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## Divine Parody: Ridiculing America's Spiritual Crisis in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*

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### Abstract

*One of the reasons for modern man's mental disorders is a spiritual crisis. In American Gods, Neil Gaiman ridicules this condition by reviving religious, folklore, and mythological entities into new contexts. These entities, however, are simplified as merely intertextual references by most studies. In fact, the new contexts are pragmatically intended to parody American modernity in leading modern man to a spiritual crisis. This research, thus, aims to be a descriptive-analytical study that not only interprets such references through intertextual analysis but also uses pragmatic analysis to examine how the novel parodically portrays modern man's spiritual journey. Deploying Linda Hutcheon's Interpretation of Parody, the Intertextual analysis results that these mythological characters are resituated to represent marginal communities, like ex-convicts, fugitives, drifters, gangsters, immigrants, homeless, laborers, prostitutes, and relocators. While applying Jung's interpretation of the relationship between mythological archetypes and psychological traits, the pragmatic analysis suggests that the hero archetype has been reimagined to caricature modern man's spiritual journey in reconciling his conscious desire with unconscious competencies that resulting disorders in his mental. The factors that influence the hero's mental stability are manifested through the trickster characters in deceiving the hero's consciousness with secular realities, while the sage characters reinforce the hero's unconsciousness through some spiritual journeys.*

**Keywords:** *Mythology; Parody; Spiritual Crisis; American Modernity*

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### Introduction

Mythology is always defined in modern society with its binary framework as an irrational product of the primordial mind as opposed to the so-called modern rational

thinking. In fact, as defined by Jung (1964), myths, folktales, and religious narratives are a set of symbols from the collective unconscious of ancient humans that more accurately reflect the human psyche than science does.

Modern humans have been indoctrinated with a mindset that no longer recognizes metaphysical power, or what Jung (1970) refers to as the *participation mystique*, which is aimed to aid their psychic development spiritually (p.75). In *Modern Man in Search of Soul*, Jung (1933) asserts that this spiritual problem is the cause of mental disease and psychological disorders in modern humans, as a result of a loss of a strong feeling of purpose, significance, and existence in life. Whereas, most studies reveal that the psychological symptoms of a spiritual crisis include: anxiety, depression, paranoid, social isolation, lack of satisfaction and happiness, obsessive-compulsiveness, and somatization (McConnell et al., 2006).

The loss of trust in spiritualism is said to be the reason for modern fantasy literature's disparagement as a genre of 'anti-real,' too 'childish,' and deficient in 'arbitrary logic'. To tell the truth, the revival of mythology in modern fantasy has been repurposed to criticize modern man's ignorance towards spiritual assistance. So, reading mythological references in modern fantasy requires more than a simple intertextual analysis; it requires decoding the pragmatic implications of these mythological beings' recontextualization.

When it comes to the list of 21st-century fantasy authors, Neil Gaiman is always mentioned as the top-tier and has been dubbed 'the prince of metaphor'. His 2001 novel, *American Gods*, is one of his works with a lot of references. *American Gods* is a grand tale about the survival of ancient Deities from various mythology that lived in the contemporary times; dressed and working as humans. The story is set in a number of American towns where they were transported to the country alongside the arrival of immigrants as their believers.

They were battling their contemporary-day rivals, known as "New Gods" or "Gods of the Modern," who are characterized as polytheistic Deities with varied autonomy exhibited essentially of various modern features, such as God of Media, God of Globalization, God of Technology, and so on. People are compelled to abandon their faith in old Gods and offer sacrifices to them as a result of their presence.

Hence, the Old Gods plot a war against the New Gods in order to maintain their existence.

The retrieval of the interconnection between the recontextualized depiction of the past arts in the novel and the original representation in their cultural background has been the focus of previous studies that have interpreted the significance behind Gaiman's creative process in reconstructing mythology. As a result, *American Gods* is frequently regarded solely as an intertextual work replete with historical texts from various cultures. Rata (2015) argues that the rich intertextual references manifested into characters in *American Gods* are symbolically to define the essence of what shaped modern American identity. Rata (2016) once again confirms that the narrative genre of modern fantasy, where the artificial Old World mythology is to disclose the diversity of American identity, marked by its complexity of '*different cultures, values, and nationalities, and their corresponding idiosyncracies*,' through mythopoeic reading (p. 44). While the fusion of spatial and temporal aspects in plot generation, or what Bakhtin referred to as a 'chronotope,' has semantic significance in addressing socio-historical immigrant issues like homelessness, poverty, racism, prejudice, and others. Another intertextual study assumes that Gaiman's usage of mythology, adapted into '*the cultural/spiritual pastiche of postmodern America*,' according to Wheeler (2017), is to investigate the cultural dichotomies between primitive-traditional society and modern-industrial society in describing the way of life (p.120-123).

Thus, the structural reading of intertextuality in *American Gods* can only answer the questions, "What is America?" "What determines American identity?" and "What are the intricacies in embracing and rejecting its determinations?" But, in these investigations, has the interpretation disclosed Gaiman's political undertones? Taking one example, in "The Role of Intertextuality in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*", Rata (2015) deploys Gerard Genette's Intertextuality where the borrowing of mythological texts from the various culture in the novel is immediately determined because America is shaped from various cultural elements. So, the assumption

that can be admitted is the heterogeneity, multiculturalism, and poly-ethnic are what constitutes American Identity.

Hutcheon (1985) dismisses Genette's idea of Intertextuality, claiming that it is structurally created in general only to be a minimal transformation of text. This means that a pragmatic procedure is unnecessary. By this denial of pragmatic interpretation, the political statement behind the fictitious realm of modern fantasy is disguised.

Because, if the pragmatic implications are considered, *American Gods* is not just a definition of what is so-called America. The novel aims to redefine the truth that has been a common conception behind America which sheltered in the name of modernity to honor them as what the knowledge says as an advanced, superior, and civilized society. Therefore, in contrast to previous studies that primarily only provide an intertextual analysis, this study is further intended as a pragmatic interpretation to examine how the novel parodies American modernity in leading modern man into a spiritual crisis.

## Methodology

This study deploys descriptive-analytical method. As for qualitative study, this research is conducted by library collecting data through: 1) Close reading the novel as the primary source of data, and the secondary source consists of articles, books, and journals related to Norse, Slovakian, Ancient Germany, British, African, Egyptian, Arabian, Indian, and American mythology; 2) Classifying the data by sampling narrations or dialogues both from the primary and secondary sources that describe those mythological figures; 3) Listing the data, which although the novel mentions numerous mythical figures, this study only focuses on those represented as prominent characters.

Meanwhile, the data analysis is divided into two stages: 1) The intertextual analysis aims to compare the new contexts of mythological entities to the real representation whether it's parodic, satiric, or ironic through Linda Hutcheon's theory of parody to comprehend the poetics of parody in resituating mythological entities as a marginal

society; 2) The pragmatic analysis aims to reveal Gaiman's political statements within his play of representation through Jungian analogy between mythology and psychology to apprehend the politics of parody in caricaturing modern man's Spiritual Crisis through reimagining archetypal functions. Both results are drawn into the final conclusion by stating margins' critiques to redefine American modernity.

## Results and Discussion

### ***Poetics of Parody in Modern Fantasy: Resituating Mythological Entities to Represent Marginal Society***

Parody is a literary device to evaluate reality by stressing disclamation at the dominant and proclamation on the margin. The nature is whether parodic (ridiculous), ironic (paradoxical), or satiric (scornful). Thus, Gaiman's play on representation in *American Gods* refers to who these mythological figures are supposed to represent? And what to reflect?

Baldur, a beloved Norse God, is the hero of the story. Baldur had been killed in the myth, but in the novel, he was resurrected as an American ex-convict named Shadow Moon. Gaiman (2017) describes that Baldur had a '*face shone like the sun*' and '*was so beautiful that he illuminated any place he entered*' (p.118). 'Light' and 'Sun' are hence symbols of his Deity. His appearance in the novel, ironically, is depicted as a character named 'Shadow' and 'Moon,' which characterizes his identity that had lost its authenticity and sincerity as a result of constantly depreciating self-acceptance and avoiding self-disclosure.

Ironic ethos, according to Hutcheon (1985), is semantically identified as antiphrasis with the parodied target while pragmatically signifying an evaluation, questioning and judging the parodied target (p.53). The ironic representation of Baldur and Shadow, thus, aims to insinuate modern man's mental crisis, which stemmed from his desperate desire to be the standard modern man accepted by dominant values, despite the fact that they must reject his uniqueness in order to avoid prejudices, discrimination, and

stereotypes. Thus, the main parodic theme in *American Gods* is that coming to America is a blasphemy for Gods. Gaiman recasts the lives of Deities, devils, and other mythological beings from dignified pantheons to be degraded in the same way that immigrants are. Coming to America did not imply that they were welcomed as Gods.

It's definitely an allegory to say the existence of immigrants is not that special or even humanly ignored. Czernobog, a Slavic God of Misfortune, got a poor job as a knocker in the beef industry, where he slaughtered cows by slamming their heads down. His representation is ironic because the process of smashing the head with a hammer was performed as a sacrifice to worship Czernobog, yet he used it to survive in modern days.

Czernobog's ironic portrayal reflects Eastern European immigrants' life in America. Zong and Batalova (2015) report that eastern European immigration was driven not only by economic prospects, but also to escape from religious persecution in their homeland, where the majority of them were Jews, Muslims, and Pagans. However, demographic data reveals an irony that Eastern European immigrants account for around 20% of the 10% of total European immigrants who live in poverty. While linguistic ethnographic data estimates that nearly 42% of Eastern European immigrants suffer from foreign language anxiety (FLA), which results in a stereotypical racial slur (Zong & Batalova, 2015). So, Gaiman betrays the silent truth that Eastern European immigrants are not afforded the same privileges as immigrants from other regions of Europe. The situation is allegorized in the novel, in which the Slavic Gods no longer get the same right to practice their rituals as other Western Gods. This function is defined by Hutcheon (1985) as a decentering parody that contests the dominant manipulative narratives by valuing marginal voice.

Living in a multicultural society like America, Immigrants must be free of their hubris. It is achieved by not claiming that their cultural background is superior, and different cultural values are respected through a relative point of view rather than based on standardized judgments. Because ancient tales

warn that anyone who flaunts their hubris will end up as a tragic hero.

Gaiman adapts Mad Sweeney or Buile Suibhne, known as Irish exiled king, to explore the intricacies of immigrants' homelessness. It is in line with the Aristotelian tradition, which states that a tragic hero always begins as an aristocrat, with his excess dignity leading his hubris (Reeves, 1952, p.174-175). The insanity eventually scared Suibhne to flee his kingdom, while Gaiman re-adapts the story as the king continued traveling across the West, until arriving in America in the modern age. In the modern scenario, Gaiman rewrites the tragic hero's hubris as immigrants' nationalist sentiment, which turns out to be a barrier to blend into the melting pot.

The exiled hero's hubris is always related to mental disease in the tragic hero archetype, such as insane, grumpy, greedy, etc. (Reeves, 1952, p.176), whereas in the context of immigrants, their nationalist hubris manifests into racial stereotypes. Mad Sweeney was faced by Irish stereotypes such as '*Guinness*' drinker, brutish troublemaker, '*freeloader*,' and coin trick player as a portrayal of Irish immigrants who still held his Irish nationalism. Mad Sweeney even introduced himself as Leprechaun, a mischievous dwarfish solitary fairy from Irish folklore. Mad Sweeney's self-identification as a Leprechaun, turned out referring to 'race stereotyped jokes' in order to insinuatingly belittle Irish immigrants.

It is arguable that Gaiman's creative process of resituating the lives of Deity is based on their divine profession. In the modernized context, the Queen of Sheba is represented still as an erotic figure. But, American modernity had degraded her just as a regular Los Angeles concubine. The Queen had to adapt to modernization by registering at prostitution sites. Her portrayal is sarcastic also comical, from a queen whose image is often demonized in old myths (Lassne, 1993), but she could not even fight back when the New Gods chased her.

The sarcastic depiction of the Queen of Sheba serves to satirize America's inhumane attitude toward the peripheries. When satire collides with irony or parody, its ethos implies

a deconstructive outcome. Hutcheon (1985) terms ironic or parodic satire. To achieve satiric pragmatism or a disdainful correction, the ethos deploys parodic or ironic semantics (p.61).

Another Islamic mythical being mentioned is an ifrit, one of the Jinn's type. He camouflaged as a regular modern guy whose identity could still be guessed from his flaming eyes, which he hid behind sunglasses. It was only Salim, a poor self-esteem Muslim immigrant who feared being labeled a "*cheap Arab*," (Gaiman, 2001, p.151), who recognized him.

To face homesickness while in a foreign country, fellow immigrants might be heroes to one another by building a little shared-cultural group. Jinn, thus, played a catalyst hero for Salim. Vogler (1996) states that a catalyst hero's role is '*to bring about transformation in others*' (p. 37). He also granted Salim's American dream, even if it wasn't what he had dreamed for. Because Salim realized that the concept is a product of western collective consciousness that would not be fully realized by the eastern unconsciousness. Gaiman compares how Western consciousness to the myth of American dreams as a fate-changer as how Westerners believe in the myth of jinn as dream-fulfillers, whereas for Easterners, jinn is actually a supernatural being who characteristically share similarities to humans.

*"They believe that we grant wishes. Why do they believe that? I sleep in on stinking room in Brooklyn. I drive this taxi for any stinking freak who has the money to ride in it, and for some who don't. I drive them where they need to go and sometimes they tip me. Sometimes they pay me"* (Gaiman, 2001, p.156).

The lust for power has become a collective topic in both mythical tales and biographical portrayals that were driven by the psychic disorder. The novel modernizes the Norse All-Father, Odin, who was struggled to adapt to modern innovations and been rivaled by the rise of New Gods; making him lose his wisdom as a Gray Beard, Mighty Poet, True One, and Much Wise, and to become a Riddler, Deceiver, Treachery Ruler, and even Evil Doer (Rudgley,

2018, p.9). It establishes Hutcheon (1985)'s assertion that "*parody be considered pejorative in intent and ridiculing in its ethos*" (p.50).

Gaiman's repurposing of Odin's archetypes as the God to be feared alludes to the misuse of Odin as a symbol of white supremacy in the West. Rudgley (2018) argues that Odinic psychology is misinterpreted by western consciousness as a socialist revolutionary epitome that inspired several right-wing extremist movements, including Hitler's Nazi party, which misappropriated the Scandinavian symbol of Swastika that was initially considered sacred to symbolize Odin as the God of Luck. (p.92).

American Odin, who is painted as a despotic ruler, is ridiculed for the lack of trust in his fellow Gods. His divine nature as a wandering God is also repositioned, which in the myth to collect knowledge, but in today's World, he voiced scathing views about modern lifestyle. The sarcastic Odin, according to Hutcheon (1985), makes the parodied object's attitude to be radical, outspoken, and less mindful (p.56).

Odin was known to have many names. In the novel, however, Odin was referred to as Mr. Wednesday because it was the day that Shadow first met him. The naming of Odin in the novel has an unintentionally comedic tone, which is linked to the Anglo-Saxon tradition of naming days, where the third day, Wednesday, originally came from 'Woden's Day'.

Mr. Wednesday plotted a conspired war with his old companion, Loki, to resurrect Asgardian Odin's glory days. Loki is undoubtedly the most well-known mythical trickster, and his tale is still popular in its alternate modern version, which mainly envisions him continuing his mischief in the modern era. Bassil-Morozow (2019), assumes that Loki's trickster tendencies are what made him still relevant in Hollywood popular culture (p.85). The resurgence of Loki in modern works acts as a reminder of Jung's cautions about the trickster archetypal metaphor, which shares parallels with the psychology of tyrants whose trials might result in mass catastrophe (Bassil-Morozow, 2019, p.95-96).

While Western tricksters are mostly depicted as violent, immoral, and boundary-breakers, but in non-Western society, their trickster existence is hailed as cultural heroes, and some even consider them to be Gods who embody self-liberation (p.15-16). They are known as antinomian tricksters or picaresque heroes by some mythologists. Ballinger (1989) argues that non-Western tricksters, like Native American heroic tricksters, are distinguished from Western tyrannical tricksters by their ambiguity.

The North Native American tribe known as the Algonquin people regard Wisakedjak's tale as a cultural hero. Since the Algonquin language family is an unwritten language, Wisakedjak is told in a variety of spellings, but his name is Americanized as Whiskey Jack in the novel. Picaresque heroes are mostly categorized as a margin that cannot match society's standard of moral (Ballinger, 1991, p.22) in which Gaiman represents Whiskey Jack as a surviving Native American relocator who lived in a mobile home at a reservation area in Lakota land. Urbanization had turned his character into an anti-white bitter old man. It is in relation to Ballinger's (1991) classifications that characterize the marginal role to insult modern society's respectable status ideals (p.24). Whiskey Jack's critical attitude was reflected in his refusal to join Mr. Wednesday's war since he had trust issues with white men.

*"They'll win," said Whiskey Jack flatly. "They won already. You lost already. Like the white man and my people. Mostly they won. And when they lost, they made treaties. Then they broke the treaties. So they won again. I'm not fighting for another lost cause."* (Gaiman, 2001, p.279).

Picaresque heroes have become popular by portraying them as satirical agents, with contemporary society as the target of their satire (Ballinger, 1991, p.22). Whiskey Jack's parodic representation is not sarcastic, but rather cautionary, pointing to parody tendencies as realistic rather than idealistic aspirations (Ballinger, 1991, p.26; Hutcheon, 1985, p.18).

Another trickster that is hailed as a God is Anansi from African west coast mythology. Anansi, or Mr. Nancy as its Americanized name, was described as the only Old God who took a neutral stance; not fully supportive and interested in the war plot while throwing satirical jokes. His trickster archetypal nature confirms Hutcheon's (1985) claim that parody is not negative in ethos, but neutral or playful in purpose (p.58).

Thus, it is arguable that the Eastern mythological values presented in the novel are essentially different from the West. If Odin, Loki, Czernobog are represented as Gods to be feared who preached about war, hatred, or sacrifice, the Hindu Gods, on other hand, are represented as Gods to be loved who further guided morals, psychology, and the meaning of life. Applying Jungian interpretation of the psychic imbalance in Western tricksters, Hindu has previously prototyped this trait in which destructive behavior always starts with pleasure-seeking while ignoring a spiritual help (Akhilananda, 1948, p.8). So, the presence of Hindu entities, like Kali as Western Tricksters' opponent seems to satirize the Western tricksters' spiritual crisis that leads to their destructive behavior.

Gaiman also revives Gods of Knowledge to unravel historical confusions and taboos. Pre-Columbian transoceanic contact claims, which suggest the prehistoric people sailed to America long before Christopher Columbus did in 1492, are among the conspiracies around American historical speculations. It is conceivable that Gaiman supports the claim by recasting Thoth, the Ancient Egyptian God of Storytelling, as a deconstructor of American history in the character of Mr. Ibis. In a series of intermezzo narratives in a sub-chapter titled 'Coming to America', Gaiman imagines the arrival of Viking explorers in 813 AD and the first migration of immigrants from ancient Siberian tribes to America in 14,000 BC.

Jett (2014) classifies these speculations into the fact-based ones, such as Vikings navigation records; religious congruence in east Asia with Native American beliefs; also genetic evidence as revealed in the novel, *"here's a skull that shows the Ainu, the Japanese aboriginal race, were in America nine thousand*

years ago. Here's another that shows there were Polynesians in California nearly two thousand years later" (Gaiman, 2001, p.163); while some are subjective-based, One of them is Ancient Egyptian traders (p.37-62).

Mr. Ibis claimed in the novel that his people, the Nile people, sailed across the oceans for trade, which was based on facts of their contacts in South America by correlating the cultural exchange between the Aztec and Mayan civilizations with Ancient Egypt in terms of pyramid architecture, Deities, and the tradition of embalming mummies. Mr. Ibis fictionalizes Southern Illinois' impersonation of Egypt as a result of these pieces of evidence, leading to speculation that Ancient Egyptian traders may have also reached North America. "(Southern Illinois) was a trading post back in the old days" (Gaiman, 2001, p.162).

The rejection of pre-Columbian trans-oceanic contact since it contradicts modern rationality casts doubt on ancient sailors' headway due to technological limitations: "...these people were primitives, they didn't have radio controls, vitamin pills, or jet airplanes" (Gaiman, 2001, p.163). The ice age migration over the Bering landmass is the only 'reasonable' option for them. Jett (2014) argues that the Western suspicion of the reputation of Eastern ancestral explorers is aimed to depreciate the East as an inferior descent while honoring the West's ancestors as destined to be superior in terms of exploration, discovery, and conquest.

Therefore, the recontextualization of Thoth's master of knowledge aims to challenge modern knowledge regarding the so-called American official history.

*"The important thing to understand about American history...is fictional, a charcoal-sketched simplicity for the children. For the most part, it is uninspected, unimagined, unthought, a representation of the thing, and not the thing itself. It is a fine fiction...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"* (Gaiman, 2001, p.85).

The parodic mix of historiography and fictionalization in *American Gods* implies that the novel works as critical veracity than a nostalgic validity. It confirms Hutcheon's (1989) claim that the rewriting history in parodic representation is a historiographic metafiction; "it offers a sense of the presence of the past, but this is a past that can only be known from its texts" (Hutcheon, 1989, p.4). Hence, Parody proposes rewriting the past in fiction by reflecting current perceptions to reveal a contradictory truth (Hutcheon, 1985, p.113-114).

### ***Politics of Parody in Modern Fantasy: Reimagining Mythological Archetypes to Caricature Modern Man's Spiritual Crisis***

The hero myth is the most universal product of human unconsciousness, appearing in all cultures. While the details differ based on their cultural background, these tales of the hero's journey are collectively known as a personal developing process of negotiating an individual's consciousness in a quest to be the whole psyche. Jung introduces the process with the term of individuation or self-realization.

Jung (1970) states that modern man controlled in wholly consciousness are questionable and suspect (p.75). It is portrayed in Shadow who has directed readers' prejudices to question his image as a shadowy convict at the beginning of the novel. He was cryptic when asked about his past, ambiguous when identifying his racial appearance, and 'Shadow' was not his real name, which he constantly avoided revealing. Shadow had always expected himself to act like a normal modern guy, even if it has to distress his feelings. However, he was aware that his status as an ex-con posed a big barrier to public acceptance. He was fulfilled with anxiety about social exclusion during the last few days of his sentence.

*"There was a hollowness in the pit of his stomach that he told himself was simply a fear of going back to the world on the outside. But he could not be sure. He was more paranoid than usual, and in prison usual is very, and is a survival skill. Shadow*

*became more quiet, more shadowy, than ever." (Gaiman, 2001, p.15).*

Shadow's situation is referred to as an 'unhistorical' human by Jung (1970). A person who always discards his history would live in solitude, perplexity, and constantly discrediting of all his capabilities (p.75). Living by suppressing inner desire could only burden a modern man when dealing with the world. Shadow felt incredibly nervous and disturbingly careful about what he said when engaging with the world for the first time as a free man at the airport.

The world, which is rapidly innovating, encourages modern man's consciousness to catch up, but consequently, he is more convinced to abandon his trust in spirituality. Jung (1970) argues that these conditions made modern man's psyche to be more pessimistic, skeptical, insecure, and always felt lacking and left behind by technological progress (p.76). Shadow, for example, felt culturally lagged by the electronic system, as though the world had evolved drastically after three years in the penitentiary.

*"Then Shadow was stumbling through the brightly lit airport terminal. Shadow worried about the whole e-ticket business...Anything electronic seemed fundamentally magical to Shadow, and liable to evaporate at any moment" (Gaiman, 2001, p.23).*

Indeed, all those unrealistic expectations for progression have paradoxically turned people into soulless beings that no longer care both intrapersonally and interpersonally; always prejudiced and competing. Thus, many of the mental issues people face today are basically rooted in an individual's inability to balance what their inner self wants with what the outer world needs. This crisis causes a toxic inner conflict which leads to an imbalance in their psychological wholeness. Jung (1970) diagnoses someone who lives dependently by obeying his outer will would only surrender to let his soul flow wherever it takes him with no future, hope, or fixed purpose (p.81). Shadow's expected modern life turned out to turn him into a purposeless and worthless human.

*"I feel," Shadow told her, "like I'm in a world with its own sense of logic. Its own rules. Like when you're in a dream, and you know there are rules you mustn't break. Even if you don't know what they mean. I'm just going along with it, you know?" (Gaiman, 2001, p.83).*

Declining spiritual help also leads modern men's arrogance to deny self-introspection. Even more pitiful, they are unwisely concerned with other people's perceptions, despite the fact that modern men will continue to ignore each other's existence (Jung, 1970, p.79).

Jung (1970) explains that to thrive in the age of secular deceptions, modern man have no other choice but to become tricksters themselves (p.76). To be progressive and competitive, his ego mandates to acquire trickery proficiency to cross the boundaries. So, regardless of massive calamities as a result of technological advancements, such as war, oppression, and natural disasters, it is the lust to catch up with progressivity that has changed modern man to be greedy, ambitious, and cynical. The tragedies of tricksters, which were forewarned by ancient man through mythology, are casually ignored by modern man, who dismisses them as mere fictitious old man's tales.

The trickster's journey usually begins as an intellectual whose ego is ravenous for pleasure. Trickster is always depicted as a mentally empty leader, then projects his loneliness by inviting others into a collective movement to be tyrannized, due to his contrary behavior to societal norms. Loki is the most popular trickster whose tale is still popularized in modern versions that mainly continue his mischievousness to cause havoc in the modern era.

*American Gods*, with no exception, features Loki using the double-edged sword of modernity under his sophisticated regime called the New Gods. Along with his partner, Odin, who in the myth described as having the highest degree of wisdom, ironically, modern America had neglected the sanctity of his sageness in order to survive by becoming a thief, a con artist, a homeless wanderer, and an



envious vengeful whose ambitions to rejuvenate his glory by tyrannizing the Old Gods had failed. They planned a conspiracy to deceive and seduce other pantheons to join the war. At the end, the war was waged for them to gain self-pleasure by exploiting both the Old and New Gods to die in the war in the name of worshipping both.

Gaiman's play of Ironic Odin, satirizes how the mirage of modernity leads to the birth of a dictator whose consciousness drives him to rule a homogenous mass. Individuals would be more easily managed and manipulated under such a totalitarian order, while the oppressive system would prevent individuals from individuation. The interests and rights of the mass are collectivized to be obligated and responsible for the group visions.

American Odin or Mr. Wednesday who no longer had any of Asgardian Odin's wisdom made him into a self-proclaimed leader by prioritizing the worth of the statistical numbers, "*Well? Where are they? There should be dozens of us here. Scores!*" (Gaiman, 2001, p.115), and ignoring the uniqueness of each Old Gods, "*Organizing Gods is like herding cats into straight lines. They don't take naturally to it.*" (Gaiman, 2001, p.307). Although at first most of them refused to join, he used self-proficiency to terrorize fear, "*You're as forgotten and as unloved and unremembered as any of us*" (Gaiman, 2001, p.248), propagate prejudices, "*Little snot...They (the New Gods) don't have a fucking clue*" (Gaiman, 2001, p.55), and manipulate speculations, "*Firstly, it's not madness. It's the only way. Secondly, everyone will be there. You would not want to be left out, would you?*" (Gaiman, 2001, p.73).

The same command was also implemented by Loki under his shape-shifting persona, Mr. World, to organize the New Gods. He programmed the reality of modern society to assume that they were truly *'the culmination of the whole history of mankind'* (Jung, 1970, p.76).

*"I want a clean world. I want to own tomorrow. I want evolution, devolution, and revolution. I want to move our kind from the fringes of the slipstream to the higher*

*ground of the mainstream. You people are underground."* (Gaiman, 2001, p. 298-299).

It implies that Gaiman ridicules Jung's (1969) suspicion that modernization has resulted in a competition between the modern state and the modern church (religious mass) to lead individuals into statistically homogeneous masses while instilling fear, prejudice, and false assumptions against their opponents. Marginal Deities represented the modern church, which thought that modernity had caused people to lose faith in them.

Jung (1969) argues that modern churches have been oriented to win the competition and no longer teach religion as a spiritual needs, but rather allegiance, fanaticism, and communal service (p.17). Odin's modern church doctrinated Shadow with those dogmatized disorientations. Shadow had never been spiritually provided since his house of Gods was more concerned with the quantity, and Odin was more concerned with homogeneity, therefore Shadow was not permitted to recover his uniqueness. Shadow was always more commanded regarding his devotions, responsibilities, and self-sacrifice.

To ensure that individuals do not recover their individuality, Jung (1964) claims that the mass must indoctrinate its members to be ideological fanatics by propagating prejudice and false assumption to antagonize their opponents. It's the damage of rapid technological advancement as a public opinion indoctrination tool. Gaiman mocks this deception by personifying western media culture as a Goddess of Media that has always depicted the Old Gods as *'dangerous people,'* while claiming to be the *'good side,'* through her clichéd puns.

In fact, modern man had been terrified by the thought that they, too, had grasped the disadvantages of those technological advancements of also leading to their tragic downfall. This is the ironic truth of modern man. This restlessness is portrayed as Technical Boy is discouraged by realizing that a war armed with sophisticated technologies of mass annihilation would just culminate in the annihilation of all parties. Because, at his unconscious, modern man is still an archaic

man (Jung, 1970, p.50). Modern man would instinctively return to the 'pre-logical' state of mind to believe in supernatural existences in some things that scientific explanations could not explain.

Except for his own will, nothing can change a modern man's bleak life. So, he must personally activate his initiation before starting on a psychological journey. In the hero myth, initiation is triggered by the mentor's persuasion, which is collectively called the hero's call for adventure. Self-introspection, according to Jung (1964), can only be induced by a spiritual encounter. These experiences are prototyped through the sequence of encounters with divine figures who use their metaphysical power to find the hero's unconscious realm.

As portrayed by Mr. Wednesday, the Western God as a deceptive spiritual mentor to Shadow's individuation, crusading religion as a doctrine would only impede its devotees from realization. Contrarily, Shadow's contacts with the Eastern Gods were crucial to help him accept his identity. So, Jung (1969) in *Psychology and Religion: West and East* argues that there is a difference in perceiving religion according to the East and the West.

*"White people have some fucked-up Gods, Mister Shadow"* (Gaiman, 2001, p.143).

Jung (1969) explains that Westerners perceive religions cognitively, which has led to doubts about their veracity and relevancy in the modern era (p.480). Meanwhile, Easterners regard religion imperatively that has unconsciously turned into an individual need and way of life, especially in this day of secular deceptions. Thus, as shown in one of the mythical characters referenced in *American Gods*, Kali, Easterners can practice their religion without fear of becoming superseded by scientific dogmas.

Kali is the Hindu Shakti of maternity and war. Kali is debatably conceptualized through the pure unconscious mind of the primitive Indian tribes, with her representation as a savage woman. The idea is consistently worshiped by Dravidians and Aryans, with slight acculturation, suggesting that Hindu

history was founded on progress. Hence, Kali's image represents primal woman, Dravidian motherhood, and Aryan Iron Age warlord (Chaudhuri, 1956, p.125). For Hindus, however, the cultural fusion embodied by Kali is morally regarded as openness to development without needing to repress others or reject the former. It too has become a psyche in Kali worshipers.

Kali was ironically recast in the story as the Old God who opposed Mr. Wednesday's war plans. The opposing representation of her concept of divinity reveals that Easterners enjoy religion without the anxieties in the modern age. The principle that science and spiritualism must accept, not deny, each other's existence is mastered by embracing religion as a metaphor for a way of living, as depicted in the figure of Kali, who was unaffected by the popularity of the Modern Gods, which the Western Gods were insecure about.

*"The only thing that seems self-evident...is your own desire for glory. We've lived in peace in this country for a long time. Some of us do better than others, I agree. Back in India, there is an incarnation of me who does much better, but so be it. I am not envious. I've watched the new ones rise, and I've watched them fall again"* (Gaiman, 2001, p.119).

The idea of believing in God by gaining cognition would only lead to doubts about the empirical truth of God's existence. Further, it tends to regard God to be feared, whereas religions, as imperatives see God to be loved till the blessedness of His saintly concept, is embodied in the worshiper's personality. Because individuals who see God as a force in human life will realize His essence through emotions, they will not judge a religion as a doctrine, but rather as their own existence (Jung, 1969, p.480).

Ganesh, an elephant-headed Hindu God, is one of the Gods who has been a psyche for His followers. He is a God of overcoming obstacles and assuring success and is especially idolized by Indian immigrants who are struggling in their new land. He was the only Old God in the novel who had not faced troubles in America,

unlike most of the Old Gods, referring to the fact that many Indian immigrants still believe him. Thus, Ganesh is worshiped not because of His existence, but of the essence of His divine symbols of building sustainable hope, which has been embedded in His devotee's psyche.

Following Mr. Wednesday's faked death, Anansi, or his Americanized name Mr. Nancy, took over as Shadow's spiritual mentor to guide him from an imperative perspective. Anansi is a very important African fable figure during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Marshall (2010) states that Anansi's tales have played multiple functions: as self-integration of African identity in claiming a new identity in the new land; amusement that recovers grief and strengthens solidarity via storytelling; and inspiration for resistance and rebellion (p.183).

In the myth, Anansi is a storyteller whose trickery tales have helped black slaves by adopting his tactics to outsmart, challenge, and break loose from their white masters. One of the tales mentioned in *American Gods* is 'the tiger's death'. Just as its purpose in the traditions, the tale was aimed as entertainment to melt the tension between the Old Gods and to ignite the spirit of the union among the Old Gods, "*just because we are few and they are many, we are weak, and they are powerful, it does not mean that we are lost...just because you're small, doesn't mean you got no power*" (Gaiman, 2001, p.116-117).

Although Anansi has trickster traits, for black people he is a personal God who has personally urged his oppressed folks to integrate self-independence from inhumanity. Anansi was also depicted in the novel as a liberator who freed Shadow from Mr. Wednesday's tyranny, as an evoker for Shadow from the illusions of secularism, and as an advocate to reinforce Shadow's self-integration to reach his wholeness.

Therefore, the existence of mythologies, religions, and folklores for marginal groups is important for their self-integration in the midst of modernization's marginalization. Religion functions as a conscious and unconscious stabilizer to protect its followers from the misfortunes of becoming victims of

secularism, which results in spiritual emptiness.

## Conclusion

*American Gods* is a modern version of Dante Alighieri's *Divine comedy*; narrating the spiritual journey of a man through life in a modern context. The novel parodies the paradoxes of American modernity in overestimating expectations and idolizing excessively on secular progressivity while consequently resulting in psychological disorders to its fans. Gaiman Americanizes a number of mythological figures from diverse cultures to represent the struggle of the American marginal community in facing competition with modernity that not only materially but also mentally alienates them. Thus, his play of representation is not simply an intertextual device but pragmatically implies his political undertones through Shadow's journey of individuation as a self-purification of modern man from secular lies.

After accomplishing self-realization of what had modernity lied to and fooled him into his misfortune, Shadow had come to discover the reason for his depression and confusion as a failed modern man by not blaming his ego's failure, but it is actually a spiritual emptiness in his psyche. Shadow's spiritual-awakening journey tells us, the so-called modern humans, that religions are believed not to be empirically proven, but rather religions are metaphorically implemented as psychological needs.

Because modern life is built by transferring pseudo-reality and hyper-rationality that forces people to imitate and emulate, even though this disoriented way of life always misleads them confused and ends up as a victim of disappointment in excessive expectations and hopes. It also includes modernity's manipulation in stereotyping marginal identities as ex-convicts (Shadow), warlords (Odin, Loki, Anansi, and Kali), immigrants (Czernobog), homeless (Mad Sweeney), laborers (Jinn, Mr. Ibis, and Mr. Jacquel), prostitute (Queen of Sheba), and relocators (Whiskey Jack), who emphasize them vicious, unprincipled, dangerous, and violent.

Therefore, modern identity is perceived as an unstable and rapidly mutating condition, yet precisely this condition is accountable for producing anxiety and identity crisis. This condition is exactly the opposite of the traditional society whose roles of myths define one's identity. Thus, the identity of every member of traditional societies was fixed, solid, and stable. Meanwhile, in modern society, identity is more mobile, multiple, and subject to change, so the problem of modern man is in how they constitute, perceive, interpret, and present themselves to themselves and others.

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