical because they are twins. Furthermore, folktales like fables are often cautionary in their purpose and focus on the frailties and faults of humankind (The Art of The Short Story 18), yet their pragmatism often yields to fantasy like the Russian tale of Baba Yaga:

[That] features an old woman who lives in a hut with chicken’s feet; in one story, the woman pursues the child heroine in a flying mortar powered by a grinding pestle, and the girl escapes by throwing a comb to the ground that, on impact, turns into an impenetrable forest (18).

Comb hits ground. Ground/Comb impact produces forest: cause and effect. The folktale is not as skeletal, admittedly a personal colloquialism added to the above description of myth, as ancient myth but still by no means does the traditional folktale have the same agency for inspiring a reader’s empathy that the modern or contemporary short story achieve by incorporation of realism.
Essie Tregowan’s excerpt is a modern short story (if not contemporary given that its protagonist was a female and it focused on her struggles specifically akin to her sex and gender) steeped in realism that happened to contain characters and cultural narrative artifacts that can be found in myth and folklore, but structurally what Gaiman gave his readers was a short story. As we move onto the deeply moving, at times disturbing, and tragic account of Wututu and Agasu—the twins who are magic because they are twins, sold by their uncle into slavery and separated in adolescence for the remainder of their natural lives to suffer the horrors of slavery alone—we continue to follow the arching gaze established by Lévi-Strauss’ thoughts and Gaiman’s actions. Again, Mr. Ibis—Thoth—introduces us to our short piece of fiction but this time it is done in a way that illustrates the importance of recognizing how and why different types of stories are told (i.e. the detailed postulation we just went through above). Mr. Ibis begins by giving readers the entire story: “there was a girl, and her uncle sold her” (*American Gods* 284). That’s it. That is exactly what occurred, and this is irrefutable: “there was a girl, and her uncle sold her, *wrote Mr. Ibis in his perfect copper-plate handwriting*. That is the tale; the rest is detail” (284). Mr. Ibis, or Gaiman, is driving home the exact point of why we are taking this time to focus on the narrative structure of this excerpt in comparison to the one that preceded it and the one that will follow, and he does it all in one line—there was a girl, and her uncle sold her. The girl’s name was Wututu, and she had a brother named Agasu. Wututu and Agasu were twins. Wututu and Agasu were magical because they were twins. Wututu and Agasu were magical because they were twins, and their uncle sold them into slavery at which time they were separated. Agasu, who was later known as Inky Jack; who was later known as Hyacinth; who was later known as Big One-Arm, was transported to the island of St. Dominique where he lived as a slave, eventually lost an arm, became possessed by the trickster god Elegba and lead the slave revolt of 1791 which
brought about the independent nation of Haiti (285-293). Wututu and Agasu were magical because they were twins, and their uncle sold them into slavery at which time they were separated. Wututu, who was later known as Sukey; who was later known as Mama Zouzou, became a house slave renowned for her knowledge of remedies and healing recipes which she brought with her from her home land and praised the trickster god Elegba for remembering even in her old years. And Mama Zouzou passed on her knowledge to the Widow Paris; who was later known as Marie Laveau, who then had a daughter by the same name and who made that name famous for her knowledge of voodoo (293-298). So which version of the story is true? The answer, according to Mr. Ibis; which is according to Mr. Gaiman (and by extension is in accordance with Lévi-Strauss, Jonathan Gotschall, and other therioists), is both are true.

There are stories that are true, in which each individual’s tale is unique and tragic [like Essie Tregowan’s], and the worst of the tragedy is that we have heard it before, and we cannot allow ourselves to feel it too deeply. We build a shell around it like an oyster dealing with a painful particle of grit, coating it with smooth pearl layers in order to cope. This is how we walk and talk and function, day in, day out, immune to others’ pain and loss. If it were to touch us it would cripple us or make saints of us; but, for the most part, it does not touch us. We cannot allow it to (284).

This is why the structure of this excerpt, of the book American Gods (and Anansi Boys), of Gaiman’s work as a whole, and why the structure of myth in the Lévi-Straussian sense is so important and it can be simplified into two reasons. First, with in the broad picture of this chapter and this work as a whole, we follow the arching gaze described by Lévi-Strauss and exhibited by the growth and change of Gaiman’s work. We transition from one structure to another constantly building upon what we looked at before: First we were given raw and imaginative chaos in The Sandman and Neverwhere, stories like dreams come from the imagination and can become as fantastic or as bizarre as our infinite imaginations will allow, but the magic of that fantasy is that it offers a peace of mind for what came before us and what may come after. Then we began to
focus on how and why these excretions of the imagination became adhered to humankind as we grew and developed. Just as we grew and developed so did our stories, and our arch continued into works like *American Gods* and *Anansi Boys*, and we not only wanted to know why these stories lasted so long but also how? We find that within the constant diaspora of humankind there was also a diaspora of narrative, and just as man can trace his lineage so too can one trace the lineage and forking points of a narrative—in that mirrored effect we found that the cause was potentially a symbiotic relationship between humankind and its cultural narratives. The complexity of these narratives becomes exponential now that we have arrived at the question of why does the format of these narratives often change as much as the content might? In Gaiman’s second *coming to America* story we are exemplifying more than just a modern short story as we saw with the first, but instead a short story that contrasts the realism of the modern age with pieces of folktale narrative that are blatantly different not only in their physical structure, but also in tone and voice then why not just give readers one or the other? Because both are true. If you want to know what happened, look at the folktale: there was a girl, and her uncle sold her. If you want know how you would have felt if it happened to you, then look at the short story: there was a girl, who was separated from her twin brother when their uncle sold them. The girl was raped, and she was beaten, and she birthed children, who died, and her brother died in a war in a different land, and the woman grew old and was alone and was never free. Both versions of the story are the real story, just like both versions of the Stranger/Mad Sweeney and both versions (perhaps a better phrase is all versions) of Mr. Wednesday are true.

Gaiman via Lévi-Strauss moves forward through his career toward an increasingly authentic cultural narrative or myth. Within *American Gods* (and *Anansi Boys*) he reiterates the magnitude of control he has over this evolution of story by giving us a subset of narratives that
move in the opposite direction of our arching gaze: we go from the modern, to a hybrid of modernism and antiquity that allows readers to see the merits of each, and finally we come to the distant past with this third and final excerpt taken from *Anansi Boys*, which has no hidden motive like the first two other than giving readers a deeper insight into the Gaiman character that is Mr. Nancy and is also a cultural artifact from West African religion—the spider god Anansi (or *Ananse*).

**Here’s Another Story They Tell about Anansi: The Tar Baby**

Regardless or cultural background or rearing, even if you don’t think you know the story of the tar baby or any other Anansi stories for that matter, you’re probably wrong. At the very least you all know at least one story that somewhere down the line of its lineage was an Anansi story first (*Anansi Boys* 42). The story, or folktale to be specific, is rather predictable if not inherently familiar in its style, structure, and narrative as most folktales concerning a *trickster* go. Anansi the spider has an ego infinitely disproportionate to his size, Anansi is a spider after all—when he isn’t a man. “It depends on how you tell the story” (42-43). Anansi’s wife plants a pea garden, and Anansi being Anansi wanted all the peas, so naturally he faked his own death and tricked his family into burring him under the pea garden. Each night Anansi would crawl out of the ground and eat all the peas until his belly was “as tight and a drum.” This occurred night after night, until Anansi’s grieving family thought of a plan to thwart their mystery pea burglar. Anansi’s wife told her sons to think like their tricky father and come up with a plan. They built a *scarecrow* figure out of tar in the shape of a man. Anansi crawls out of the earth, sees the tar-man and confronts him with threats and finally violence. In his foolish attempt to subdue this mysterious villain who had apparently laid claim to his precious peas and posed a threat to his

---

15 See “The Tar-baby” from *Bre’r Rabbit.*
dear family, Anansi punched and kicked, and bit the tar man until all eight of his legs and face
were stuck to the figure. His family found Anansi the next morning “all stuck to the tar-man, and
dead as history. They weren’t surprised to see him like that. Those days you used to find Anansi
like that all the time” (111-114).

So there you have it, a simple folktale. A dash of fantasy sewn together with some cause
and effect, sprinkle in some irony for humor and there you go—an Anansi story. Of course this
simple little folktale, recounted over four pages (or paraphrased in about one half of a page
typed), holds much more complexity than its simple and for lack of a better term cute structure
appears to hold. So let’s briefly deconstruct: this story, appearing on page 111, is the second
Anansi Story that Gaiman gives us and in the regards to the overall plot of the book things are
still in a very developmental stage. We know Anansi is a god, because even if we didn’t read
American Gods, Gaiman tells us very pragmatically in the first chapter that Fat Charlie has an
estranged father in Florida (Fat Charlie lives in London), said estranged parent has suddenly
died, and following the funeral an old family friend informs Fat Charlie that his father wasn’t
simply a cunning, cheap, and according to Fat Charlie his father was a morbidly embarrassing
cartoonish man, and a womanizer—he was also the West African trickster god Anansi the
Spider, king of stories.

We also know that, as stated above, Anansi (or the aspect of The Anansi that is
personified as Mr. Nancy) is dead. We know that Fat Charlie had a long lost demigod
sibling/twin brother named Spider. And we know that all of this information appearing in Fat
Charlie’s life acts as a catalyst for the series of unfortunate events that lead Fat Charlie into
losing his fiancée, losing his job, losing his apartment, and embarking on a wacky adventure to
save the world from another vengeful west African deity. Yes, this all happens in the first
chapter and a half. Once we are presented with this short sequestration in the form of a folktale I posit that the entirety of this novel can be contextualized in these four pages of text. Folktale Anansi dies, but this isn’t surprising because people “used to find Anansi like that all the time” (114). So we can assume death isn’t exactly finite for a deity, albeit an American aspect of one. Folktale Anansi is also outsmarted by his own two sons, and the main narrative does show the audience that Spider and Fat Charlie eventually put their differences aside and do end up saving the world (and their father—who we learn is only currently dead as a human, but as a god he is quite well). And Folktale Anansi is exemplified as the most clever man around (despite getting into a fist fight with a pile of tar), who always comes out on top by outwitting his adversaries—although folktale Anansi is seemingly undone by his own cleverness, that same wit and cunning is shown in folktale Anansi’s offspring. The same can be said for the main narrative, both Spider and Fat Charlie use the talents inherited by their father to achieve victory.

Like the slave-ship excerpt from *American Gods* which gives readers two versions of what happens to Wututu and Agasu simultaneously, so too does Gaiman perform the same trick here in *Anansi Boys* context of the relationship applicable to the tar-baby folktale and the novel as a whole. As readers you can decide which version of the truth you want to read: Anansi was a trickster and his tricks eventually got him killed (apparently often), or Anansi was a caring father who bore two sons in the best way a god who is stranded in a strange land can. And those two son’s would learn from their fathers tricks and become their own aspects of Anansi themselves—saving the world, getting the girl, living happily ever after. Both narratives are true because both narratives are the same story.
Chapter Four: Fooling the Critics

In a June of 2013 interview with Claire Armistead, books and literature editor for The Guardian, Gaiman had just released *The Ocean at The End of The Lane* via HarperCollins publishing that same month. Of the aforementioned title, Gaiman admitted that *The Ocean at The End of The Lane* was the first novel he had written “completely and one hundred percent entirely accidentally” (Royal Literature Society 6:04). He continues:

"Every other time I’ve written a novel I knew I was going to be writing a novel, I knew what kind of novel it was going to be, I knew the shape of the book, and then I went off and wrote it. I knew that *Stardust* was going to be a thin book that would feel like a fairytale, I knew that *American Gods* was going to be something the size and shape of a brick—that it would be a big rambling thing—I knew that *Anansi Boys* was sort of the kind of length of a P.G. Woodhouse novel because that was the sort of thing I wanted to make. With *The Ocean at The End of The Lane* [...] Amanda [Amanda Palmer, the lead singer of The Dresden Dolls, and Neil’s wife] was gone recording an album, and I found that I was really missing Amanda [...] and I thought I’ll do a story—I’ll do Amanda a story [...] I’ll take the landscape of the world I grew up in, and have character that is a lot like a seven year old Neil, and I’ll set it in that landscape and then I’ll send it to Amanda [...] and then I’ll get on with my real work that I was meant to be doing. (Neil Gaiman in Conversation with Claire Armistead 6:04-12:12).

And so, *The Ocean at The End of The Lane* came about, unlike his other works, as a simple whim. It was a whim that was meant to be endearing, and it was meant to be a gift; *The Ocean*, according to Gaiman, is the most autobiographical novel he had ever (accidentally) written. What started as a short story, and grew to a novella, and finally a novel, was unplanned and uncontracted. Gaiman was simply attempting to take a small event from his childhood, surround it by the real places he grew up, and make something dark and sweet in the way that only Gaiman can.
The Ocean begins when the family of an unnamed seven year old protagonist takes in a lodger over some summer months. The lodger was a South African opal miner who had allegedly gotten himself into some serious debt with friends and family in Africa. One morning, the protagonist’s father discovers that said lodger had stolen their family Mini, driven it to the end of the lane, and then put the barrel of a pistol in his mouth. This, according to Gaiman’s father actually happened (6:32), and from here Gaiman’s talent takes over and things become rather fantastic very quickly. The Ocean is a story about the helplessness children can feel when adults don’t take them seriously—everything is a cry wolf situation and that can be very frustrating for a child. However, because we are discussing Neil Gaiman, this child’s experiences of monsters under the bed, witches in the woods, and things with very sharp teeth that live in the shadows, are very real.

What makes this specific novel interesting when compared to previous titles mentioned in this project is not its circumstantial conception, or its autobiographical nature. It is the novel’s narrative structure and that structure’s relationship with the characters Gaiman has created. This same importance was stressed in the prior chapter when we were concerned with the various short cultural narratives and their various structures, but we have established that while each of those structures were different and equally important in understanding Gaiman’s narrative evolution (in the Darwinian literary sense) the characters in all of these short pieces were derivative—they came from somewhere familiar and had planted new roots.

The Ocean at The End of The Lane contains the same relationship between narrative structure and character and readers find something familiar and modern in the characters, but also a nostalgia created by those characters via their own interaction with the setting and narrative. The Hempstocks, and Hempstock farm create an excellent medium to illustrate this
idea and provide entry for readers to recognize this effect on other characters and the narrative as a whole. Gaiman has created a cultural narrative that adheres to himself; the narrative presents itself with an agency to be as vast as any other Gaiman narrative we have encountered. It has been mentioned multiple times in previous chapters that The Ocean at The End of The Lane is the culmination of our arching gaze, and Gaiman’s interpretation of an authentic myth—it is something created out of complete originality, in which the only derived inspiration is Gaiman’s own childhood—his own experience with reality that is unique to him. Gaiman takes the small anecdote concerning the South African opal miner, and from there as readers we are launched head over heels into a fantasy with a depth and history older than the big bang. This idea will be illustrated by focusing our gaze onto the mythical characters Gaiman has created—who they are, why they exist, and how they came into existence as narrative devices. Gottschall will help once again with this explanation, followed by Lévi-Strauss we will then attempt to describe at least one gross constituent unit found in The Ocean. Finally we will relate The Ocean and its narrative structure back to a previous Gaiman narrative we have discussed. The three sub-sections just described will give essential fortification to the argument and final point of Lévi-Strauss’ arching gaze—if a myth is a myth it is temporally revertible and non-revertible; myth answers some basic human question like why things are the way they are (as Gottschall put it) and yet this particular myth retains all the familiar Gaiman qualities we have discussed.

**She Said She Could Remember The Really Old Country: Who Are The Hempstocks?**

Lettie Hempstock, Mrs. Hempstock, and Old Mrs. Hempstock are by far the most supernatural beings found in The Ocean at the End of The Lane via inference and implication from their actions and roles in the story, they are also the least detailed. Embodied as an eleven year old girl, Lettie is the youngest of the familial triumvirate and she remembers when the moon
was made. Mrs. Hempstock, Lettie’s mother, remembers the place they came from before they were residing on Hempstock farm—the old country. She remembers when the old country sank into the ocean. Old Mrs. Hempstock, Mrs. Hempstock’s mother and Lettie’s grandmother, remembers that her daughter is wrong and the old country didn’t sink into any ocean… it blew up (The Ocean at The End of The Lane 1). Despite their incredible longevity, the three women are also depicted quite simply; they appear as a very old woman, a middle aged woman, and a very young girl—eleven years old according to the novel. Lettie Hempstock talks like an eleven year old girl, she walks and dresses like an eleven year old girl, and yet even our protagonist can see quite clearly that even though Lettie is eleven, she has been eleven for a very long time. Gaiman has created a character that contains the perfect duality between a folk-heroine and a mythic figure. Lettie’s youth and consequent innocence in both appearance and general nature give her a very adolescent quality as a character creating a binary between the natural and the preternatural illustrated by the friendship she shares with the anonymous protagonist. This shared innocence allows for a narrative to expand that is both engaging and thought provoking while remaining pragmatic and happenstance. Dissimilarly Lettie’s great age automatically gives her profound wisdom and strength which is only augmented by her mysterious existence. That mysterious quality is how Gaiman is able to achieve a narrative that reads as both a child’s fairytale and an epic myth that has an implied history dating back to the beginning of time. Lettie’s duality can be attributed to all three of the Hempstock women, and the harsh juxtaposition of that duality is evenly blended by the mystery of the Hempstock’s origin, nature, and identity. Because the Hempstock’s appearance in the narrative of The Ocean gives readers direct links to the present and the distant past, they also consequently create a link between narratives (or at the very least narrative genres). Just as the gods in American Gods were
transplanted, and as such they created a narrative link between the present of *American Gods* and the narrative past of their respective narrative origins, so to do the Hemptock’s create such a link or another binary between the narrative present of Gaiman’s novel and the speculated origin of the Hempstocks which predates the big bang. Gaiman’s story, *The Ocean at The End of The Lane*, is temporally revertible and non-revertible based on its own narrative structure—it is a Lévi-Straussian spiral in and of itself. A contemporary structure that creates its own history by existing and expanding (being read), the Hemptock’s make what appears to be a nightmarish fairytale into a myth that predates myth.

If the Hempstocks are our window into an entire universe of potential narrative expansion then our main antagonist, Ursula Munktin, and her ultimate demise, the Hunger Birds. Briefly, allow me to restate for readers that the power and importance of the Hempstocks doesn’t depend on the feats Gaiman allows you to see them perform, it is in the mystery of how they perform them and what else they may be able to do. Describing the Hempstocks with language in general is very Derridian, because attempting to apply *signs* and *signifiers* to what isn’t *signified* gives a false impression of the true nature of the *signified*. Even so, I do find a particular metaphor for the Hempstocks contextually helpful in making a point and that is the Hempstocks appear to function in at least one capacity as shepherds of supernatural and preternatural beings and boundary lines. This is obviously amplified by and artistically blended with the idea that they live on a farm and that farm is old. Calling Old Mrs. Hempstock, Mrs. Hempstock, and Lettie Hempstock witches, according to my own interpretation of *The Ocean* and Gaiman’s opinion, would be inaccurate although they do perform acts that could be attributed to witchcraft in other narratives: spells, enchantments, binds, etc. The Hempstocks, in a matter of speaking, keep the things under your bed from coming out. Ursula Munktin is one of those things.
According to Gottschall, the imagination “frees us to roam spacetime” (Gottschall 11). It is here in the imagination that man can act as God and create at will. Nightmares and Heroes alike, we can create them to be as detailed or insubstantial as we chose. The heroes and villains in Gaiman’s story come from his more insubstantial arsenal of characters. Ursula Munktin is a thing that is not of this plane and its current role in the timeline of this short novel is the antagonist. Gaiman gives us descriptions of her various physical appearances: a beautiful woman with an evil smile and alluring figure, and a monster from a nightmare:

I thought I was looking at a building at first: that it was some kind of a tent, as high as a country church, made of grey and pink canvas that flapped in the gusts of storm wind, in that orange sky: a lopsided canvas structure aged by weather and ripped by time. And then it turned and I saw its face, and I heard something make a whimpering sound [...] and I realized that the thing was whimpering at me. Its face was ragged, and its eyes were deep holes in the fabric (40-41).

No categorical name is given for Ursula Munktin other than flea—a mocking and admonishing term used by the Hempstock’s (Old Mrs. Hempstock in particular) to describe things like Ursula Munktin that do not belong in this place or plane. Ursula is often illustrated by the Hempstocks as simply a thing acting according to its nature, in the way a shepherd may describe a wayward sheep that has caused an inconvenience by simply being a sheep. The real reason to worry about stray fleas, according to the Hempstocks, is far more terrifying than whatever damage a flea might cause. Where there are fleas, according to Old Mrs. Hempstock, there are varmints. Again, like flea, varmint appears to be categorical instead of declarative of a things name. The varmints responsible for the demise of Ursula Munkin are something, characteristically speaking, that tend to appear in many of Gaiman’s novels: a being or beings so terrifying and evil Gaiman portrays them as shadow—incorporeal or even transcendent. These Hunger Birds, as they are named in
this story, are the universes way of pressing the reset button. They eat what needs to be eaten and should not exist, even if that is existence itself:

High in the sky they were, and black, jet-black, so black it seemed as if they were specks on my eyes, not real things at all. They had wings, but they were not birds. They were older than birds, and they flew in circles and in loops and whorls, dozens of them, hundreds perhaps, and each flapping unbird slowly, ever so slowly descended [...] gray-black, naked, winged but featherless; faces from nightmares—beak-like snouts filled with needle-sharp teeth, made for rending and tearing and devouring, and hungry red eyes [...] there might have been a thousand. I could not explain it: perhaps they were from a place where such things as counting didn’t apply, somewhere outside of time and numbers (127-129).

The hunger birds, Ursula Munktin, and the Hempstocks are all narrative structures that are so mysterious they could be the unfinished imaginative processes of a seven year old boy trying to come to terms with a stranger committing suicide in their family car, or they could be the beginning of all narrative spirals. While their originality is not ground breaking in the context of fictional world-creation, they are perfect examples of narrative structures of myth because of their contemporary human qualities and their sublime nature that renders them indescribable in entirety, yet their implied longevity is contextual myth characteristic of the supernatural defining why things are the way they are—why did the opal miner steal their car and kill himself? Because Ursula Munktin influenced him to do so. How was she able to do this? Sometimes sheep stray from the flock.

So what? Why does this piece of fantasy/horror/young-adult fiction represent the culmination of Gaiman’s experiments with myth creation? Isn’t it just a well written story about the reality that children see juxtaposed against the reality that adults see? Well yes, of course it is. But it is also a well written story about adolescent perception and growth that sits on the foundation of the rest of Gaiman’s work: The Sandman, Neverwhere, American Gods and Anansi
Boys. The Ocean represents the culmination of Gaiman’s experiment with myth creation despite its originality because said originality is simultaneously an established cultural narrative and an autonomous piece of fiction. The story and characters found in The Ocean are all new and original Gaiman creations that may or may not exist in the universe of his other works, and have been created with characteristics that render them temporally revertible and non-revertible within the narrative of The Ocean—a compositional feat that arguably stands above the other titles discussed in this project because characters and narratives in said other works are derived (that is Gaiman’s intention and point). However, despite the revelation of The Ocean as myth being self-sustaining and self-creating in terms of mythic agency The Ocean can also be considered a cultural narrative for other structural (in regards to narrative devices like characters) and circumstantial (in regards to Gaiman’s prowess as an established author in the literary world) reasons.

One Hempstock Unaccounted For: The Graveyard Book

When it comes to Neil Gaiman you either love him, or you perform a quick Wikipedia search after hearing his name. While the term mainstream may only be applicable since the turn of the millennium, fans of Gaiman and his numerous titles, characters, and mediums are passionate as any fandom of ground-breaking talent can be. One of Gaiman’s defining qualities as an author is the fact that he is so undefinable in terms of genre. Is his work science-fiction; is it horror; is it fantasy; is it YA; is it non-specific and new? Excluding The Sandman, you may not find Gaiman on the same bookshelf in any given bookstore. It is that indefinability that feeds the cult of Gaiman followers—they are a subculture. Like any culture or subculture, Gaiman’s fans adhere to a narrative (in this case a group of narratives). It is easy to find the connection between titles like American Gods and Anansi Boys, because they share the same character(s). One could
even argue that the Odin illustrated in *The Sandman* titles could be an aspect of the Mr. Wednesday found in *American Gods*. Gaiman’s works are all stand-alone narratives with no professed connection in context of canonical universe—but as just stated some obvious connections exist. If these connections do exist then for the fans of Gaiman, this subculture of literary nerds; punk-rock natives; London Goths; emotionally tumultuous teenagers, are adhering to a microcosm-cultural-narrative. In their dreams, Mr. Wednesday may continue to be the thorn in Shadow’s side, or he could be in cahoots with Croup and Vandemar whilst they attempt to trick the king of tricksters, Anansi.

*The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, represents the first time (excluding the deliberate connection between *American Gods* and *Anansi Boys*) that Gaiman created a definite continuity between two standalone narratives. But haven’t we established that all the titles discussed in this project are individual and not serial? Yes, but there are a few Gaiman titles that have not been focused on or mentioned: *Good Omens*, co-authored by the late Terry Pratchett, and *Stardust* are both seminal works that have been excluded from this project because what relevance they hold in context to this project has already been established by other titles, or for the sake of page numbers these titles are better suited for another project. One unmentioned title, however, has now floated to the surface of scholarly importance if only for this subsection of this final chapter. *The Graveyard Book* (Gaiman’s homage to Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*) falls somewhere between adult fiction and children’s literature, focusing on an orphaned boy who is raised in a graveyard by ghosts, specters, spirits, and other unclassified entities—Nobody Owens is Gaiman’s Mogli.

Yet *The Graveyard Book* is important in context of *The Ocean* because of one small character that can be found loitering around an unmarked grave, under an old tree in an obscure corner of
the graveyard where souls offensive to the Christian tradition can be found—here lies one Lizzy Hempstock.

Predating The Ocean by over half a decade, this secondary character from Graveyard is characterized as a young girl who was assumed a witch and punished accordingly. The Hempstock of Graveyard never claims to be a witch, nor does she claim any affiliation or any Wiccan belief or Wiccan constituents. Yet this small piece of intertextuality not only creates an obscure connection between the characters found in either title, it creates a substantial connection for the fans of Gaiman or expands their understanding of his mythology as a whole. Before 2014, Lizzy Hempstock was just a sweet but mischievous girl who Nobody Owens befriended when no one else would. After the introduction of Lettie, her mother, and Old Mrs. Hempstock, Lizzy Hempstock became part of tradition—a tradition that is masonic in its secrecy as far as readers are concerned—that predates the beginning of time. The revertible and non-revertible nature the Hempstocks bring to The Ocean has now also overflowed retroactively into another Gaiman narrative; a relationship has been established the exponentially expands the narrative universe of each work. As such the cultural narrative of Neil Gaiman’s universe not only has agency for, but evidence of, an intertextuality that creates a canon for mythic figures beyond assumption and implication (i.e. American Gods and Anansi Boys) or anthology (i.e. The Sandman). Using terms like authentic or true in regards to literature can be dangerous in academia; without further research it is probably naïve or immature to state that The Ocean at the End of the Lane is an authentic and truly original cultural narrative—myth—created by Gaiman and as such proving this entire thesis absolutely correct. I would one day like to be able to state in complete confidence that the work of Neil Gaiman (and authors like him) prove that Lévi-Strauss was correct and all myths are connected by the scientific categorization of gross constituent units in
their narratives (and by extension authors like Gottschall are also validated in their Darwinian approach to story). What I do believe we can be confident about as this project draws to a close is that all the theories and implications postulated and extrapolated upon in this chapter and the ante-chapters before it clearly have the agency for applicability to this thesis. Gaiman’s work in entirety is stark evidence of an author who not only has a true talent for his craft, but also a passion for the real research, education, and comprehension of the cultural narrative. The dedication Gaiman has put into his life’s work not only allows him to stand out as a contemporary author of multiple genre’s and mediums, it also continually opens new veins for research and connections. The connection I have drawn between the cultural implications of a Neil Gaiman story and the theory postulated over half a century ago by Lévi-Strauss\(^\text{16}\) is not definite nor is it necessarily ground breaking. The gravity, however, created by certain sources of contemporary fiction in their relationship to cultural narratives, recognizing the narratives that create more than an intertextuality or an expansion of a story but a profound understanding of the entire cultural narrative as a whole is an importance for the future of cultural narratives in academia that cannot be ignored. I believe each of the titles in Gaiman’s portfolio that have been dissected in this thesis are of equal importance and as such equally applicable to the final postulation of this thesis stated above. However, as we have established in the beginning of each chapter the order that certain titles have been arranged in this thesis which is also a chronological order of publication by Gaiman also shows the evolution of the author’s ability to create such a narrative that provides a cultural resonance in the light of Lévi-Strauss’ argument.

\(^{16}\) Contemporaries of Lévi-Strauss and those who followed in his footsteps of defining, categorizing, and analyzing cultural narratives also deserve acknowledgment for their contributions. See concluding chapter for specific mentions, reasons for their absence, and prospects for future research.
Chapter Five: Where Are We Now and What Did We Miss?

Working on this project of the past year, my focus and purpose has always remained the same while my structure and method of explaining my purpose has constantly evolved. Sometimes this constant change was exponentially beneficial for progress while at other times it seemed to place me at an impasse as a writer, researcher, and prospective academic. I chose two focus my master’s thesis on Neil Gaiman for two main reasons: the first, as a lover of books I just love Neil Gaiman. Secondly, my time working as a graduate assistant at Millersville University not only showed me how rigid the divisions of expertise (that were discussed in the introductory chapter) actually are in contemporary literature departments, but in light of those divisions—which are often more like oppositions—I decided that regardless of length or success of my argument if I chose to write about another an author or subject that is already widely accepted in academia I would personally feel as though I would only be contributing the white-noise of similar titles and revisited theories that I found exploring the shelves of past theses and some of the oldest syllabuses still circulating the department. I had decided if I were to enjoy the process of writing my culminating graduate project I would not only need to write about someone or something that I personally enjoyed and was passionate about, but I also thought I would need to challenge myself by discussing an idea that was new enough to either obtain the approval of my superiors or cause them to call me an upstart.

What I discovered almost immediately is that while writing about an author who is still publishing and possible only entering his prime is exciting and unavoidably fresh, it is also possibly one of the most difficult things a young academic can do because said author is still publishing. Three times over the course of this project I was forced to stop, if only to satisfy my
own compulsions, and wait for a new edition or a brand new text to be released by Gaiman. I felt it would have been lazy and unprofessional to continue and further postulate a thesis that could potentially be rendered moot by new texts that would be undiscovered. Thankfully, Gaiman’s new editions and releases only fortified my argument, the waiting for release and time needed to digest these publications only resulted in frustrating delay and stagnation.

Despite these setbacks, I do feel confident in professing how proud I am in this thesis, in the dissection of Gaiman’s numerous works, in creating something larger than anything I have ever attempted in my academic career, and in getting through the predictable thesis-hate to rediscover a deeper love and understanding of one of my most treasured authors and influences—Thank you Mr. Gaiman.

This thesis set out to rattle some academic pillars, but in accordance to the always appreciated advice of my advisor and friend, Dr. Dominic Ording, those pillars could only be rattled in a professional and maturely written thesis grounded in theory and philosophy of the established canon. In learning a great deal about myself as a writer I embarked on a path to identify the essential ramifications of one of the seminal literary arguments of the twentieth century—Lévi-Strauss’ “The Structural Study of Myth”—and not only show how those ramifications had an effect on contemporary literature, but how authors of a certain talent and prolific nature validated that argument ten-fold in contemporary fiction which is too often awarded academic attention and accreditation a generation after its publication. While not all contemporary fiction should upset the established canon, of course, I believe in certain circumstances specific contemporary fiction is exactly what is needed to bridge the gap between our twenty-first century students and the majority population of twentieth century educators. By following the arching gaze of Lévi-Strauss’ argument, which states cultural narratives (myth and
other related genres) last within the discourse of societal evolution because of their temporally revertible and non-revertible nature. Some authors who possess a certain level of dedication to the research behind their craft go beyond the notion of appropriation in context of cultural narratives to achieve something else: *continuity* of narrative evolution. By recognizing the GCUs theorized and showcased by Lévi-Strauss in 1955 (and beyond) an cultural narrative can not only be retold, but expanded while simultaneously remaining the original narrative—the spiral’s point of origin and all other points thereafter. Not only are cross cultural connections illuminated, but relations between discourses and rhetorical style are also bridged (i.e. Essie Tregowan, Wututu, and the Tar Baby), and major literary staples that younger readers may struggle to access much less relate to can be delivered in new mediums that not only maintain their original essence, but give said young readers the agency to access that they could not penetrate before (i.e. “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”).

Unfortunately, whatever successes I believe this thesis did achieve are not also accompanied by failures and short-sightings. Some areas of this project were rendered open ended with assurances of future research ventures, like the lacking of insight from Joseph Campbell and Roland Barthes. These open doors were left as such not for lack of interest but for sack of time and my own personal ability to remain as concise as possible. In short, Campbell and Barthes are integral in understanding the evolution of cultural narrative research in the twentieth century that was turned upside down by Lévi-Strauss, but as the main focus of this specific project was Neil Gaiman and not Lévi-Strauss himself, I felt omitting potential subsections if not entire chapters dedicated to Campbell and Barthes was permissible in order to reach my conclusion.
There is one failing, however, that I do regret as this project comes to a close in terms of a master’s thesis, and that is the subject of the constantly mentioned GCUs—Gross Constituent Units. I do feel I was able to achieve a broad understanding for myself and for readers of GCUs in accordance to Lévi-Strauss’ theory, and I was also able to delineate for readers the broadest examples of them: *coming to America* stories, the importance of dreams within myths and Gaiman’s work in regards to narrative structure, and characters in Gaiman’s work that personify the temporally revertible and non-revertible quality that Lévi-Strauss originally posits. Yet for those who are intimately familiar with Lévi-Strauss’ composition, I obviously did not achieve the scientific and profound complexity of breaking down various bundles of GCUs like Lévi-Strauss did. While I originally desired to show those vary same type of graphic breakdowns in the narrative structure of Gaiman’s works like Lévi-Strauss did with Oedipus, I soon realized that understanding the details and nuances of his theory was far different from performing said dissections of a narrative. I believe I can attribute this difference to one essential truth: what I possess in research talents, writing skills, and passion for Gaiman’s work, I lack in linguistic experience as a profession—in short whatever experience and expertise I have gleaned from my studies as an undergraduate and graduate student are weakest in the literary realm of linguistics which is exactly, as Lévi-Strauss says, where the notion of GCUs is derived from.

While I personally feel this lacking weakens my overall argument and presentation in general, I am willing to argue that that feeling is possibly only personal and the broader examples of GCUs that are present in this research function adequately to deliver my understanding of these devices and their importance to the overall thesis—obviously after completing the three main chapters, the strongest of which I would venture is chapter two regarding *American Gods* and *Anansi Boys*, it is clear GCUs are only a tool to focus the Lévi-
Strauss lens I have adopted and discussion and analysis of overall narrative structure in Gaiman’s work in relation to my own philosophies and supporting research is the muscle behind what this thesis posits.

Preparing for, and working through this project has added an assurance for myself that much if not all of my future research as an academic will focus itself around the evolution of story in general, with particular attention paid to cultural narrative and whatever that meta-label hovers over: myth, folklore, sacred narrative, etc. Regardless, this thesis despite its strengths, short comings, and delays, has reestablished as focus and drive for research and choice of profession overall. I would be overjoyed to return to Gaiman as a subject in the future as other milestones of his career come and go, and the research you have just waded through has a high potential to be expanded or at least influence a future dissertation if not parallel publication and learning. For now I can say that I am excited to be able to pick of a piece of Gaiman’s work with a new found understanding of the writer as whole, and without the pressure to deconstruct every character, chapter, and narrative as a whole.
Works Cited


