

**SIMULACRA AND HYPERREALITY
IN
NEIL GAIMAN'S *AMERICAN GODS***

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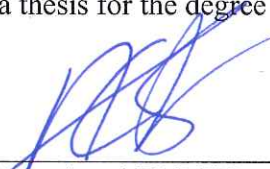
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ABSTRACT

SIMULACRA AND HYPERREALITY IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *AMERICAN GODS*

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Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* tells the story of many mythological figures from diverse ancient mythologies, who try to survive in the twenty-first century America. However, these old gods are gradually replaced by the new gods of the American society such as Television, Technology Boy, and Media. This thesis aims to scrutinize Gaiman's novel through French theorist Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra. Baudrillard asserts that the reality in our contemporary world has been replaced not just by mere copies, but by simulacra that have created their own realities; thus, this is the new reality, which is the hyperreality. By analyzing the protagonist Shadow Moon, the simulacrum of Baldur in Norse mythology, the antagonist Mr. Wednesday, the failed simulacrum of Odin in Norse mythology and other minor characters, some of who have transformed into simulacra whereas others just remained as copies, I will try to depict the fact that unless one is simulacrum, s/he cannot survive in America. Neil Gaiman's novel illustrates this struggle for the old gods to adapt to American values and recreate their own narratives instead of reliving the histories of their original versions. As an expatriate himself, Gaiman is no stranger to this process as a European living in America. He projects his experience as an expatriate onto his novel while he tells the struggle of European

gods to fit in America. In the discussion on new gods, the characteristics of American society, such as consumerism, technology and rejection of history, will be handled with respect to Baudrillard's theory.

Key Words: Neil Gaiman, Baudrillard, Simulacrum, Hyperreality, Norse Mythology.

ÖZ

NEIL GAIMAN'IN *AMERICAN GODS* ADLI ROMANINDA SİMÜLAKRLAR VE HİPERGERÇEKLİK

ATCAN ALTAN, Neslihan

Yüksek Lisans, İngiliz Edebiyatı ve Kültür İncelemeleri

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Neil Gaiman'ın *American Gods* adlı romanı farklı kadim mitolojilerden gelen bir çok mitolojik tanrı ve figürün yirmi birinci yüzyıl Amerika'sında hayatta kalma çabasını anlatmaktadır. Bununla birlikte bu kadim tanrılar giderek yerlerini Amerikan toplumunun Televizyon, Teknoloji ve Medya gibi yeni tanrılarına bırakmaktadırlar. Bu tez Gaiman'ın romanını Fransız kuramcı Jean Baudrillard'ın simülakr kuramına dayandırarak incelemeyi hedeflemiştir. Baudrillard günümüz çağdaş dünyasında gerçeklik kavramının yerine sadece kopyaların geçmediğini ve bu kopyaların kendi gerçekliklerini yaratmış ve bu şekilde de hipergerçeğe ulaşmış simülakrlar olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Tezin amacı, romanın ana karakteri Norveç mitolojisinden Baldur'un simülakrı Shadow Moon, yine Norveç mitolojisinden Odin'in başarısız kopyası Wednesday ve diğer ikincil karakterleri inceleyerek bu figürlerin bir simülakra dönüşemedikleri sürece Amerika'da hayatta kalamayacakları gerçeğini ortaya koymaktır. Neil Gaiman'ın romanı da bu eski tanrıların, kopyası oldukları tanrıların öykülerini yeniden yaşamak yerine, Amerikan değerlerine uyum sağlayıp kendi öykülerini yazma uğraşlarını betimlemektedir. Neil Gaiman da Amerika'da yaşamını sürdüren Avrupalı bir göçmen olarak bu sürece uzak değildir. Kendisi, bu deneyimini Avrupalı tanrıların Amerika'ya uyum sağlaması olarak

romanında yansıtmaktadır. Eski tanrıların ardından yeni tanrıları ele alan bölüm, Amerikan toplumunun tüketicilik, teknoloji ve tarihi reddetmesi gibi özellikleri Baudrillard'ın kuramı çerçevesinde incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Neil Gaiman, Baudrillard, Simülakr, Hipergerçeklik, Norveç Mitolojisi.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Neil Gaiman is an accomplished British science-fiction and fantasy author of diverse works from adult novels to young adult novels, children's books, and graphic novels. He was born in Hampshire, England in 1960, where he spent most of his time in libraries reading his favorite authors, such as C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Ursula K. Le Guin, and G.K. Chesterton. His career as a writer began as a journalist and his first two works were biographies for Duran Duran, a popular music band in the eighties, and for Douglas Adams, the author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Gaiman's collaborations with the artist Dave McKean on graphic novels like *Violent Cases* and *Black Orchid* series were followed by the revolutionary graphic novel series *Sandman*, "a comic strip for intellectuals" as Norman Mailer called it. (P. Anderson, personal communications, July, 2001) He moved to the United States as a result of his first wife's desire and even though they separated, Gaiman is still living there with his wife Amanda Palmer, a punk-cabaret singer.

Gaiman's first novel *Good Omens* (1990) was a collaborated work with the famous British fantasy author Terry Pratchett, so Gaiman's first solo novel is considered to be *Neverwhere* (1996), which was also adapted as a mini-TV series by the BBC. His next novel *American Gods* (2001) was the book that brought all the international fame and positive critique to Gaiman, along with all the important awards in fantasy, science-fiction, and horror genres. It is the first book to receive both the Hugo Award for best SF/Fantasy Novel and the Bram Stoker Award for Best Horror Novel at the same time as well as the Locus Award for Best Fantasy Novel and Nebula Award for Best Novel. Peter Straub, an accomplished American author in the horror genre, who also received the Bram Stoker Award for his work *The Throat*, calls Neil Gaiman a "remarkably gifted writer," stating that *American Gods* has even exceeded Gaiman's classic work *Sandman* series. He says of *American Gods*: "Here we have poignancy, terror, nobility, magic, sacrifice, wisdom,

mystery, heartbreak, and a hard earned sense of resolution – a real emotional richness and grandeur that emerge from masterful storytelling.” (Gaiman, personal communications, March, 2001) His novel *Anansi Boys* (2005) includes a familiar character, Mr. Nancy, an African god, who Gaiman introduced in *American Gods*. His children’s book *The Graveyard Book* (2008) was inspired by *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling and became a best-seller in the United States.

Some of his works, including *American Gods*, are in the process of being turned into movies and TV series, while his children’s books *Coraline* and *Stardust* have already been adapted to acclaimed movies. He co-wrote the screenplay for the movie *Beowulf* (2007), adapted the screenplay for the legendary Miyazaki animation film *Princess Mononoke* (1997), and wrote two episodes for the well-acclaimed TV series, *Dr. Who*. His latest novel *The Ocean At the End of the Lane* (2013) won the National Book Award in England and will be adapted into a feature film produced by Tom Hanks.

American Gods opens with Shadow Moon, the thirty-two year old protagonist of the novel sentenced to six years of prison for aggravated assault on two men with whom he was an accomplice to a bank robbery as their driver. This scheme has actually been plotted by Shadow’s wife Laura. The gang attempted to get away with all the money without sharing it with Shadow and Laura, as a result of which they were severely beaten by Shadow. Shadow serves only three years of his sentence and is about to be released when he is informed by prison authorities that his wife has been killed in a car accident with Shadow’s best friend Robbie Burton. It is revealed later in the novel that Laura and Robbie were having an affair and at the time of the accident Laura was performing oral sex on Robbie. Because of this grave news, Shadow is to be released a couple of days earlier than his original release date. On a plane on his way back home, Eagle Point, for Laura’s funeral, Shadow meets Mr. Wednesday, who already knows Shadow’s name and what has happened to his wife. Mr. Wednesday offers Shadow a job as a bodyguard, an errand boy and a driver. Realizing that there is nothing waiting for him at home, Shadow accepts this job offer, but he soon finds out that it involves a journey into the world of old gods who are about to have a war with the new gods of the new world, America. The gods of the old world are from a plethora of mythologies – Norse, African, Egyptian, Slavic, Indian, Islamic, Jewish, and Native American mythologies. They try to

survive in their mortal manifestations as prostitutes, criminals, and grifters (R. Dornemann & K. Everding, personal communications, 2001), in today's America, where the new gods such as Technology Boy, Television, and Media prosper. Both new and old gods are tricked into believing that each party wants the death of the other as a result of a scheme pulled by Wednesday and Low Key.

Shadow's is a journey entangled with diverse mythological and supernatural elements, road trips through which the vast landscape of America as well as its characteristics are revealed. As Gaiman himself expressed on his website for the reviewers of the work before its publication, the novel is about a mythological America, a place where diverse belief systems are brought with the immigrants and slaves. He asserts that *American Gods* is about:

. . . an America with strange mythic depths. Ones that can hurt you. Or kill you. Or make you mad. *American Gods* will be a big book, I hope. A sort of weird, sprawling picaresque epic, which starts out relatively small and gets larger . . . It's about the soul of America, really. What people brought to America; what found them when they came; and the things that lie sleeping beneath it all. (<http://www.neilgaiman.com/works/Books/AmericanGods/in/184/>)

American Gods, does, indeed, start out small and turns into something larger through its intricate narrative with two frames overlapping with each other. The novel resumes two separate narratives, one recounting the story of Shadow Moon, in contemporary America and the other written under the title of interludes that reveals how old gods came to America through the belief systems of immigrants. In the first story, it is revealed to Shadow that he is the son of Wednesday, the failed simulacrum of Odin, the all-father god in Nordic mythology. As a consequence of this revelation, Shadow embarks upon a journey through which, he transforms into a hero, who saves both the old and the new gods from destruction and discovers hidden aspects of his soul. While the first narrative unravels the personal journey of Shadow among gods and other mythological figures, the second narrative gives information about the mythological background of the characters in the first frame.

As an expatriate, Gaiman claims that the novel is about the “. . . immigrant experience, about what people believed in when they came to America. And about what happened to the things that they believed.” (*How Dare You*, 2001, para. 13) The beliefs of the immigrants have been reformed, or rather eroded in order to conform to

the new land and the new century in the novel; that is, the gods in the original myths and in the faiths of immigrants have become mere copies of the original, losing their significance. In an online interview, Gaiman talks about the America perceived from an immigrant vantage point. He points out:

I was trying to describe the experience of coming to America as an immigrant, the experience of watching the way that America tends to eat other cultures . . . In America, to quote Michael Moorcock "Art aspires to a condition of muzak" --everything homogenizes, it blands. I think I was trying to talk about both the blanding of other cultures, the way the rough edges get knocked off very quickly and the way the things that make them special and unique get forgotten or lost or abandoned or subsumed into the "American Dream." (Dornemann & Everding, personal communications, 2001)

Gaiman reflects the way America assimilates other cultures into homogeneity and uniformity. Similarly, Jean Baudrillard emphasizes the systematic annihilation of a variety of cultures in America, saying: "For the European, even today, America represents something akin to exile, a phantasy of emigration . . . At the same time, it corresponds to . . . the zero degree of culture . . ." (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 81)

In the novel, many mythological figures, who are ripped off of their cultural qualities in America, become misfits of the society. To illustrate, two Slavic mythological sisters, Zorya Vechernyaya and Zorya Utrennyaya, and Zorya Polnochnaya, a character invented by Neil Gaiman himself¹, who are responsible for guarding a chained dog that might eat the Ursa Minor constellation if he breaks loose, are now old and living in Chicago, reading fortunes for people to make ends meet. Another transformed mythological figure also living in Chicago is the Slavic god of death, Czernobog, who also lives in Chicago. He is an ailing old man, complaining about everything. The novel is full of replicas of mythological figures, who have changed, been forgotten, or become bland like muzak, a piece of background music played in stores and elevators.

¹ Neil Gaiman explains in his interview with Patton Oswalt how he came up with the idea of another goddess that has not existed in Slavic mythology. In fact, in Slavic mythology, only two sisters are responsible for watching Ursa Minor, but Gaiman, as he explains in Saban Theatre to his audience, created the third sister because he was fascinated by the story of two sisters and he thought "it would be cooler" to have a third one, whom people started to believe to be a part of the original myth. In this case, Gaiman has rewritten new mythology. Neil Gaiman and Patton Oswalt at Saban Theater in L.A. 6728711 pt3 (YouTube) 4 August 2011. Retrieved 27 July 2014

Gaiman's novel can be regarded as an attempt in "revisionist mythmaking", a term originally used by feminists to talk about how women writers revise and rewrite stories by men to include women in them. As Alicia Ostriker claims:

Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be revisionist: that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thirst of the individual poet but ultimately making cultural change possible. (Ostriker, 1982, p. 72)

Even though his motives do not serve for a feministic purpose, Gaiman rewrites the mythologies of ancient gods and creates simulacra to show the incompatibility of these gods and the American culture they have to survive in. By turning the glorious gods of mythologies once dominating the belief system of human beings into average residents of America, Gaiman transforms them into a *shadow*, a simulacrum, or a replica of what they used to represent before. To use the French theorist Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum, these characters as copies have replaced the original and have become the hyperreal in the frame of the novel. The aim of this thesis is to discuss *American Gods* as a rewriting of various mythological stories through Baudrillard's theory to display how unfeasible a goal it is for ancient gods of the old mythologies to exist in the twenty-first century, especially in America, unless they conform to the values of America and reinvent themselves whenever America demands so. In order to understand the transformation of these ancient gods, I will approach the topic by revealing the narratives of certain characters in the novel such as Wednesday, Shadow, and Low Key by juxtaposing the narratives of the gods they represent in the Norse pantheon and new gods like Television, Technology Boy, and Media.

Since the term simulacrum originates back to Plato, before discussing Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum, I will briefly analyze Plato's philosophy reflected in *The Republic*, in which Plato uses Socrates's dialectic method to discuss various topics such as the definition of justice, the structure of a state, and the qualities of a just man with other Athenians. In Book VII, Plato illustrates the effects of education on the soul with the allegory of the Cave. Socrates starts describing a cave in which the dwellers, chained to their seats can only see what is in front of

them through the light that is provided by a fire above and behind them. At the back, there is also a higher ground on which a path lies where some people carry artifacts and the dwellers of the cave can only see the shadows of these objects. (514a-c) In other words, the dwellers are only exposed to the shadows of the artifacts in the cave, believing that what they see or hear is the reality. “All in all, . . . the shadows of artefacts would constitute the only reality people in this situation would recognize.” (515c1-3)

Socrates offers a different scenario in which one of the dwellers is released from his captivity. With this newfound freedom, he is able to look towards the light above him, at first failing to see the real things because the sunlight would burn his eyes and he would refuse to believe that this is the actual truth. However, after a certain period of adjustment he would be “able to see the sun, not images of it in the water or some alien place, but the sun itself, in its own place, and be able to study it.” (516b3-5) After such an enlightening experience, it is proposed by Socrates that this person might want to go back to the cave so that he can share this newly-acquired wisdom with fellow dwellers of the cave; yet, going back into the cave would cost him his sight again, resulting in agony, and would be interpreted by other dwellers as a futile experience. For Socrates, this journey to the light is an upward journey of the soul from the visible realm, which in this case happens to be the cave, to the intelligible realm, where truth and understanding exist. Therefore, Socrates claims “education isn’t what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes.” (518b5-6) Education, according to Socrates, assumes that sight is already there, but not directed to the right way; it is, then, education, which would redirect sight appropriately. (518d3-7) Shadow’s journey in Neil Gaiman’s novel can be regarded partly as his education about finding out his roots or his past and how his identity is a reflection of another figure, Mr. Wednesday, the copy of Odin the once almighty god of the Norse pantheon.

In Book X, Plato, through the dialogue of Socrates, discusses mimesis, art as imitation of reality. Poetry, according to Socrates, is a device that fails to represent truth and reality because it only reflects things as they appear, but not as they really are. Even though he holds Homer in high regard, Socrates believes that poetry’s representational quality makes it unreliable and false. He gives the example of carrying a mirror so that anyone can have the talent to create things; yet that would

only be creating appearances, not the real things. (596c1-6) He, then moves on to a remarkable ‘trinity’, comprised of God, a joiner, and, a painter; all of whom create beds, only one of which is real. The bed created by God is apparently the real one, while the ones created by the other two agents are merely manufactured or represented. As a result, the same disparity counts for the works of a playwright or a poet as their works are two degrees removed from the reality. (598 a-c) He believes that since poets, Homer included, are “representers of images of goodness . . . and have no contact with the truth” (599e), they are deceivers misleading people into making wrong judgments. Therefore, art should be banned from the republic.

Jean Baudrillard’s theory of “simulacrum”, based on the replacement of the real with a copy, emphasizes a similar notion that is stated in the Platonic idea of poetry being a “copy” of reality. Baudrillard, however, focuses on the idea that the copy has now replaced the real. In his work *Simulacra and Simulation*, he asserts, “Never again will the real have the chance to produce itself.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 2) As a result, a hyperreal world based on the copies is created. In such a world, it is an unattainable goal to seek the “real” since there is no “real” in the conventional sense, but the hyperreal. He states: “Nothing resembles itself, and holographic reproduction, like all fantasies of the exact synthesis or resurrection of the real . . . is already hyperreal. It thus never has reproductive value, but always already simulation value.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 108)

The characters in *American Gods*, thus, are comprised of values related to simulation due to their hyperreal nature. What Baudrillard perceives about the true nature of hyperreality resonates with the characters – especially with the old gods of European origin – in *American Gods* perfectly. As Baudrillard declares in contemporary societies, people living in an incomprehensible world are surrounded by copies lacking originality. He says:

We are simulators, we are simulacra (not in the classical sense of “appearance”), we are concave mirrors radiated by the social, a radiation without a light source, power without origin, without distance, and it is in this tactical universe of the simulacrum that one will need to fight – without hope, hope is a weak value, but in defiance and fascination. (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 152)

This is the hyperreal universe in which the simulacrum has no reference to the original. As Baudrillard claims, it is the “era of simulacra and of simulation, in which there is no longer a god to recognize his own, no longer a last judgment to separate the false from the true, the real from its artificial resurrection.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 6) It is this very era in which the characters of *American Gods* try to survive. For instance, the antagonist (or the anti-hero) of the novel, Mr. Wednesday, one can say he no longer represents the heroic characteristics of Odin, but is transferred into a trickster, a con-artist, who deceives people to get by and who manipulates both Shadow and the other old gods into rising against the new ones. His desire to be resurrected as the glorious all-father he once used to be, which turns out to be unattainable in the new land.

America is apathetic towards Mr. Wednesday’s needs. She already has replaced real gods with new ones because this new land has responded to Baudrillard’s question:

But what if God himself can be simulated, that is to say can be reduced to the signs that constitute faith? Then the whole system becomes weightless, it is no longer itself anything but a giant simulacrum – not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference. (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 5-6)

America exemplifies Baudrillard’s theory due to the fact that it itself is a simulacrum of all that has melted in its multi-cultural existence. Based on what all the immigrants brought to her, America has molded her own system of values and culture by creating her own hyperreality. As long as an entity complies with the identity of America, it has a chance to survive. As Baudrillard suggests:

The form that dominates the American West, and doubtless all of American culture, is a seismic form: a fractal, interstitial culture, born of a rift with the Old World, a tactile, fragile, mobile, superficial culture – you have to follow for its own rules to grasp how it works: seismic shifting, soft technologies. (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 11)

Complying with the rules and integrating with the American culture, comprised of a simulacrum, is vital to one’s existence. According to Baudrillard, Disneyland is a

perfect example to understand simulacra as it reflects “the miniaturized pleasures of real America, . . . its constraints and its joys” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 12). The masses are drawn to Disneyland because the American way of life and values are presented in a microcosmos there. Another objective of Disneyland revealed by Baudrillard would be to hide the fact that Disneyland is in fact, America:

Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, whereas all of Los Angeles and the America that surrounds it are no longer real, but belong to the hyperreal order and to the order of simulation. It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real . . . (Baudrillard, 1981, pp. 12-13)

Disneyland is one giant simulacrum, creating the illusion that the real world cannot cross the boundaries of Disneyland and people can enjoy themselves, but once outside, there is reality. That is, it manipulates people into believing that America is real. From Baudrillard’s perspective, Disneyland is “a space of the regeneration of the imaginary as waste-treatment plants are elsewhere, and even here.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 13) That is exactly what America does. It obliterates faculties, replacing them with recycling institutes, where people, who are robbed of their genuine capacities by the values of America, are reintroduced to these capacities through America’s institutions. People are provided with services they were once able to perform on their own. As Baudrillard states: “People no longer look at each other, but there are institutes for that. They no longer touch each other, but there is contactotherapy . . . Everywhere one recycles lost faculties . . . (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 13) Such recycling process is indeed a part of consumerism. Therefore, old gods are eradicated so that they can be recycled in the form and shape America determines.

Mr. Wednesday – along with other gods in Gaiman’s novel from diverse mythical and cultural origins patched on to the texture of America - is nothing, but that “giant simulacrum.” He is also attempting to recycle his lost faculties; yet, Wednesday seems to be oblivious to the fact that he needs to be a simulacrum, but, not a mere copy, hence, is his failure to survive in America.

The unlikelihood of survival for the old, mythological gods in the new land also stems from the drastic disparity between the values represented by the old gods and the values of America. Baudrillard in his *America* describes this country as:

. . . the original version of modernity. We are the dubbed or subtitled version. America ducks the question of origins; it cultivates no origin or mythical authenticity; it has no past and no founding truth. Having known no primitive accumulation of time, it lives in a perpetual present. Having seen no slow, centuries-long accumulation a principle of truth, it lives in perpetual simulation, in a perpetual present of signs. It has no ancestral territory. (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 82)

As Baudrillard puts it, with no foundation or past, America belongs to an ever-present, lacking the ancestral base required to accumulate truth; it can only simulate it. (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 82) That is why, Mr. Wednesday cannot accomplish his plans in America. He belongs to the old land with a past whereas America has never belonged to any sort of past, not even the past of the real owners of the land, the Native Americans. As Baudrillard asserts: “History is a strong myth, perhaps along with the unconscious, the last great myth. It is a myth that at once subtended the possibility of an “objective” enchainment of events and causes and the possibility of a narrative enchainment of discourse.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 47) America does not need that kind of a myth because as Baudrillard contends it is the home of modernity. In fact, he claims being the home of modernity is the only original thing about America. (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 87)

The consumerist aspect of American culture is another factor in the incompatibility of America and the old gods. According to Baudrillard, an average American’s life is determined by the set of goods and services s/he has or gets: “it is an ideal minimum of a statistical kind, a standard model of middle-class life.” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 70) Baudrillard uses an example of a TV show to demonstrate how middle-class standards are imposed by the media as a goal to be attained.. *The Louds*, a TV show in the Seventies depicted the American way of life and values reflected in this model or idea. The Louds live in a house in California, with their five children and three garages. Their social and professional status is assured. These are the values esteemed by the American society. As Baudrillard states: “Just as medieval society was balanced on God and the Devil, so ours is balanced on consumption and its denunciation.” (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 196) This model of consumption relies on the destruction of its objects, meaning all goods and services need to be consumed and

destroyed and gods are not exempt from this as they are regarded as some sort of a service that can be consumed as well.

Mr. Wednesday fails to see that aspect of America. He is wrapped up in the illusion that once he can get all gods in a war, the glorious days of Odin will be his. Nevertheless, he undermines the fact that it is an unattainable goal to become Odin and rewrite Odin's history the same way it was written. Odin has already been consumed. Therefore, Wednesday can either be a simulacrum or perish as a copy.

The new land has become a vast simulacrum of everything the European past represented because of its first European settlers; therefore, in such a place, Mr. Wednesday can only be an exile unless he becomes a simulacrum. Baudrillard claims that it is impossible for Europeans to adapt to America, saying: "We do not have either the spirit or the audacity for what might be called the zero degree of culture, the power of uncultured. It is no good our trying more or less to adapt, their vision of the world will always be beyond our grasp." (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 85) It is perhaps this very reflection that makes Mr. Wednesday and other European gods and mythological figures misfits in American culture. They cannot integrate into American culture as themselves; they also fail to become true simulacrums, becoming a copy of the gods whereas Shadow accomplishes this goal by rejecting to become a copy of Baldur, the son of Odin and the most beloved gods in the Norse pantheon, on whom I will elaborate in detail in Chapter 2.

Roland Barthes in his work *Mythologies* asserts that "Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things." (Barthes, 1991, p. 108) America, devoid of such a historical foundation cannot sustain old myths, even the copies of them. For America, the image of gods does not represent a "profound reality." As Baudrillard puts it, "it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum." (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 6) This is the setting of *American Gods*, in which the antagonist Mr. Wednesday, by manipulating the protagonist of the novel Shadow, attempts to achieve his utopia. Yet, he cannot revive his mythology in this land: "From the day when the eccentric modernity was born in all its glory on the other side of the Atlantic, Europe began to disappear. The myths migrated. Today, all the myths of modernity are American." (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 88) As a result, the new land is indifferent towards aspirations such as Mr.

Wednesday's, not because it deliberately does so, but because its nature is purely made up of simulacrum, which in consequence allows only new gods to exist that are in tune with the texture and the culture of this new land, while discarding old gods who fail to become simulacra. In the end, Shadow becomes the only simulacrum, who chooses to write his own story rather than relive the myth of Baldur, which has already been written.

In Chapter 2, I will talk about how Wednesday and Low Key fail to become simulacra of Norse gods Odin and Loki respectively, while Shadow accomplishes to be the simulacrum of Baldur within the framework of Baudrillard's simulacrum theory. Apart from these main characters, I will mention the stories of few mythological figures from the old land, such as Czernobog, god of death in Slavic mythology, Bilquis, queen of Sheba in the Bible and Quran, Mr. Ibis, god of wisdom in Egyptian mythology, and Mr. Jacquel, god of death in Egyptian mythology, who contribute to the discussion on the main characters. I will then, deal with Baudrillard's reflections on America as a new land and culture with respect to new gods, Television, Technology Boy, and Media. The concluding chapter will dwell more on America as a simulacrum as well as its geography and its consumerist values.

CHAPTER II

OLD GODS AND NEW GODS

In this chapter, I will first analyze the characters, who are the simulacra of mythological gods, namely Mr. Wednesday, Shadow Moon, Low Key Lylesmith, Mr. Ibis, Mr. Jacquel, and Czernobog. Then, I will talk about new gods, Television, Technology Boy, and Media in relation to the setting America in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. In this discussion on the characters in the novel, Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum and his analysis of American society will be employed due to the fact that Baudrillard's philosophy will explain the states of the characters.

2.1. OLD GODS

Gaiman's rewritten version of Odin, Mr. Wednesday – one of many names of Odin as he is also known as Wodan, as well as Wednesday, the third day of the week (Fee, 2001, p. 20) – is an extension of a Nordic myth. The original Odin is an awe-inspiring god, the host of Valhalla, which is claimed to be the final destination of hundreds of dead warriors, known as *einherjar*. They come to this prodigious hall with golden shielded roofs and hundreds of doors to enjoy drinking mead and fight for an everlasting life.

Apart from being the host of Valhalla, Odin has multiple functions as stated in *Prose Edda*, a compilation of Scandinavian myths recorded in the thirteenth century. Among many of his assets, Odin is the lord of the warriors slain during battles, he talks to the dead, seeks and attains knowledge no matter how challenging and impossible it seems to do so. In fact, unlike the immortal and undefeatable Olympian gods, the Norse gods had to live in Asgard - the realm where the Norse pantheon exists - under the threat of their archenemies, the Giants, who had already been promised victory over gods. As a result, this absolute knowledge of a certain defeat made their hearts heavy with gloom. Yet, Odin with heroic deeds in his heart sought wisdom that would help him save his world. One of the myths regarding this

aspect of Odin reveals how he sacrificed his right eye in return for wisdom, which is essential to his intention. He finds out after an encounter with a giant that if he is to get a draught from Mimir's Well, – well of wisdom - he needs to give his right eye. Despite this painful price he needs to pay, he drinks from the well and, therefore, plucks his right eye as he has pledged to do so.

Terrible was the pain that Odin All-Father endured. But he made no groan nor moan. He bowed his head and put his cloak before his face, as Mimir took the eye and let it sink deep, deep into the water of the Well of Wisdom. And there the Eye of Odin stayed, shining up through the water, a sign to all who came to that place of the price that the Father of the Gods had paid for his wisdom. (Colum, 2002, p. 81)

Through this self-punishment, Odin understands why the world needs to undergo destruction and solemnly accepts this ending for the world. He does not regret losing his eye in return for such critical news. In another instance, he hangs on *Yggdrasil*, the tree of life, which is said to be holding the universe together, for nine days as self-sacrifice to attain the knowledge of the runes that would give him the power of the nine worlds. (Colum, 2002, p. 40) Edith Hamilton refers to this story quoting from Odin's words:

Nine whole nights on a wind-rocked tree,
Wounded with a spear.
I was offered to Odin, myself to myself,
On that tree of which no man knows.
(Hamilton, 1942, p. 454)

Odin, indeed is willing to take extreme actions so that he can attain knowledge, which would bring him wisdom.

Along with wisdom, Odin is also associated with old age. The all-father gave men *ond*, which is breath, life, and spirit:

He will live throughout all ages, ruling his whole kingdom and governing all things great and small. He fashioned the earth and the sky and all that is in them . . . But the greatest is . . . he created man and gave him the spirit which shall live and never perish . . .”(Sturluson qtd. in Patton, 2009, pp. 213-14).

Although the lord of the warriors is the source of life, paradoxically, “he is also the god who sometimes requires their blood in sacrifice.” (Patton, 2009, p. 214) Odin, in short, is the almighty god with heroic deeds but his power will not suffice to alter his inevitable defeat by the Giants.

The hyperreal version or the simulacrum of Odin, Mr. Wednesday in Gaiman’s work, faces a similar, yet also a quite different challenge from Odin’s. Despite his yearning to carry on Odin’s narrative of perseverance, sacrifice, and numerous other deeds that gods are supposed to fulfill, Wednesday has lost his almighty status to the current generations of gods in America as a character with a forgotten historical background. It is this threat and his intense desire for survival that drives him to plot against other gods and attempt to revive his myth in the novel. Yet, he is doomed to failure as Baudrillard mentions the impossibility of producing the real in the postmodern world. Wednesday fails to become the simulacrum, ignoring the fact that there is no probability of reliving the life of Odin. In that sense, Wednesday’s rejection to create his own mythology in a land that does not need to hear the same ancient stories over and over leads to his failure.

As told in the second narrative of *American Gods*, Odin migrated in the faiths of the Norsemen to America when at the end of a harsh journey arrived at their destination, today’s Newfoundland in America in 813 AD as expressed in the novel:

It was more than a hundred years before Leif the Fortunate, son of Erik the Red, rediscovered that land, which he would call Vineland. His gods were already waiting for him when he arrived: Tyr, one-handed, and gray Odin gallows-god, and Thor of the thunders. They were there. They were waiting. (Gaiman, 2001, p.78)

Yet, in the course of the novel, Odin failed to maintain his legacy. Mr. Wednesday emerged as the simulacrum of the all-father Odin and his aspiration to preserve the saga of Odin has failed both because he is not Odin, and the new land disposes herself of ancient gods, replacing them with the new ones.

Wednesday is first introduced to the readers on the plane, which is about to take Shadow home to Eagleton, where he is to attend his wife’s funeral. He is in an expensive suit, wearing a Rolex, typical indicators of wealth and status in the contemporary world, but not of godly qualities. Despite Wednesday’s Americanized appearance, certain clues to his real identity is revealed. He has reddish-gray hair and

a grayish-red beard with pale grey eyes. (Gaiman, 2001, pp. 22-23) Shadow notices that one of his eyes is different from the other, insinuating Odin's sacrifice of his eye in exchange of wisdom. Wednesday is also wearing a tiepin on which there is a "tree, worked in silver: trunk, branches, and deep roots" (Gaiman, 2001, p.23), another hint to his identity as the tree is a reference to the tree of life, Ygrdrasil on which Odin sacrificed himself. This ritual is repeated by Shadow later in the novel in order to resurrect Wednesday, who unbeknownst to Shadow and other ancient gods fakes his death so that he can manipulate them into fighting with the new gods in America. Wednesday tries to convince Shadow to work for him as a driver and an errand boy, indicating that there is nothing expecting him at home. Shadow, disturbed by the existence of this man, who seems to know a lot about him, asks the man who he is and receives a reply, which also exposes another quality of Odin: his love of knowledge and wisdom. To Shadow, Wednesday says "Information and knowledge: these are the currencies that have never gone out of style." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 25) As Wednesday underlines even though the values of societies have changed throughout the centuries, the desire for information has remained the same.

Gaiman's Odin, Mr. Wednesday is a manipulative con-man, a hybrid of the values America and his mythical origin represents. Throughout the novel, he tries to realize his dream of destroying the new gods Technology Boy, Media, and Television – who are the gods that have replaced the Giants - by implementing his well-thought plan to cause chaos and fear among old gods about their well-being so that they can rise against the new gods and take their places in the battle. He needs blood and death to feel alive and to be remembered. This is so vital for him that he does not hesitate to be on the same team with Loki – Odin's foster brother and a ruthless god who commits evil deeds towards both humans and gods (Mortensen, 1913. P. 146) - or kill his son Shadow's wife so that Shadow is left with no purpose in life other than taking part in Wednesday's scheme.

Wednesday, nonetheless, fails to create his own reality and become a simulacrum despite the existence of bits and pieces of Odin, such as his language that would only resonate with the American way of life and its core values. Wednesday is like a salesman, pitching for his product in the way he tries to persuade Shadow into working for him. He says: "There may be a little risk, of course, but if you survive you can have whatever your heart desires. You could be the next King of America."

(Gaiman, 2001, p. 25) Wednesday's style is the reflection of the American dream, which enhances the illusion that only in America can people win against all odds. As Baudrillard claims: "It is this culture, which, the world over, fascinates those very people who suffer most at its hands, and it does so through the deep, insane conviction that it has made all their dreams come true." (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 83) Wednesday is not exempt from this suffering Baudrillard points out as he is in a constant state of resentment and frustration because the new gods will replace him even though he tries to comply with American values.

What Wednesday reveals about himself so openly is an example of this compromise. To Shadow's question about who Wednesday is and whether he is a con-artist or not, Wednesday answers: "I suppose I am. Among other things." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 51) He does not sound offended by the affiliation Shadow makes about his profession. As mentioned before, Odin the all-father is gifted in many ways, but being a con-artist is one attained in the new world in order to survive in this hostile environment, where the new gods want to annihilate him.

On the day the gods meet at *The House on the Rock*, - a roadside attraction in Wisconsin - Wednesday gives a moving speech about how they are in danger of becoming extinct and how he feels about his current state. He states:

. . . The land is vast. Soon enough, our people abandoned us, remembered us only as creatures of the old land, as things that had not come with them to the new. Our true believers passed on, or stopped believing, and we were left, lost and scared and dispossessed, to get by on what little smidgens of worship or belief we could find. And to get by as best as we could. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 150)

Wednesday is frustrated, full of resentment and fear. He resents the fact that his people, mankind, stopped believing in him once they started living in America. Wednesday's frustration could be explained by Baudrillard's reflection on this country. He suggests, ". . . America was created in the hope of escaping from history, of building a utopia sheltered from history, and that it has in part succeeded in that project." (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 87) American utopia is incompatible with Wednesday's. Even the battlefield Rock City, chosen for the war between the old and new gods, reflects this project mentioned by Baudrillard because of the fact that Rock City is detached from history and utopic in its looks. Even people who visit this

roadside attraction seem to be disconnected from history. At Rock City, there are “people who looked like movie stars, . . . and a number of people who looked most of all like the idea of a person and nothing like the reality.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 536)

Wednesday is discontent with his hyperreal existence. He aims to revive Odin’s mythology, yet other gods or rather, the idea of a god replace him in a mechanistic age in America, where Wednesday’s identity fails to adapt to its values. As Baudrillard claims, “America has no identity problem. In the future, power will belong to those peoples with no origins and no authenticity who know how to exploit the situation to the full.” (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 82) The new gods are better candidates to serve this purpose as Wednesday does not fit into this description of the type of people to rule the land. He desires to stick to his origin, Odin rather than becoming his simulacrum. Even his son Shadow acknowledges this fact in his speech to stop gods fighting:

There was a god who came here from a far land, and whose power and influence waned as belief in him faded. He was a god who took his power from sacrifice, and from death, and especially from war. He would have deaths of those who fell in war dedicated to him – whole battlefields which, in the Old country, gave him power and sustenance. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 583)

Wednesday wishes to be a god with origin and history, dependent on the belief and sacrifice of his subjects, yet in America, people prefer to sacrifice themselves to other gods that have neither an origin nor history, gods about whom I will talk about later in this chapter.

Wednesday is a cast-off in America and even though how he arrived in America is depicted in the novel, what happens to him after he disappears into a shadow as a result of Shadow’s confrontation with him towards the end of the novel is ambiguous. Wednesday’s scheme with Loki is revealed through the efforts of Shadow’s dead wife Laura, as a result of which, Wednesday talks about why he did what he did and then disappears. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 579)

The next time he appears as Odin/Wednesday is in Iceland, - a deliberate choice made by Gaiman since Iceland is the home of the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda, the manuscripts of Norse mythology. Also, Iceland is the place, where Gaiman

decided to write a novel about America, which turned out to be *American Gods*². Shadow sees an old man in a cloak and an eye patch, looking like a hippie. He utters some Icelandic words, meaning: “How is it going? Remember me?” to which Shadow replies he does not know any Icelandic and can only speak English, stating he is American. The old man then switches to English, talking about America:

My people went from here to America long time ago. They went there, and then they returned to Iceland. They said it was a good place for men, but a bad place for gods. And without their gods they felt too . . . alone.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 633)

It seems that Wednesday has vanished only to be transformed into the original version of himself in Iceland. When Shadow claims that he must be Wednesday, the old man disagrees: “He was me, yes. But I am not him.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 634) He is the original Odin and Wednesday is the failed simulacrum. What Baudrillard suggests about the ‘double’ seems to describe Wednesday’s situation accurately:

an imaginary figure, which, just like the soul, the shadow, the mirror image, haunts the subject like the other, which makes it so that the subject is simultaneously itself and never resembles itself again, which haunts the subject like a subtle and always averted death. (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 95)

In the end, Wednesday fails to survive without being co-existent with Odin, proving that he also fails to fit in the definition of the hyperreal. He is the shadow of Odin and cannot live independent of him and Shadow is the son of this god.

Shadow Moon, the protagonist of the novel, is Baldur’s³ simulacrum, the precious son of Odin in Norse mythology. Brian Branston summarizes the main narratives of Baldur’s life as:

(1) a beautiful young man loved by all and especially his goddess mother Frig [sic], (2) his impending death, of which he gets warning by dreams, is somehow connected with the Doom of Gods, (3) in spite of an appeal to and promises from all Nature, the young man suffers a bloody wound and dies, (4) he goes down into the Underworld and stays in the power of Hel its Queen, and (5) the

² See Gaiman’s essay “All Books Have Genders” on

http://www.neilgaiman.com/p/Cool_Stuff/Essays/Essays_By_Neil/All_Books_Have_Genders

³ The spelling of the name *Baldur* has variations depending on the source in which it appears such as *Balder* or *Baldr*. I will use *Baldur* in my thesis.

success of a further appeal to all Nature to weep for his return is thwarted by one evil creature's refusal. (Branston, 1957, p. 154)

In the Norse pantheon Baldur is deemed as the best god and is held in the highest regards of everyone because he is considered to be a radiant sky god thanks to his description as "the god of light, beauty, brightness, and wisdom." (Dixon-Kennedy, 1997, p. 40) Karl Mortensen also mentions that Baldur's wisdom is reflected on his bright face and is also valued for his eloquence and grace. (Mortensen, 1913, p. 55)

Baldur's misfortune befalls as a result of a prophecy that is revealed to him in his dreams despite the efforts made by Odin and Frigga to prevent this tragedy. Baldur starts to see in his dreams some dark shapes and monstrous forms that try to take out the light in him. When he shares his dreams with other gods, Odin decides to travel to Niflheim, the underworld, to find out about the fate of his beloved son. Odin upon arriving Hel's Hall, the place where the queen of the underworld resides, notices that the place has been ornamented with gold, the reason of which he thinks might be linked to Baldur. Upon Odin's inquiry with Vala the prophetess, he finds out that: "The shining mead . . . is brewed for Balder . . . For all their glory, the gods will be filled with despair." (Crossley-Holland, 1980, p. 148) She also reveals that Baldur's blind twin brother Hodur, will be the one to kill Baldur by a fatal branch.

Odin returns to Asgard with this news and shares it with his wife Frigga, who comes up with a solution to prevent their lovely son's death. Frigga makes all things living and non-living take an oath not to harm Baldur. After this act, Baldur's immunity to all sorts of attacks becomes a kind of amusement for gods in Asgard, throwing things at Baldur and seeing him get away unharmed. However, Loki feels tremendously irritated by this game: ". . . it sickened him to see that Balder was immune from every kind of attack. This grudge grew in him day by day and began to consume him." (Crossley-Holland, 1980, p. 151) Loki, by disguising himself as an old woman, tricks Frigga into telling him the reason why Baldur can get away from all sorts of attacks unharmed. When he finds out that Frigga has not taken an oath from mistletoe, Loki makes Hodur throw a branch of mistletoe at his brother. Hodur feels happy that he has also had the opportunity to participate in this game of throwing things at Baldur. "But to his dismay, instead of the loud laughter which he expected, a shuddering cry of horror fell upon his ear, for Balder the beautiful had fallen to the ground, pierced by the fatal mistletoe." (Guerber, 1994, p. 204) Baldur

dies and further efforts to bring him back to life fail as Loki once again intervenes, about which I will be talking in detail in the discussion on Low Key in this chapter.

Shadow Moon, the hyperreal Baldur, displays various disparities with Baldur the Norse mythology is familiar with. Physically, Shadow, indeed, seems like Baldur's shadow. References about Shadow's appearance indicate that he is handsome; yet, unlike fair and blond Baldur, Shadow has dark skin, dark eyes, and dark hair. Also, whereas Baldur leads a content life with his family and friends in Asgard until his death, Shadow lacks substantial information about his background. Until his true identity is unraveled in the middle of the novel, the reader only knows that he was born in Norway to a mother working at embassies around Europe. Shadow feels out of place and restless as a consequence of his countless travels with his mother since his childhood. As the narrator claims, Shadow and his mother "never spent long enough in any place for Shadow to make friends, to feel at home, to relax." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 225) Hence, Shadow's status as a drifter could be explained by what Baudrillard asserts in *Simulacra and Simulation* as lacking a "visible past, a visible continuum, a visible myth of origin, which reassures us about our end." (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 10)

As a child, unlike Baldur, who is everyone's favorite god in Asgard, Shadow was small, unpopular, frequently made fun of and bullied. The narrator describes Shadow's adolescence saying:

In the spring of his thirteenth year the local kids had been picking on him, goading him into fights they knew they could not fail to win and after which Shadow would run, angry and often weeping, to the boys' room to wash the mud or the blood from his face before anyone could see it. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 225)

Whereas Shadow had to endure a tormenting childhood, Baldur was cherished and loved by everyone, especially by his mother Frigga and his father Odin, who tried everything they could in their power to protect their son from death.

Unlike Odin who loved Baldur dearly, Wednesday has never worried about Shadow, until making him a key person in his plan to trick both new and old gods into creating chaos and feeding on it as was mentioned before. Shadow does not find out about the true identity of his father until he sees in a dream how a stranger whom Shadow instantly recognizes as Wednesday seduces his mother at a dance hall.

Wednesday and Shadow's mother dance and flirt and they leave the dance hall together. "Shadow buried his head in his hands, and did not follow them, unable or unwilling to witness his own conception." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 517) That is how Shadow realizes that he is the son of a god, which also makes him a god or at least a demi-god. Although this fact is revealed to Shadow in his dream instead of being informed in real life, he knows this is the truth about his origin because Shadow like Baldur has the supernatural power of seeing dreams that foretell future events. I will talk about this gift later in the chapter.

Even Shadow's name alludes to being a simulacrum: Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines shadow as "a reflected image", "an imitation of something: copy", and "phantom". When one of the old gods, Easter asks Shadow about the story of his name, Shadow replies "I never knew what to say to the other kids, so I'd just find adults and follow them around, not saying anything. I just needed the company I guess, I was a small kid." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 330) These words imply that he was like a shadow in the presence of other people. Shadow is not like Baldur in the sense that he has never been in the spotlight since he was a small child. This behavior pattern has penetrated into his character in his mature years as he kept his quiet even in the company of his beloved wife Laura. In one of his encounters with Laura, who comes back from death by a magic coin Shadow put in her coffin, she tells him "You're not dead . . . But I'm not sure that you're alive either." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 397) As Laura describes him, he is "like this big, solid, man-shaped hole in the world." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 396) She tells Shadow that at least Robbie, who was mentioned in the introduction chapter, was somebody because he wanted things and was able to fill up space; yet, Shadow is not like that, implying that he is barely alive. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 396) Shadow seems to be lacking the assertiveness that Laura describes in Robbie. Yet, Shadow is strong enough in character to volunteer for Wednesday's vigil. At least, he is selfless in his actions and performs acts, which require courage.

During his ordeal on the tree of life for three days, which he does as a vigil for Wednesday's death, when the storm hits, Shadow feels an intense joy while still hanging on the tree:

A strange joy rose within Shadow, then, and he started laughing, as the rain washed his naked skin and the lightning flashed and thunder rumbled so loudly that he could barely hear himself. He

laughed and exulted. He was alive. He had never felt like this. Ever. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 499)

Through his suffering on the tree, Shadow dies and is resurrected as someone who feels alive for the first time. Similarly, once Baldur dies, it is foretold that he will come back to rule again after Ragnarok, the doom of Asgard. (Dixon-Kennedy, 1997, p. 41) Both Baldur and Shadow are resurrected figures, implying the birth of a new world order, where the old gods do not have a place, the doom which is what neither Odin in the original myth, nor his failed simulacrum Wednesday could prevent.

Shadow, as mentioned before, is also similar to Baldur in his intuitive nature. Both Baldur and Shadow see dreams, in which future catastrophic or dramatic events are revealed to them. Baldur's dream about his doomed fate is regarded as the beginning of Ragnarok and Shadow sees similar dreams, which foretell that a dramatic change in the order of things is expected. On the plane back home for his wife's funeral, Shadow falls asleep and sees his first revelatory dream in which a man with a buffalo head, in reply to Shadow's question about where he is, answers: "In the Earth and under the Earth . . . You are where the forgotten wait." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 19) By forgotten, the Buffalo Man implies the old gods waiting to be revived with the help of Shadow. Shadow does help Wednesday in his quest to become the almighty Odin to the degree of sacrificing himself as a vigil to Wednesday; yet, Shadow, unlike other characters in the novel such as Wednesday and Low Key, does not care for being a god himself or letting anyone be sacrificed for that purpose. In fact, Shadow, in his deeds is similar to Baldur, whose palace is the place where no foul things happen and only healing takes place. (Colum, 2002, p.71) He prevents the war which would help Wednesday and Low Key become stronger in the expense of all other gods. When gods, old and new, gather in the battlefield, Shadow gives a speech, in which he reveals the scheme of Wednesday and Low Key with an introduction that reflects what it means to be a god in America:

This is a bad land for Gods . . . The old gods are ignored. The new ones are as quickly taken up as they are abandoned, cast aside for the next big thing. Either you've been forgotten, or you're scared you're going to be rendered obsolete, or maybe you're just getting tired of existing on the whim of people. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 582)

Everyone agrees with Shadow, which also reveals his unifying power just like Baldur unifies all gods in their love for him. Shadow takes this gift one step further by saving the lives of both old and new gods.

Unlike the gods however, Shadow is content to lead the life of an ordinary man. He says, “I think I would rather be a man than a god. We don’t need anyone to believe in us. We just keep going anyhow.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 584) This final remark ends the war and everyone leaves the battlefield. Shadow goes back to Mr. Nancy, a trickster and the god of all knowledge of stories in African mythology, and then to Chicago to meet Czernobog and Zyoryana sisters to say farewell to them. He, then goes back to Lakeside, where he finds out that Hinzelmännchen, a Kobold⁴ from German mythology, has been killing all the children missing and keeping them in his old klunker. Shadow’s selfless deeds and care for both people and gods make him a favorite person in Lakeside like Baldur.

The novel does not reveal what happens to each god after their disrupted battle, but recounts Shadow’s final experiences in Iceland like Wednesday. To some extent, Shadow tracks his origin back to its roots. In Iceland, Shadow contemplates about the concept of home as he gazes at Reykjavik:

And one day he would have to make a home to go back to. He wondered whether home was a thing that happened to a place after a while, or if it was something that you found in the end if you simply walked and waited and willed it long enough. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 633)

As a perfect simulacrum of the Norse god, Shadow does not think he belongs to Iceland. In fact, he is not even familiar with the notion of home; thus, is still in search of one.

In Neil Gaiman’s short story “The Monarch of the Glen” (2006) Shadow appears two years after the events that take place in *American Gods*, again as a traveller, in the Scottish Highlands, where he finds himself in another mythological tale in which he has to fight Grendel and survive. Yet, it seems that he has not been able to run away from his unearthly kins. In one dream Shadow has in the story, Thor, calling Shadow with the name Baldur asks him to set them free. “You are of

⁴ Merriam Webster’s definition of a kobold is “an often mischievous domestic spirit of German folklore.”

our blood, Baldur. Set us free.” (Gaiman, 2006, p.322) Thor’s request indicates the fact that Shadow is the Norse gods’ connection to the modern world and they need Shadow to come back to life. However, Shadow, being the simulacrum of Baldur rejects this connection with Baldur: “And Shadow wanted to say that he was not theirs, was not anybody’s . . .” (Gaiman, 2006, p. 322) He is indeed not the Baldur the old mythology recognizes and loves as their own. He is the simulacrum and as Baudrillard suggests, the simulacrum has replaced the original. After his adventure with Grendel, Shadow decides to go back to Chicago, where his mother and Shadow lived for a while before his mother died.

Unlike other simulacra in the novel, Shadow can survive in America, and make the new land his home, which implies the fact that he is more of an expatriate than an immigrant like Neil Gaiman himself, who states in an interview at the end of *American Gods*, that he is not an immigrant, but an expatriate author living in America. (*An Interview with Neil Gaiman*, 2001, para. 3) Shadow, as the simulacrum of Baldur, is the only hyperreal character in the novel, who does not want to revive the Norse mythology in which he is to be the much beloved Baldur, the god of light. He is content to be an expatriate *shadow* in America. What Baudrillard suggests about the successive phases of the image is in harmony with Shadow’s situation: “It has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own simulacrum.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 6) Shadow is his own simulacrum. In fact, Shadow has written his own story as a simulacrum and become a hero. He fits into Joseph Campbell’s description of a hero:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow men. (Campbell, 1949, p. 23)

Shadow Moon stumbles upon a supernatural world of gods and gets through it without compromising his integrity, bringing some insight to both humans and gods. As a consequence, Shadow becomes a true hero and a perfect simulacrum by his constant transformation in the new land. And as Baudrillard claims simulacrum is the real thing. Gaiman’s remarks about Shadow being an unfinished character because there will be a sequel to *American Gods* (Rick Marshall, personal communications,

22 June, 2011) also supports this theory that Shadow is the simulacrum as his story resumes.

While Shadow successfully becomes a true simulacrum of Baldur by refusing to follow the original one's footsteps and rewrites his own story, another character in the novel who, like Mr. Wednesday, fails to fit in Baudrillard's definition of simulacrum is Low Key Lylesmith, the failed simulacrum of another ancient Norse mythological figure Loki⁵. Sources about the origin of Loki are diverse. One view states that he was "a minor fire god, one of the Aesir, but one of the most brilliant, devious and ambiguous of all immortals." (Dixon-Kennedy, 1997, p. 149) Loki was a handsome and mischievous god, who liked to play all kinds of tricks on other gods. Another source claims that Loki "originally belonged to a pre-Odinic race of deities, and was the son of the great giant Fornjotnr." (Guerber, 1994, p. 217) Loki, for some obscure reason, has sworn brotherhood to Odin and took his place among the Aesir. Despite the diverse narratives about Loki's origin, his characteristics do not display any disparities based on the sources. As Mortensen explains, Loki shows "many of Odin's noble qualities, but his temper is such that he is not capable of exercising them in the right way. He has sense and understanding like Odin, but they express themselves in bitter malice and fraudulent acts." (Mortensen, 1913, p.146) Loki's temper may be related to his passionate character. According to Gueber, "Loki played a prominent part in the creation of man, endowing him with the power of motion, and causing the blood to circulate freely through his veins, whereby he was inspired with passions." (Guerber, 1994, p. 216) Despite Loki's important role in the creation of man, his passion gradually becomes a destructive force as the "originator of deceit, and the backbiter of the Aesir." (Guerber, 1994, p. 216) Loki's worst act of backstabbing the gods in Asgard is his huge role in the death of Baldur due to his jealousy⁶. In fact, Loki is the one who finds a way to fulfill the prophesy of Vala about Baldur and kills him with a mistletoe through Hodur, Baldur's blind twin-brother, a tragedy which I mentioned in the discussion on Shadow.

Loki's role in Baldur's death extends to the point where he obstructs Frigga and Odin's actions to bring Baldur back from the dead. After Frigga sends her other

⁵ The meaning of Loki is ambiguous. It may be associated with Luka in old Norse, meaning "to close" or "to finish."

⁶ Edith Hamilton mentions Loki's grudge against Baldur in her book *Mythology* (1942). p. 456

son Hermod to make a deal with Hel to take Baldur back, Hel says that she can set Baldur free under the condition that all “in the nine worlds, dead and alive, weeps for Balder.” (Crossley-Holland, 1980, pp. 159-160) Everyone weeps, except for Loki who is disguised as a giantess named Thokk. As a result, Baldur cannot come back. Although other gods get angry at Loki, they do not react to his obstruction of Baldur coming back from the dead. Yet, they decide to punish Loki after he disrespects Thor’s wife Fig. Finally, Loki is strapped in a cavern, where a serpent is fastened directly above his head “so that its venom would fall, drop by drop, upon his upturned face.” (Guerber, 1994, p. 227) Loki endures this punishment until Ragnarok, the doom of Asgard, during which Heimdall and Loki simultaneously kill each other.

In *American Gods*, Low Key Lylesmith’s name resonates with Loki; yet, for quite some time neither Shadow nor the readers are aware of that fact, because Low Key keeps a low profile as his name suggests. Low Key always chooses “low key” characters to hide his true identity. He is introduced in the novel as Shadow’s cellmate, a “grifter from Minnesota.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 4) He has orange-blond hair and a scarred smile. He plots with Odin to kill Shadow’s wife Laura so that Shadow can have no distracting forces in pursuing Wednesday’s tasks and join Wednesday in his agenda to promote war between the old gods and the new ones. Yet, it turns out that, having teamed up with Mr. Wednesday, Low Key is scheming against all the new gods and manipulating Shadow for this purpose. Low Key and Shadow’s first encounter outside prison takes place in a motel where Shadow, Czernobog, and Mr. Nancy, two other mythological figures, meet with the new gods Technology Boy and Media, who deliver Mr. Wednesday’s dead body to Shadow and his company. On this occasion, Low Key, as a master of deceit like Loki, is disguised as Mr. World, the driver for the new gods. He admits being a good liar when Shadow confronts him. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 478)

During Low Key’s encounter with Shadow, Shadow asks Low Key why he did not walk out of prison by using his supernatural powers. Low Key explains the rules of being a god to Shadow:

You got to understand the god thing. It’s not magic . . . It’s about focus. It’s about being you, but the you that people believe in. It’s about being the concentrated, magnified, essence of you. It’s about

becoming thunder, or the power of a running horse, or wisdom.
(Gaiman, 2001, p. 479)

This definition of god resonates well with Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum due to the fact that both Wednesday and Low Key, in their essence, are Odin and Loki indeed. Yet, they fail to become the simulacra, only becoming copies of the originals, who want to adapt to the new land and remain as gods worshipped by people, which combined with the attitude of people towards gods as Loki puts it, adds to their failure to survive in America: "And then one day they forget about you, and they don't believe in you, and they don't sacrifice, and they don't care, and the next thing you know you're running a three card monte game on the corner of Broadway and 43rd." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 479) This is precisely what both Wednesday and Low Key are trying to avoid. They desire to be immortal, not temporal, by reviving the glorious mythology their original selves once created, which leads them to their own destruction because they cannot become true simulacra.

Even though Low Key appears to be more in tune with the new land than Wednesday, his seemingly indifferent attitude towards what has been happening between the old and the new gods is still a part of the scheme Wednesday and Low Key are pulling. Certainly, Low Key has no sentimental attachment to his pantheon similar to Loki. And after the fake murder of Mr. Wednesday, Low Key is indifferent to who dies or not. He claims, ". . . it's change or die, evolve or perish. I'm all for evolution – it's the old change or die game. He's dead. War's over." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 479) Yet, these are not Low Key's true feelings. He does want the old to win, but it does not happen. Low Key, in that aspect, is as much of a failure as Wednesday because their plan does not work and they both perish. Therefore, as the failed simulacrum of Loki, Low Key is unable to plot the death of Shadow unlike Loki, who does Baldr's.

Since Low Key is a failed simulacrum of Loki, he meets his end in America in the hands of Laura, Shadow's wife. Laura kills Low Key with the stick, which as Low Key suggests is "the symbol" of the weapon that killed Baldr. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 570) Because Low Key insists on repeating the old myth, he is ironically killed by the mistletoe stick. If Low Key had found it in himself to become the simulacrum rather than just be the copy, he might have had the chance to survive. In the end,

Low Key loses his battle to be the mischievous Loki again and ends up dead in the new land.

Apart from these major characters, there are many minor characters in *American Gods* who are simulacra of ancient gods. One of them is Mr. Ibis, the simulacrum of Thoth or Djehenty, an ancient god, who migrated to the new land long time ago. He is the Egyptian god of wisdom, the inventor of writing, and the patron of scribes. “Thoth, the ‘excellent of understanding’ observed and wrote down everything that happened and reported it to Ra every morning. Thoth . . . knew the past as well as the future.” (Pinch, 2002, p.210) His simulacrum Mr. Ibis now lives in Cairo, Mississippi with his partner Mr. Jacquel, another simulacrum of an Egyptian god, Anubis, who is the lord of the dead, commonly represented as a jackal. Gaiman chooses Cairo on purpose to imply the Egyptian lineage of these two characters. In fact, Gaiman explains the reason why he chose this town to be the home for the Egyptian gods in an interview. He describes the town as: “that has once been full of history and that history had now passed by . . . So what can you have in Cario? The Egyptian gods seemed so perfect for that. (Dornemann & Everding, personal communications, 2001) These two gods are now in the funeral business with Shadow. In fact, Mr. Ibis and Mr. Jacquel, as a favor to Mr. Wednesday, hide Shadow from the new gods that are in pursuit of him.

Mr. Ibis and Jacquel seem to have better adapted to the American society than most other characters, such as Wednesday and Low Key. Jacquel boldly summarizes their current situation, saying:

We’ll be out of business in a few years. We got savings put aside for the lean years . . . every year they just get leaner. Horus is crazy, spends all his time as a hawk . . . what kind of a life is that? . . . we’re in better shape than most of them. At least we’ve got a little belief to be going along with. (Gaiman, 2001, pp. 223-224)

Yet, they know they are bound to share the same doomed fate with the rest of the old gods, who are already forgotten or about to become obsolete in this new land. Jacquel reflects on their situation:

Fighting’s not going to change a damned thing, because we lost this particular battle when we came to this green land a hundred years ago or a thousand or ten thousand. We arrived and America just

didn't care we arrived. So we get bought out, or we press on, or we hit the road. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 224)

America fails to sustain old gods because it represents hyperreality. As Baudrillard claims "America is neither dream nor reality. It is the hyperreality . . . Everything here is real and pragmatic . . ." (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 28) There is no room for the old mythologies and gods. Hence, it allows new gods to replace the old ones, who cannot transform themselves into hyperreal ones. As a result, both Mr. Ibis and Jacquel are destined to disappear like Wednesday and Low Key.

Czernobog, the Slavic God of Death, starts as a copy, who is doomed to be obliterated in the novel; yet, transforms into a simulacrum in the course of the novel. Czernobog, also known as Chernobog is, as Mike Dixon-Kennedy claims, the "epitome and personification of evil, darkness, and death." (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 52) It is said of him that he usually appears in the hours of darkness and his brother, Belobog, the god of goodness, is his direct opposite. Unfortunately, as Neil Gaiman also states in an interview, there are not many sources about these ancient Slavic deities as the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church eradicated most of the sources and after them, Napoleon burned the remaining sources on his way to and from Moscow. ((R. Dornemann & K. Everding, personal communications, 2001)

In *American Gods*, Czernobog is introduced in Chicago after Shadow and Wednesday start traveling in the United States to gather allies for Wednesday's cause. He does not have an American name and uses the original name, which indicates that he is not a simulacrum, but only a copy. Despite being a copy at the beginning of the novel, Czernobog, taking part in Shadow's journey, comes to terms with his existence and does not yearn for his glorious days, which demonstrates that he has found a way to become a simulacrum and continue his remaining life at peace.

Czernobog lives in an apartment in Chicago with three mythological sisters, who watch for the constellation Ursa Minor that is under the threat of a chained dog wanting to break loose and eat the constellation.⁷ No one pays attention to Czernobog because he is a sick, old man. He is wrinkled and yellow due to years of

⁷ Information about these mythological sisters was given in the footnote of this thesis on page 5.

tobacco use. When Wednesday asks him how he is doing, Czernobog replies: “I do old. My guts ache, and my back hurts, and I cough my chest apart every morning.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 85) Despite his deteriorating health, Czernobog is still ambitious about killing. For instance, he talks about his young days in Chicago when he used to work as a knocker, a person killing cows with a sledgehammer. Czernobog convinces Shadow to play checkers with him saying if he loses, he gets to kill Shadow with a sledgehammer. Shadow accepts and loses the game. Czernobog says he will get his wager when the time comes. (Gaiman, 2001, pp. 90-91). He tells Shadow how he came to America: “All our countrymen go to New York. Then, we come out here, to Chicago. Everything got very bad. In the old country they had nearly forgotten me. Here, I am a bad memory no one wants to remember.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 86) Czernobog knows that he is doomed to be forgotten, but still, he refuses to take part in Wednesday’s war, saying he would prefer to die instead of helping Wednesday. He changes his mind after Wednesday’s death. But thanks to Shadow’s intervention, the war never starts. When everything is over, Shadow visits Czernobog to keep the promise he made when they played checkers. Czernobog touches Shadow’s forehead gently with his sledgehammer, sparing his life. He is grateful to Shadow for what he has done: “I owe you much. More than you know. Because of you, things are changing. This is spring time. The true spring.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 628) They shake hands and depart. Czernobog, the remnant of the original god of death, seems at peace and hopeful about what remains of his future as a simulacrum and not as a copy.

2. 2. NEW GODS

In the novel, Television, Technology Boy, and Media are the main characters, who represent the new gods that fight against the old ones, like Wednesday and Low Key. In Shadow's first encounter with Television, it comes to life and tries to convince him to be on their side. As the representative of the television, Lucy Ricardo – the actress playing in the famous *The Dick Van Dyke Show* – from the screen reaches out to Shadow and they have a small conversation about Television's identity and purpose: “‘The TV's the altar, and I'm what people are sacrificing to.’ ‘What do they sacrifice?’ asked Shadow. ‘Their time, mostly’, said Lucy. ‘Sometimes each other.’” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 189) The words “altar” and “sacrifice” hint that this is one of the gods that has replaced Wednesday and the other ancient ones because this is what twenty-first century people respond to and believe in. As Baudrillard suggests: “. . . it is a question of a sacrificial process, of a sacrificial spectacle offered to twenty million Americans. The liturgical drama of a mass society.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 28) The acts of sacrifice performed for old gods like Odin are not performed for Wednesday as in the contemporary world, there is Television to make sacrifices to, which is time and relationships. Odin, in the old days demanded the absolute dedication and loyalty of his subjects and he received that. Yet, in the contemporary world, Wednesday cannot get that kind of dedication and loyalty because people are not devoted to him or even impressed by him. They would rather spend their time on Television, the new god who deserves sacrifices. In today's hyperreal societies, Baudrillard thinks, “TV is watching us, TV alienates us, TV manipulates us . . .” (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 31). This is the power of Television, which cannot be simulated by the old gods.

Another instance where Shadow interacts with Television again is when he is arrested by Chad Mulligan in Lakeside after Robbie's wife Audrey sees Shadow and tells Chad that Shadow is wanted for two murders, which were in fact committed by Shadow's dead wife in order to save him from the men of new gods. Shadow is put

in a cell, where he can still see the TV. A rerun of an old show *Cheers* is on. As he watches TV, one of the characters from the show starts talking to him:

It is certainly not too late to change to winning side. But you know, you also have the freedom to stay just where you are. That's what it means to be an American. That's the miracle of America. Freedom to believe means the freedom to believe the wrong thing, after all. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 437)

As implied in the quotation, the description of the American identity is related to having the freedom to believe in anything whether it is right or wrong and new gods seem to be providing just that. In fact, gods like Television manipulate people into believing things that do not actually happen. After Television's brief monologue about the identity of America, the screen shows a room where two men, one of whom is Wednesday, are talking. At that moment, Shadow is not aware that both old and new gods are being conned by Wednesday and Loki. To Shadow's utter surprise, Wednesday is killed live on screen. This could be real to an unsuspecting audience; however, it is a staged death, which again proves the manipulative power of TV and how it controls what we think of the images or simulacra we see.

The implications of such huge impact of TV support the assumption that freedom to believe in things we choose is also an illusion created in America due to the fact that all reality is altered and manipulated according to the desires of the ruling forces. As Baudrillard suggests, "You no longer watch TV, it is TV that watches you (live); or again: You are no longer listening to Don't Panic, it is Don't Panic that is listening to you." (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 29) From this perspective, Television is similar to an all-seeing god-like being who watches and controls people. This role of the television could be explained by the panopticon⁸ developed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Referring to the British Utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham's concept of a prison, which is designed to prevent the prisoners from both seeing the inspector who watches them from a central location, and knowing when they are watched, Foucault asserts:

Thanks to its mechanisms of observation, it gains in efficiency and in the ability to penetrate into men's behavior; knowledge follows the advances of power, discovering new objects of knowledge over

⁸ Panopticon in Latin means "all-seeing."

all the surfaces on which power is exercised. (Foucault, 1975, p. 204)

Foucault claims that societies control individuals through such system of surveillance in various institutions, such as the hospital, prison or school. In contemporary societies, Television has taken this mission of watching and shaping individual behaviors. Therefore, old gods are redundant and useless in this system of power.

In the novel another new god is represented in the character of Technology Boy, a fat, acne-faced young man, who is riding in a limousine and ordering people around in his long, black, and silky coat. He smells of plastic and seems like an amalgam of a teenage boy and a computer. (Gaiman, 2001, pp. 55-56) Technology Boy's appearance and attitude demonstrates the fact that he is one of the ruling forces in contemporary America and is not afraid of challenging Wednesday. His language is made up of references to computer technology, which indicates that Technology Boy represents the digital age or the age of simulation as Baudrillard would call it, that does not need old gods like Wednesday. Technology Boy clearly explains what matters in today's modern world is the dominant paradigm that resonates well with the texture of America when he kidnaps Shadow to threaten Wednesday about not starting a war with new gods. He tells Shadow:

You tell Wednesday this, man. You tell him he's history. He's forgotten. He is old. And he better accept it. Tell him that we are the future and we don't give a fuck about him or anyone like him. His time is over . . . He has been consigned to the dumpster of history . . . (Gaiman, 2001, p. 59)

Wednesday and other gods who cannot fit in the current reality of America are doomed to die as they fail to adjust to and meet the requirements of the society. As Technology Boy further puts it in his warning to Wednesday, this is the new reality, the hyperreality in Baudrillard's terms. Technology Boy emphasizes that gist in his warning: "Tell him that we have fucking reprogrammed reality. Tell him that language is a virus and that religion is an operating system and that prayers are just so much fucking spam." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 59) What this character makes clear is that the new world order integrated with technology has replaced the old values that Wednesday is a part of. Technology Boy belongs to a new paradigm, which might

reverberate with what Baudrillard refers to as “the electronic tribalism of Silicon Valley.” (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 48) The phenomenal rise of Silicon Valley in the twentieth century as the center of dominant computer and information technologies (Tajnai, 2010, para. 1) also indicates a paradigm shift into a digital world.

Since he holds the power at hand in contemporary America, Technology Boy does not hesitate to commit murder so that he can intimidate old gods into yielding to him. He kills a mythological figure, Bilquis, in a tremendously violent manner. Bilquis, in her original background is a pagan queen that converts to Islam as a consequence of her encounter with King Solomon. However, in the twenty-first century, she is working as a prostitute in Los Angeles and swallows her customers through her vagina after she seduces them into saying, “I worship you.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 31) In this sense, Bilquis seems to be a successful simulacrum, who is content with working as a prostitute and finding people who worship her; yet, it will be explained later that she will not be able to compete with the digital world.

Technology Boy pretends to be a customer and tricks Bilquis into getting into his limousine, where she realizes that she has been deceived and asks Technology Boy what he wants. He tells her:

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. That’s wrong. We need to take the spotlight and shine. Front and center. You people have been so far underground for so long you’ve lost the use of your eyes. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 404)

Technology Boy is enthused about and focused on dominating the new world order and is willing to take extreme measures to accomplish his goal. For him, the old gods have lost their functionality and has no use for the new world. During their first and only encounter, Technology Boy tells Bilquis she is an “analog girl living in a digital world.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 404) This utterance summarizes the essence of the new era. For Bilquis and her kind, survival is not an option and they are bound to be eradicated from the face of the earth eventually. It is the era of Technology Boy. Baudrillard claims “Technology is an extension of the body. It is the functional sophistication of a human organism that permits it to be equal to nature and to invest triumphally in nature.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 111) In this regard, if Technology Boy

represents the domination of humans equipped with technology over nature, it could also be presumed that he is fit to replace old gods with his invincible character. However, this narcissistic attitude he has is a fatal error on Technology Boy's behalf because he cannot meet the requirements of being a new god in America.

Technology Boy kills Bilquis by running her over with his limousine. Her death is symbolic in the sense that her destruction implies the fate of all old gods. "The car hits her with an impact that crumples the grille and tosses her into the air like a glove puppet . . . the impact shatters her pelvis, fractures her skull." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 406) The graphic description of the impact of a machine on the mortal flesh of a mythological figure furthers the notion that the battle between the old gods and the new ones is one to be lost similar to the battle between the Aesir and the Giants. What remains of Bilquis after the limousine runs over her is "the smeared red meat of road kill, barely recognizable as human, and soon even that will be washed away by the rain." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 406) Bilquis as a failed simulacrum falls victim to a homicide.

Moreover, when Technology Boy and Shadow meet again at a motel in Lebanon, another forgotten American town, which is a neutral territory for the old and new gods, Technology Boy foregrounds his importance. Shadow is there to get back Wednesday's dead body and Technology Boy tells him: "You couldn't be hypertext if you tried. I'm . . . synaptic, while you're synoptic." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 476) This quote refers to Technology Boy's own ability to transfer information whereas Shadow lacks this quality. Thus, Shadow cannot be hypertext, another allusion to a computer feature about arranging information in a computer database.⁹ According to Technology Boy, the difference between himself and Shadow is related to computer technology, which is again the means to transfer knowledge and information in today's world. Technology Boy makes a reference to William Butler Yeats' "Second Coming" while they deliver Wednesday's body to Shadow: "Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer; / Things fall apart; the center cannot hold . . ." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 482) Technology Boy summarizes the current chaotic situation with this extract from the poem. Yeats defines history in terms of cycles, or gyres. He claims that the first ancient Greek cycle ends with the birth of Christ and it takes two thousand years for a civilization

⁹ See the online dictionary for computer terminology www.webopedia.com

to rise, fall and be replaced by another civilization. (Yeats, 1925, p.138) As Yeats posits, the messiah that will replace Christ will be antithetical: “Christ gave a *primary* revelation at the climax of an *antithetical* civilization and will be followed by His contrary.” (Yeats, 1925, 127) Campbell, referring to the same poem, says “. . . when you come to the end of one time and the beginning of a new one, it's a period of tremendous pain and turmoil”(Campbell & Moyers 1988, p. 21) Hence, in “The Second Coming” Yeats foresees that the new messiah in the twenty-first century will be “Spiritus Mundi”, a beast-like being to compete with the anarchy of the modern world. In Gaiman’s novel, this allusion to Yeats’s poem underlines the demise of old gods, but also an end awaits new gods if they do not transform or reform themselves to meet the demands of the current system.

Even though Technology Boy is a product of contemporary American society, he cannot continue to live like Television because he underestimates the power of old gods, especially that of Low Key, who is disguised as Mr. World while working for Technology Boy. This lack of intuition leaves him defenseless and unable to cope with the pressure coming from Wednesday, which results in his destruction. Low Key kills Technology Boy by twisting a knife into his chin and pushing it up toward his brain and he dedicates this death to Odin. Technology Boy’s death does not resemble a human death as he oozes a fluid other than blood and makes mechanical noises giving out strange odors while he dies. “The smell on the air was that of burning insulation wire, as if somewhere a plug was overloading.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 548) After his death, Low Key mocks Technology Boy by saying: “He looks as if he just saw a sequence of zeroes and ones turn into a cluster of brightly colored birds, and then just fly away.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 550) Low Key believes technology is defeated by the ancient powers. Technology Boy, in fact, is defeated because of his hubris, which is not a quality new mechanical gods are supposed to possess in America. As one character Mr. Nancy says: “That’s the biggest trouble with the new kids – they figure they know everythin’, and you can’t teach them nothin’ but the hard way.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 488) As mentioned before, Technology Boy’s narcissism causes him his life while the other new gods are always on the look out for dangers that would cause their demise.

Another new god is Media, who tries to turn Shadow against old gods and change sides. Shadow meets Media when he travels with Czernobog and Mr. Nancy

to Lebanon to retrieve Wednesday's body. She looks perfect in an unreal way: "She was perfectly made-up, perfectly coiffed. She reminded him of every newscaster he'd seen on morning television sitting in a studio that didn't really resemble a living room." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 466) Media's appearance resonates well with the values of the current century, especially with America's. For her, this is business and she addresses Shadow and his party accordingly. She shakes their hands firmly and looks them straight in the eyes and says: "I'm Media. Good to meet you. I hope we can get this evening's business done as *pleasantly* as possible." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 466) Not only Media's appearance, but also the way she handles herself is an example of textbook business etiquette. Czernobog asks whether this is the Medea in the mythological story of Jason and the Argonauts, who killed her children. Medea promises to help Jason through his quest for the Golden Fleece and in return asks Jason to take her with him. Medea plots, deceives, and kills anyone who poses a threat to Jason's pursuit. She even kills her brother to run away with Jason. However, Jason leaves Medea for the daughter of the king of Corinth and Medea avenges this betrayal by killing their two children.¹⁰ Today's Media is similar to Medea in the sense that she cannot be stopped from reaching her goals. After Czernobog's remark about Media, Mr. Nancy says, "Different woman . . . same deal." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 468) insinuating that they are not very different.

At night in the motel, when Shadow goes back to his room, he sees Media sitting on his bed. She tries to convince Shadow to get onto their side by making an appealing offer, which would be hard to refuse if Shadow were attracted to materialistic awards. Still, the offer Media makes shows the extent of her powers. She tells Shadow: "We can make you famous, Shadow. We can give you power over what people believe and say and wear and dream. You want to be the next Cary Grant? We can make that happen. We can make you the next Beatles." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 475) This is the kind of power she has and certainly, she has the power to do the reverse as she threatens Shadow about what might happen if he does not pick the 'winning side.' She says, "We can make it bad for you. You could be a bad joke forever . . . You could be remembered forever, but as a Manson, a Hitler . . ." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 476) As Arthur Asa Berger asserts in his explanation of the "Cultivation theory", mass media focuses on the:

¹⁰ Hamilton, E. *Mythology*, (1942). pp. 64-75

relationship that exists between the mass media's presentation of reality . . . and what audiences perceive to be reality. Because the media, and television is the most important of the media, present a distorted view of reality . . . heavy consumers of the media and viewers of television gain unrealistic pictures of reality. (Berger, 1995, p. 151)

New gods in the novel seem to perform this function perfectly through the holy trinity they formed because information in the modern world is disseminated via technological tools such as TV; which is the field Technology Boy dominates; yet, the content of that information is determined by the Media. As Baudrillard talks about the power of TV, he also mentions the role of media in it: “In all this, one remains dependent on the analytical conception of the media, on an external active and effective agent, on ‘perspectival’ information with the horizon of the real and of the meaning as the vanishing point.” (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 31) Media in Gaiman’s work has the power to create that perspectival information, whose source and credibility is ambiguous; yet, people are exposed to it and they accept any information presented by the media for its face value.

Baudrillard discusses the huge role of advertising and mass media in conditioning people by explaining its logic: “For this is not a logic of propositions and proofs, but a logic of fables and of the willingness to go along with them. We do not believe in fables, but we cleave to them nevertheless.” (Baudrillard, 1996, p.180) He compares this logic with believing in Father Christmas even though people know he is not real; yet, they justify his existence as he is presented to them in a way they cannot deny, which is the logic of “belief and regression.” (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 181) This vast power of manipulation and control is also reflected in Gaiman’s Media and other new gods. It is not only this manipulation power that makes Media a huge influence, an undefeatable god in the novel. As Berger asserts: “The mass media are based, in large measure, upon our ability to “reproduce” phenomena: to make photographs; to print news- papers, magazines, and books . . .” (Berger, 1995, p. 65) In this regard, reproducing phenomena rather than keeping the originals is more in tune with America and its needs. Therefore, Wednesday’s tragic effort to become the original Odin is meaningless. Furthermore, as Berger quotes from Walter Benjamin, the uniqueness of original art works, for example, lose their authenticity once they

are reproduced and people are kept distant from the ritualistic and sacred aspects of these original works. The same is true for the old gods. They have become a consumer good, leaving their places to the new gods.

In the novel, what happens to Media is not revealed. The last time she is seen is when Shadow, Mr. Nancy, and Czernobog deliver Wednesday's body. It is most probable that she is one of the most powerful among new gods, who is unlikely to diminish.

These are the kinds of new gods Gaiman depicts in his work as opponents to or replacements for old gods. They are not simulacra as they do not belong to any sort of a history or a mythology. However, new gods are not exempt from the fate of the old ones in America, either. In the battlefield, when all gods gather, Shadow looks at new gods and feels sorry for them because he knows that new gods are aware of their own fate, which is to disappear, if they do not keep changing: "They were afraid that unless they kept pace with a changing world, unless they remade and redrew and rebuilt the world in their image, their time would already be over." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 581) America establishes the rules for gods. Their success is measured by American values. As Baudrillard keenly observes: "This material utopia of the way of life, where success and action are seen as profound illustrations of the moral law . . ." (Baudrillard, 1986, pp. 81-82) represents American values. The utopia of America is based on materialistic outcomes rather than spiritual or cultural ones, hence, the anxiety of new gods. They are burdened by this demand bearing in their minds that they will be sent to oblivion unless they meet the ever-changing demands of America.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, which takes place in America in the twenty-first century displays how gods from ancient mythologies are destined to be eradicated unless they adapt to the new land's texture and values whereas simulacra of these old gods and mythological figures have a chance to survive. To illustrate, Mr. Ibis in one instance, tells the story of one character in the novel named Mad Sweeney, an Irish leprechaun's copy. Sweeney is a bitter and angry drunkard and a homeless person. Mr. Ibis recounts how Mad Sweeney came to America through one Irish girl's faith; yet with the rise of Catholicism, he has been forgotten and has slid into the arms of madness and alcohol. (Gaiman, 2001, pp. 242-243) Mad Sweeney, failing to become the simulacrum of his original self, cannot survive in America. Even when Shadow gives him money for a bus ticket to start all over again, Mad Sweeney prefers to spend his money on whiskey and dies on the street due to exposure to cold. (Gaiman 2001, p. 239) Mad Sweeney represents those mythological figures, who cannot transform themselves into simulacra whereas another character, Easter, the simulacrum of Eostre of the Dawn, the Anglo-Saxon fertility goddess performs well. When Mr. Wednesday tries to persuade her to fight with them against new gods, she says:

On my festival days they still feast on eggs and rabbits, on candy and flesh, to represent rebirth and copulation. They wear flowers in their bonnets and they give each other flowers. They do it in my name. More and more of them every year. In my name, old wolf.”
(Gaiman, 2001, p. 332)

Eostre, by becoming Easter has earned her chance to survive in America unlike some other characters in the novel. She seems to understand that this is her only opportunity to exist. In this vast universe of simulacra, which America represents, old gods like Mr. Wednesday and Low Key Lylesmith become obsolete as they fail

to adapt to the twenty-first century world whereas simulacra like Shadow Moon are able to survive.

America, not just as the home of consumerist masses, but also as a vast piece of land made up of deserts, plays an important role in its reluctance to host gods. America's colossal geography swallows all entities amalgamating them into one melting pot. This geographical superiority crushes all gods as Whiskey Jack, the simulacrum of Wisakedjak, who is a god from Native American mythology asserts in his conversation with Shadow in *American Gods*: "It's not good growing country for gods. They don't grow well here. They are like avocados trying to grow in wild rice country." (Gaiman, 2001, pp. 556-557) Baudrillard's impression of American deserts is quite illustrative of the texture of America:

The desert is a natural extension of the inner silence of the body. If humanity's language, technology, and buildings are an extension of its constructive faculties, the desert alone is an extension for its capacity for absence, the ideal schema for humanity's disappearance. (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 72)

America, therefore, cannot accommodate old gods. In fact, if America in *American Gods* is perceived as a character, it is the ultimate simulacrum of Europe, which has created its own values and unlike the old gods, it is not in fear of becoming obsolete. As Whiskey Jack manifests, America is here to stay: "Listen, gods die when they are forgotten. People too. But the land's still here. The good places, and the bad. The land isn't going anywhere." (Gaiman, 2001, p. 558) The superiority of land over people and gods is another factor in the demise of old gods.

Gaiman's universe of simulacra does not favor new gods over the old ones inasmuch as they also have limited alternatives to survive in America: They should either change continuously and simultaneously to meet the ever-changing demands of America or they will be replaced by the new technological and consumerist items. As Baudrillard claims: "People have the desire to take everything, to pillage everything, to swallow everything, to manipulate everything. Seeing, deciphering, learning does not touch them. The only massive affect is that of manipulation." (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 60) In the novel, one example to this consumerist and manipulative lifestyle is the depiction of Las Vegas:

The secret is this: people gamble to lose money. They come to the casinos for the moment in which they feel alive . . . They may brag about the nights they won, the money they took from the casino, but they treasure, secretly treasure, the times they lost. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 304)

People gamble to experience the sense of being alive, another sign that people in America need to consume one service or another in order to feel alive. The description of Las Vegas also shows how America has a simulacrum for everything:

Here a story book castle, there a sphinx-flanked black pyramid beaming white light into the darkness as a landing beam for UFOs, and everywhere neon oracles and twisting screens predict happiness and good fortune, announces singers and comedians and magicians . . . Once every hour a volcano erupts in light and flame. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 305)

America, with its rootless background and its vast emptiness needs to have everything so that the land's giant hollowness can be filled. The country has created its own hyperreality so that the masses can feed on it. Baudrillard's example of Beaubourg¹¹ effect portrays the insatiable appetite of the twenty-first century people to devour whatever comes their way:

The masses rush toward Beaubourg as they rush toward disaster sites, with the same irresistible élan¹². . . Their number, their stampede, their fascination, their itch to see everything is objectively a deadly and catastrophic behavior for the whole undertaking. Not only does their weight put the building in danger, but their adhesion, their curiosity annihilates the very contents of this culture of animation. (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 66)

The tendency to see everything does not come from the need to learn from experience or to internalize it, but comes from the need to merely have that experience. This level of superficiality is inherent in American society as well, yet they give everything a second chance: "To them, everything is worthy of protection, embalming, restoration. Everything can have a second birth, the eternal birth of simulacrum." (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 42) As Baudrillard suggests about the perception

¹¹ The Pompidou Center in Paris, which accomadates a huge library, a music and acoustic research center, and a modern art museum is referred to as Beaubourg because it is located in the Beaubourg area.

¹² "Élan" means "energy" or "enthusiasm."

of museums for Americans, as long as something achieves to be a simulacrum, it will have infinite number of chances to get resurrected. Wednesday and Low Key in *American Gods* fail to be the simulacra with endless opportunities to live.

The old gods are replaced not just by the new gods, but also by new goods, two concepts that are intermingled in the twenty-first century consumerist society. Baudrillard explains this by creating his own metaphor for shopping centers:

Just as the gods of all countries coexisted syncretically in the Roman Pantheon in an immense ‘digest’, so all the gods – or demons – of consumption have come together in our Super Shopping Centre, which is our Pantheon . . . In other words, all activities, labour, conflicts and seasons have been united and abolished in the same abstraction. (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 196)

Big shopping malls and shopping centers have become shrines for consumerist societies, and they leave no time to devote to the old gods, who need constant attention and sacrifice. According to Baudrillard, the driving force of a consumerist is a “universal curiosity.” He asserts:

You have to try everything, for consumerist man is haunted by the fear of ‘missing’ something, some form of enjoyment or other . . . It is no longer desire, or even ‘taste’, or a specific inclination that are at stake, but a generalized curiosity, driven by a vague sense of unease – it is the ‘fun morality’ or the imperative to enjoy oneself, to exploit to the full one’s potential for thrills, pleasure or gratification. (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 80)

This perspective shapes the mindset of the twenty-first century society. In one instant in *American Gods*, Shadow has a conversation with a woman named Sam in Lakeside, where he hides from the new gods in disguise as Mike Ainsel. Sam asks him what has been going on with his life. Shadow replies even if he tells her, she would not believe him. Sam, as a consequence of Shadow’s response, rambles on about the infinite spectrum of what she may believe in including Santa Claus and Elvis Presley. However, she also says: “I believe in an empty and godless universe of casual chaos, background noise and sheer blind luck.” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 425) As Sam illustrates, the current paradigm is chaotic and intertwined with beliefs that are incompatible with each other. Iconic entities are easier to believe in, in contrast to

ancient gods. In that sense, Gaiman's work can also be regarded as the questioning of the traditional concept of religion.

Wednesday and Low Key, in that regard cannot fulfill the needs of people like Sam, who are the majority. They fail to learn about the characteristics and needs of their 'target market' as people in consumerist societies are not subjects of gods anymore, but their 'customers', whose satisfaction means the continuity of gods/goods. As Baudrillard claims, this is the universe of simulacra, where "the phantom of religion floats over a world now long desacralized." (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 153) What the narrator in *American Gods* also asserts about religions show the approach by which they are viewed in the twenty-first century:

Religions are, by definition, metaphors after all: God is a dream, a hope, a woman . . . a celestial being whose only interest is to make sure your football team, army, business, or marriage thrives, prospers and triumphs over all opposition. (Gaiman, 2001, p. 551)

Wednesday and Low Key's utter disregard for this dramatic transformation in the society brings them closer to their doom. If they had created the simulacra of old gods, they could have existed in America like Shadow, but the old ways of the ancient gods have no place in America. That is why new gods, such as Television and Media prosper and the old ones diminish.

Within the boundaries of a consumerist society, new gods are aware of what needs to be done in order for them to survive. Television is panoptical and mighty in its stance as a new god. It ". . . is nothing but a screen, not even that: a miniaturized terminal that, in fact, is immediately located in your head – you are the screen and the TV watches you –" (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 51) In *American Gods*, the way Television interacts with Shadow through some famous TV characters demonstrates this panoptical quality. As a god, Television watches Shadow and demands his submission to its will even though Shadow does not give in to Television. It does not matter to Television whether or not Shadow joins its cult. As Baudrillard claims: "Suddenly the TV reveals itself for what it really is: a video of another world, ultimately addressed to no one at all, delivering its images indifferently, indifferent to its own messages." (Baudrillard, 1986, p. 52) Television will be there and as long as it is there, there will always be consumerist masses, whom it will control and manipulate.

Media is not different from Television with regards to its mission and existence. Baudrillard asserts that a news item in mass communication is universalized and there is no difference in the way all kinds of information are received: “the news item is thus not one category among others, but the cardinal category of our magical thinking, of our mythology.” (Baudrillard, 1998, pp. 33-34) As mentioned before, Media in *American Gods* is aware of her might and tries to intimidate Shadow by mentioning her power to shatter his identity and reputation unless he joins new gods, another threat Shadow does not mind.

Technology Boy is different from other important new gods in the novel as he is the most personified one and he is the only one who gets killed because of his extreme self-centeredness and carelessness. Hence, Gaiman implies that if the new god-like beings that people respect in the contemporary world depend on their power too much and do not keep up with the changing technologies in the twenty-first century, they will be eliminated as well.

This universe of simulacra is in harmony with Shadow Moon, who does not yield to any god, whether old or new. Shadow belongs to neither the old gods, nor the new ones. Yet, he tries to bring peace to both parties. He is the perfect simulacrum of Baldur and belongs to the kind of simulacra Baudrillard describes as:

. . . productive, productivist, founded on energy, force, its materialization by the machine and in the whole system of production – a Promethean aim of continuous globalization and expansion, of an indefinite liberation of energy . . . (Baudrillard, 1981, p.121)

Shadow, especially after his vigil to Wednesday, feels more liberated and alive. This is the beginning of his new life as a resurrected simulacrum. He has been the uniting force of the novel, helping old gods and the new ones, his dead wife Laura, and residents of Lakeside. He has performed Promethean deeds, such as preventing the war between old and new gods and revealing the serial murders of children committed by Hinzemann in Lakeside, and expected nothing in return. Rather than rewriting the narrative of Baldur, he has created his own heroic deeds. Now that everything is settled, Shadow begins another journey until he finds a place to call

home. And it is certain that the reader will hear more of Shadow when Neil Gaiman publishes his new short story collection in 2015.¹³

Neil Gaiman's description of *American Gods* as a "response to the culture shock" (D. Goodyear, personal communications, January 25, 2010) he experienced when he moved to the United States projects the despair, anguish, and, the anger old gods feel in America because this is also a culture shock on their behalf. His use of diverse mythological figures from Norse to Native American, from African to Islamic mythologies adds to the profound multicultural effect America creates as a melting pot. Gaiman has brought with him the ancient mythologies to rewrite them in America. As Gaiman has found a way to fit in America, so did Shadow Moon and characters like Mr. Ibis, Mr. Jacquel, Bilquis, Czernobog, and Easter as the perfect simulacra of ancient mythological figures. In short, Baudrillard's theory of simulacrum and his analysis of American society disclose what Neil Gaiman tries to accomplish in *American Gods*.

¹³ Flood, 2014 "Neil Gaiman birngs American Gods back to life" Retrieved from: <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/01/neil-gaiman-american-gods-short-story-collection-trigger-warnings>

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APPENDIX
CURRICULUM VITAE

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