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**The Paradigm Shift: Myths, Beliefs, and the New Gods in
Neil Gaiman's *American Gods***

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Declaration

We hereby declare that the dissertation entitled, “The Paradigm Shift: Myths and Beliefs, and the New Gods in Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods*” is our own work and that all the sources we have quoted have been acknowledged by means of references.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved and supportive parents, who always believed in me and saw light in me even when my frail spirit was withered. To my sister who provided me with her endless support and encouragement and to my supportive brothers as well. I also dedicate this work to my close friends, Chahrazad, Imane and Lina. I am truly thankful for having you in my life and to my dear partner Neche Samiha.

-Lekehali Malek

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my loving parents “Tayeb” and “Zahia” for their unconditioned care and support. To my family, my best friends and my dear pupils for encouraging and believing in me. And finally, to my diligent and charming partner Lekehali Malak for her great efforts put in this dissertation.

-Neché Samiha

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Abstract:

Myths are stories that have been passed down through generations. Some are based on true events, while others are entirely fictitious. Their role is to provide everlasting answers to timeless concerns such as questions about life and death, good and evil, the essence and existence of gods, and even the origins of humanity. Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* perfectly brings out this interesting combination of "myths and religion", and the renovation process they are going through. Therefore, this research is dedicated to pointing out people's spiritual struggle as life moves on and faith is gradually being replaced by more tangible "deities". Newer forces such as Technology, Mass media, the Internet, and Globalization are dominating peoples' lives gradually leading to a paradigm shift in power relations, beliefs, and even lifestyles. Consequently, this dissertation seeks to shed light on the major clash between the old gods, who reflect society's conventional beliefs, and the new gods, who represent modern America's cultural shift. It further aims to examine how those deities function as valuable cultural manifestations of how culture mutates and thrives with the passage of time. By doing this, it looks into the social, cultural, and spiritual power universal myths wield. These aims are achieved with the help of theories and concepts from Myth studies, mainly Joseph Campbell's works on Myth, in addition to insights on spirituality and faith from theorists such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Taylor.

Key words: Myths, Religion, American Gods, Old gods, New gods, Spirituality, Paradigm Shift.

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General Introduction.

“People didn’t realize it, but they needed myths to survive, just as much now as when their forebears were alive. Perhaps more. Mythology embodied the world’s dreams helped to make sense of the great human problems. Just as the dreams of Individuals exist to give subconscious support to their conscious lives, so do myths serve as society’s dreams.”

-Charles De Lint-

Throughout history, myths served as spiritual and psychological guidance to humans, presenting symbols such as supernatural deities that assisted the human spirits onwards. One simply cannot avoid recognizing the function these accounts, which we refer to here as “myths” played in ancient people’s lives, is the same as what science and/or the old belief system does in western society today. Mythology is inevitably linked to society and culture, from which it emerges and cannot be separated. The vast majority of them were invented because humans wanted a belief to lean on as they were constructed as a way of making sense of the natural world and a conceptual framework supplied people with ways to grasp and connect to the complexities of their observable reality.

The existence of superhuman power assembled people’s strong tendency to link this belief to morality, misfortune, values, and the world’s genesis. As they have been prone to interpret their symbolic figure practically and hence to view themselves as specially favored in direct contact with the Absolute. Such claims, however, are no longer being taken seriously by anyone (*Campbell Myths to Live by* 8). The shifting paradigms through time have caused the annihilation of many gods and contributed to the construction of others. Nietzsche, for example, described their

existence as life-sustaining illusions and once these are gone, there is nothing stable to grasp on and nothing is firm. This change is believed to be the root cause of many contemporary or modern phenomena such as the rise of technology's and an extensive reliance on it, capitalism and consumerism, and, hyper-reality in culture and media (I. T. Peeters 5). The United States is an example of this because it is a country with a complicated set of ideas and beliefs due to its short age appearance compared to the Old World civilizations. All of these concepts about myth, place, and America are at the center of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*.

Neil Gaiman is one of the most intriguing fantasy writers working today. He is regarded as one of the most versatile writers of popular fiction. He does not test beliefs by placing them in a fantasy context in his novel, but rather by making the fantasy "real" and meaningful to people on a personal level. Under the strain of fiction, the concept of reality is continually challenged and evaluated especially in his work (Bilbatua 4). However, Gaiman was not the first one who embarked upon using fantasy literature as a tool of reflection on the nature of American society. Joseph Campbell's *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* and Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* used fantastical elements in discussing the distinctive features of current myths as well as how old myths continue to play a role in our culture and society.

The novel, published in 2001, tells about Shadow, the protagonist of the story, pushed into a war between embodiments of ancient gods who are now scattered over the United States in human incarnations and personifications of new gods who are fighting one another for existence. Throughout his journey, Shadow becomes a manifestation of the contemporary American predicament and accepts his unwelcome mission in the god-war, and sets forth on an odyssey of deception, spirituality, and revival. Apart from this, Gaiman himself concentrates on the undergoing ideological and theological change due to the conflict between the gods of old myths

and those of the modern world. Thus, this dissertation will examine how the gods function as both mythology and technology representations in the novel, in addition to the cultural and religious paradigm shift that occurred in American society.

American Gods is a representation of modern America and its identity, from the point of view of a British expat living in America (Sodemann). Gaiman “uses myths to define what makes America” (Rimmels 2001). The underlying premise of the novel is that America today is a place where spiritual religion has largely been replaced by material religion and where belief in the gods has been eroded to the extent that worship has become an act of reverence towards concepts such as media, globalization, and technology rather than towards figures traditionally associated with the divine (Zajko 306-307).

Today, philosophers and anthropologists problematized the shift of the position of religion in society and modernity’s attitude towards spirituality and identified particularly in being impacted by technologies and increasing individuality. In other words, there is a better need to examine the current state of the gods and myths and what happened to them- and, by consequence, the cultural position, and beliefs - of these aspects in modern America we know today within the novel’s context. Moreover, this study attempts to answer questions such as: what is the cultural and social significance of the paradigm shift between the Old mythical gods and the new gods manifest in the context of Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods*? How does myth function as a stabilizing spiritual force across various cultures and societies in the context of the novel? What are the factors that caused the drought of modern myths and contributed to the loss of power and credibility of the old gods (referring to both religious and spiritual beliefs) in America? And how does the paradigm shift affect the characters of the story about their sense of belonging, identity, and existential experience within a modern and secular America?

Joseph Campbell believes that if myths were still prevalent in modern society, there would be sustainable communities, greater morals, and a better knowledge of one's self (*Myths to Live by* 8). In this regard and among various objectives, this dissertation aims to understand how the gods function as cultural and valuable manifestations. In addition, it investigates how they can be ideal representations of how culture thrives and flourishes, where we, as humans, make an effort to nurture it. Additionally, it examines how America is a nation full of paradoxes and heterogeneity, all resulting in issues such as identity crisis and cultural displacement. Furthermore, it provides insights into the mythical and spiritual origins of America's cultural legacy and how traditional values have evolved into contemporary ideals. As a final objective, this dissertation seeks to shed the light on the major clash between the old gods, who reflect society's conventional beliefs, and the new gods, who represent modern America's cultural shift.

This work will help us provide a greater understanding of how myths and religion have helped in shaping the America we know today. Also, it will shed light on the American spirituality in both past and contemporary societies in order to uncover the change that occurred, and how it affected their lives. As it is clear, the world is in a constant state of change due to several factors, and technological development is one of them. Consequently, numerous aspects of our lives have been altered to match such progress, including religious thoughts and beliefs, all of which we are going to see through the eyes of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*.

The novel was the center of attention for many researchers and scholars. It was considered to be a vivid example of post-industrial mythopoeic (Sodemann). In her "Neil Gaiman American Gods: A Post-Modern Epic for America", Susan Gorman reports:

The novel presents a postmodern view of America and its people and engages with the epic genre both in terms of form and content. This engagement with epic does not present a coherent view of the nation, as other epics do, but instead highlights multidimensionality and irony, demonstrating potential new ways in which the epic can remain important to literary work. (1)

Although Susan provides insights on how Gaiman is offering a postmodern vision of the new America, and how the genre itself is done differently, she does not focus on the significance behind the impending war between the gods.

Another attempt to analyze such work is done by Jesper Skytte Sodemann in “American Gods and Where to Find Them: Modern Myth and Material Experience” trying to explore Gaiman’s representation of Gods and the use of myth in his novel. The writer here disagrees with those saying, “*American Gods* is not an expression of material mythmaking and magic, but rather a plea for a return to a more authentic past. In which this magic and myth “existed,” (59) by saying that Gaiman walked on the steps of Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. This is related to the instance where Campbell describes the myth and its symbols as: “the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source” (*The Power of Myth* 1). This takes the novel and modern myth into a completely new level of material experience rather than just being a spiritual one.

Syed Mikhail bin Mohamed Roslan, Rohimmi bin Noor, Hardev Kaur (2020) wrote “Modern Day Myths in Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods*” which is another article that shows interest in Gaiman’s novel. Religion and mythology have been stated numerous times as the key element

in the novel, as it has been said “*American Gods* is about a surrealistic version of modern America that is secretly inhabited by the weakened and old spirits of every god of every religion that had ever been brought to the country’s shores” (371). Here we see the solid bond found between immigration waves, myths and American spirituality. They add, “In order to construct a modernized mythic portrayal in his novel, Gaiman reshapes and reinvents the vast mythology by combining it with legends, folktales, and numerous intertextuality references” (371).

Călin D. Dragoș in “Keeping up with the Gods: Divergence and Rebranding in Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods* (2018)” analyzes the emergence of myth in America. He states:

Gaiman’s conceptual scaffolding hinges on the United States of America as a worldwide cultural melting pot, on whose territory successive waves of immigrants from as far back as prehistory have settled and brought with them their cultural identity and heritage, including their respective myths, their forms of worship, and of course their deities. This much is shared between our world and theirs, but theirs seems to feature additional spiritual complexities. (14)

All of the above-mentioned writers agree on the fact that Gaiman’s *American Gods* has formed a well-established link between mythology and the gods of the novel in such a spectacular way. The truth to which America is a melting pot, the gods and their mythological, spiritual, and historical backgrounds, and the creation of newer ones that go along with the progress made in modern life (technology) are all elements included in the novel and thus to be discussed in this present work.

Accordingly, a better understanding can be achieved primarily through using concepts from Myth studies in addition to insights on spirituality and faith from theorists such as Nietzsche coupled with a close reading of the novel to examine what the gods - both ancient and modern

symbolize in *American Gods*. Additionally, a historical-cultural approach, in its definition, highlights the social and cultural world's contributions to intellectual development. It analyzes the many dimensions of culture including mythology and society. Since it is also necessary to gain an insight into the spiritual development of mythology, we will be employing Joseph Campbell's works about Myths and their development and function since it is very vital to the American culture. He addresses myth in psychoanalytic terms to expose its core qualities and to show how it continues to represent human demands, offering consolation even in today's society. Moreover, the loss of myth is highly connected to the death of religion. Therefore, we will examine the religion's position in a contemporary western culture based on the philosophical theories of Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Taylor in the fields of spirituality and modernity. It argues, particularly in terms of how technological advances and individualism have supplanted traditional notions of spirituality in modern society. Finally, we will use our findings in discussing the outcome of the prevailing paradigms of the gods and their identity within the novel's characters.

This dissertation, therefore, is composed of two main chapters. The first one is entitled "Religion and Mythology in the American Culture". This chapter aims at laying the foundations of the work; it provides a profound socio-historical background of the American society, mainly in terms of both myths and religious beliefs. It illustrates how spirituality first, found its way inside America and what made it somehow lose its path afterward. This can only be done through studying the connection found between myths and religion: how it began (old gods) and how it suddenly disappeared into a new, modern, and highly developed world, consequently, leading to the creation of newer gods. Questions such as; who first created such spiritual myths? What do they signify? And what were they used for? are what we'll try to give answers to through this work.

In the second chapter entitled “The Ramification: The Paradigm Shift of Culture and Beliefs in Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods*”, we attempt to address the reasons for the paradigm shift between the old and new gods and the outcome of their epic battle. The Novel’s characters accounted for the variation of religious symbols taking place in the American society which were referred to as “old gods”; Mr. Wednesday and Low-Key Lyesmith (old Norse Gods), Mr. Ibis and Mr. Jacquel (Egyptian Gods) and Elegba and Great Mawu (gods worshiped by slaves coming to America) along with many others. On the other hand, Technical Boy, Media, Mr. World, and The Intangibles are examples of other characters that represented the new gods. Starting from this point, we can say that there was a cultural displacement, loss of values, and faith that led to an identity quest in America. Also, these gods have made numerous attempts trying to get back to the lights and control the scene; as a result, Shadow Moon, the novel’s protagonist, lost track of who to believe in or trust, and who is right. These conflicts describe the modern world's struggle to form a clear image of who they are and possess their own actual and unique identity when all the people now started to look the same. It is true that the world would be a lot easier and better with the right means, but at what cost! The one million question that Gaiman tries to find answers to through *American Gods*.

Chapter ONE:

Mythology and Religion in the American Culture

1. Introduction:

Culture is defined as the ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society (Oxford Languages: The Home of World-reowned Language Data). Each of these cultures is special in its own unique way. Now, let's question what would happen if these cultures are combined or brought together as one big melting pot? The result could be called "The United States of America." Americans have always bragged about their country is really a melting pot, an outstanding and smooth fusion of cultures. They take pride in tolerating differences, accepting, adapting, and adopting different customs and traditions from all over the world as a valuable part of their own heritage. This mixture of cultures normally leads to the bonding of traditions, beliefs, religions, and even mythical tales.

The present chapter shall offer a slight glimpse over this relationship. It consists mainly of two parts. The first part is a socio-historical background about how religion shaped America and American spirituality. In addition, the chapter attempts to illustrate how myths were used as religious explanations by highlighting the links made between these two elements and what resulted from such bonding. In the second part of this chapter, the "theoretical framework" aims to investigate the socio-cultural in addition to the religious significance of "Universal Myths." It also addresses the power that these specific myths wield. In order to achieve this, we explore relevant ideas and works by Joseph Campbell, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Charles Taylor.

2. The Religious Shaping of America:

Despite the largely secular disposition of America, religion is closely connected to its history and culture. Religion had an essential role in the founding of the American colonies. While the puritans founded the New England colonies, Maryland was originally intended to be a shelter for English Catholics. In addition, before the seventeenth century, a Quaker group led by William Penn established Pennsylvania. The need for religious liberty at that time was strong enough to compel the early founders to forsake the comfort of their established communities in the old world and confront the risks of the American wilderness. After rejecting papal authority in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England was not yet ready to allow religious opposition within its official church. The new world, which appeared to be devoid of institutional religion, provided a break from religious persecution in England and northwestern Europe (Zargouni 47). Reports from explorers, missionaries, soldiers, and adventurers confirmed the belief that the New England settlers were not only traders or farmers but also ideologues, experimenting with new concepts in a vast and still uncharted region.

Overall, the emergence of new faiths grabbed the attention of many French and English observers seeking a better world. Voltaire visited England and stayed there between 1726 and 1729 to learn about the various faiths that were being transmitted to North America. He set the standard by following his pursuits with the Quakers whom he encountered personally throughout his three-year stay in England (1726-1729). This brief yet vivid encounter inspired him to write and publish “letters on the Quakers” in 1734. Because of his reputation, all European visitors to America felt compelled to see the great Quakers of Pennsylvania upon reading the most recent edition of Voltaire's *Philosophical Letters*. Furthermore, Voltaire believed he had discovered the real, simple, and primitive religion in Quaker rituals (Lacorne 1).

Quakerism marked the beginnings of a natural religion founded on a single belief “there is a god, and we must be just.” As stated by Voltaire, “the universal religion that has existed throughout history and among all peoples” (Voltaire). Quakerism pursued this objective by reviving old Christian rituals. They denied any hierarchy, distinguishing symbols, or confession of religion. Based on Voltaire’s perspective, this new and unusual religion served as a standard: It provided the notion of a completely potentially viable religion, a form of Catholicism that rejects the Roman Church’s principles, practices, and sacraments (Lacorne 1).

Later on, they sought safety in Pennsylvania, which was created by William Penn, who founded it and was a part of the society of Friends. Pennsylvania eventually became the basis for the United States. The freedom that Americans overlook was not established by secular enlightenment intellectuals but through the execution of the Quaker's Christian faith (Lacorne 2-3). William Penn explained that religion is “nothing else but the love of God and man” (qtd. in Yount 20) . Rufus Jones, a twentieth-century Quaker philosopher, stated, “the springs of religion lie deep down in the elemental nature of human life itself” (qtd. in Yount 20). T.S. Eliot, a poet, agreed with the Quakers that mere knowledge is insufficient for spirituality “we know too much” he suggested, “And are convinced of too little” (Yount 20).

Early Friends such as George Fox attempted to restore “primitive Christianity” by returning to the teachings of Jesus around peace, simplicity, God's care for the poor, and instant and fair access to God's Spirit. He successfully led his groups on a road of pacifism and activism. It is not hazy for the Quaker faith to be direct and embraces revelation. Likewise, many Christians in the United States blend New Age thinking with traditional religious activities because New Age is very positive. The parallels and differences between new age and Quakerism are clear. The

essential element in New Age philosophy is complete individual responsibility and Quakers are firm believers in this (Yount 23).

Despite the blend between New Age philosophy and traditional religious thinking, Americans are becoming more and more secular. According to a recent Gallup polling, most American citizens think that they can establish their own views outside of religious doctrine. However, the sociologist Will Herberg, claims that:

The religiousness characteristic of America today is very often a religiousness without religion, a religiousness without almost any kind of context or none, a way of sociability or “belonging” rather than a way of reorienting life to God... a religiousness without serious commitment, without real convictions, without genuine existential decision. (qtd. in Yount 24)

Quakers, nonetheless, have a greater difficulty getting into these formations. A former Catholic chaplain at Oxford and a Quaker scholar, Ronald Knox, devoted his life to the conversion of the entire world to the light, and the current America reflects his vision and ideals. (24)

Aside from the Quakers who sought to fight for their religious freedom, another religious group who fled England to settle in America was known as “the Puritans”. In pamphlets, sermons, chronicles, and autobiographical conversion tales, The Puritans envisioned themselves as creators of an ideal colony that carried out God’s purpose. John Winthrop, the first Puritan to arrive in North America in 1630, with a solid feeling of self-importance, was a key figure in the establishment of Massachusetts. He promised that the Puritans would be a model of Christian charity in the “New World.” A form of the social compact is also included in Winthrop's concept of the holy community. He compares the future civil society of the Puritans to an organism, characterizing it as “knit together in this work as one man,” and he claims that its purpose is to

“par-take of each other’s strength and infirmity, joy and sorrow, weal, and woe.” “The care of the public,” Winthrop preaches, “must over sway all private respects” (Modell of Christian Charity (1630) 41) Aspiration, peace, and religious freedom, as well as discipline and social control, characterize Winthrop's vision of community life in the Promised Land of North America (Paul 153).

Americans were given a sense of history as a progressive narrative guided by God through Puritanism”. They maintained a role as a new chosen people similar to, if not prophetically associated with, the Old Testament Jews. Perhaps the most crucial as Max Weber recognizes, was Puritanism’s strength in dealing with the paradoxical demands of Christian ethics in a world on the brink of modernity. Within psychology that considered an earthly success as a sign of godly favor, it advocated moderation. Such morals were essential in the New World, where opportunities abound but moral authority is elusive. Despite the fact that "the New England Way" has become a basic system for organizing religious experience in the broader American context, its major ideas are shared by Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and other evangelical Protestants (History.com).

While a new European cosmopolitan vision was penetrating towns like Boston, the Puritan communities that they established were altered. By the 1730s, what was left of American Puritanism had been divided into three Protestant factions. During the early years of the eighteenth century, several New England Congregational churches proceeded to liberalize and de-emphasize severe Calvinist principles; as they attempted to attract more newcomers to the churches, “Old Lights” was a title given to the group of liberal clergy. And “Old Calvinists” were defined as those who continued to embrace the Calvinism of Winthrop and the Mathers. During the “Great Awakening”, the American Jonathan Edwards and the English minister George Whitefield brought

the first religious revivals in the 1730s and 1740s. Their imagery, myths, and verbal structures' use of the Puritan sermon sustained the jeremiad¹. Thousands of people in the middle and southern colonies were taught the rhetoric of sin and redemption, communal errand, and personal calling. However, by the mid-1700s, the Puritan control over communities had weakened due to doctrinal debates among Puritan congregations, as well as the arrival of individuals of other religions. Yet, their impact may still be seen in American society, particularly in the notion of American Exceptionalism. (Elliott).

3. American Spirituality:

To examine why Americans have become less religious but more spiritual over time, further insight into the contributing factors is to be introduced. Its social critics have reached uncommon unanimity in one activity: blasting American "spirituality" in all of its New Age oddities and anarchic individuality. The number of opponents is quite astounding. The "new spirituality," according to James A. Herrick, an evangelical Christian author, is a mix of goddess worshipers, Gnostics, and self-proclaimed UFO abductees seeking to seize Christianity's position: Ultimately, a widespread but shallowly based challenge to the West's powerful religious legacy (Schmidt 42). The New York Times' neoconservative writer David Brooks believes that "psychobabble"² and "easygoing narcissism," is on the rise. Commentators on the left are no less prone to sheer panic. Recently, one pair cautioned that rebranding religion, as "spirituality" is a component of corporate capitalism's "silent takeover" of the internal world and the deceptive marketing of very private, consumerist faith for the benefit of global business (42).

¹ A *jeremiad* is a speech or literary work expressing a bitter lament or a righteous prophecy of doom.

²a predominantly metaphorical language for expressing one's feelings.

For a long time, detractors of American religious liberty have been developing their case. *Habits of the Heart* (1985), is a bestselling, multi-authored sociological study of the destructive consequences of individualism on American civic and religious organizations. The writers were severely dissatisfied with “liberalized conceptions” of morality and spirituality and claimed that the old romantic ideas of self-sufficiency and the open road were now damaging the welfare of society, family, and church. “Discovering oneself” and “leaving religion” had become complementary practices in a culture that had been too long immersed in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s expressive individualism (42). Many Americans were creating their own religious tales in addition to moral vocabulary and collective experiences provided by faith communities. The social implications of such a fragmented spiritual path were visible not only in the unraveling of church life but also in the diminishing ties to public marriage, family, and citizenship (42).

During the evangelical Protestant vernacular of personal devotion in 1800, the word spirituality had little meaning, but throughout the following century of transcendentalist agitation, it eventually shifted from an abstractly philosophical term expressing a divine attribute or the intangible character of the soul to one imbued with independence, interiority, and eccentricity (42-44). In other words, Transcendental thought played an important role in shaping the concept of American spirituality.

One cannot understand spirituality without referring to Transcendentalism. The movement began with the liberal New England Congregationalists, who differed from traditional Calvinism in two ways: In contrast to the bleaker Puritan vision of complete and unavoidable human sinfulness, they believed in the value and usefulness of human endeavor. They valued unity rather than the “Trinity” of God (hence the word “Unitarian,” which was initially a term of abuse that they embraced.) The majority of Unitarians believed that Jesus was inferior to God the Father but

superior to humans (Goodman 1). William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), the Unitarians' leading preacher, depicted traditional Congregationalism as a fear-based religion and contended that Jesus redeemed people from sin, not merely from punishment. His sermon “Unitarian Christianity” (1819) condemned “the conspiracy of ages against the liberty of Christians” (Channing 336). This contributed to the name of the Unitarian movement.

The Unitarians were considered “modern.” They sought to reconcile Locke's empiricism with Christianity by claiming that the narratives of miracles in the Bible give irrefutable proof of the reality of religion. However, it was exactly on this basis that the transcendentalists criticized Unitarianism. Seeing that they appreciated Channing's thought that humans may evolve more like God, Hume convinced them that no physical proof of religion could be sufficient. The publishing of an English version of F. D. E. Schleiermacher's *Critical Essay Upon the Gospel of St. Luke* (1825), further fueled skepticism about religion which suggested that the Bible was an outcome of human history and culture. In addition to the belief that nature, including humans, possesses the power and authority usually assigned to a separate god (1-2).

A direct connection with God and nature was extremely important to the Transcendentalists. Ralph Waldo Emerson (2008) states in his essay “Nature” that “The foregoing generations beheld God and Nature face to face; we—through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe?” (Sealts 38). The heavenly, mystical, and supernatural light poured upon the human soul by the spirit of God was what Transcendentalists sought to restore. They believed that the unrestricted expression of individual emotions was the only way to solve human issues. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a key proponent of American Transcendentalism, believed that the spiritual world is more important than the physical world. He considered that the physical world supports humankind by making them aware of its glory and offering necessary

goods (Manzari 1). Emerson and his followers believed that humans discover the truth within themselves; Self-reliance and individualism were important to them, as were individuality, a deep connection to nature, god, and beauty. In addition, the doctrine and organized churches of orthodox Christianity were viewed by transcendentalists as interfering with man's spiritual relationship with God. They advocated a refusal of Christian authority and acquiring knowledge of God through revelation (2).

In addition to theology, during the mid-nineteenth century, transcendentalists were heavily interested in a wide range of social concerns; they were deemed nonconformists by themselves and others. The transcendental principles, including self-reliance, individualism, and nature led to a desire for social transformation since such tenants were centered on the concept of emancipation. Concepts of self-reliance, self-knowledge, and godly potential in all individuals turned into a belief in equality for all people in society, regardless of race, gender, or any other oppressive axis. The institution of slavery was undoubtedly the most conspicuous subject with which Transcendentalists were engaged, and they were all firmly opposed to it. Transcendentalism and its adherents were so versatile and eclectic that they addressed a wide range of topics (Kane 8).

The early 19th Century saw the rise of nascent capitalism and the Industrial Revolution, which made the Western world increasingly materialistic. As the convergence of the Communication Revolution, Market Revolution, and Transportation Revolution spread urbanization, Transcendentalists started looking for lives centered on individualism and simplicity, two things they regarded as essential to comprehending their own Souls as well as the Universe. Transcendentalists were concerned that the materialistic world's greed would destroy spirituality. The Second Great Awakening (1795-1835), which comprised various theological and social reform groups, also supported the growth of transcendentalism, because they believed in human

equality and wanted to see it represented in society. Many of them felt compelled to pursue these activities as a result of class divides generated by industrialization and immigration (Curtis 4).

However, considering religious beliefs, it is reasonable to anticipate increasing diversity and cultural hybridization, as well as having them validated by individual experience and requirements; the ability to customize and highlight one's spiritual life appears to have never been higher. In the United States, the growing diversity of religious options is combined with a profoundly established cultural value of individual decision-making and self-fulfillment to create an increasingly diverse religious environment in which people are allowed, and often required, to adjust their beliefs and practice commitments to their own requirements. Alternatively, traditional ideas and many traditional ways of belonging are declining, however, belief and belonging are not extinct; they are evolving into new forms with shifting dynamics. As a significant generation of Americans departs and individuals live longer lives, the manner in which variety and individuation impact spirituality and religion will undoubtedly alter (Williams 16-18).

4. Myths as Religious Explanations:

What is common between religion and myths is that both of them are based on strong beliefs and are used to seek knowledge and better understanding of the world around us. On the one hand, “The term *religion* defines a system of formally organized beliefs and practices typically centered around the worship of supernatural forces or beings” (Gale). Mythology, on the other hand “is a collection of myths, or stories, belonging to a particular religious or cultural tradition used to explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon” (Gale). These myths are mainly related to religious topics, but some of them also hold cultural significance as well; such as the folklore story of Aladdin and the Magical Lamp. Since most myths include imaginary characters or objects (e.g.: fairies) or ancient spiritual beliefs that do not exist anymore (e.g.: Some European and Asian

mythologies such as Greek, Romans, Chinese, etc., centered around having multiple gods and goddesses), many of their religious believers refuse the use of the term “myths” to describe their religious stories (Gale).

It is commonly known that there are certain things in life that can’t be simply formulated in theoretical language. If we take the theory of creation as an example, we would find millions of tales and myths revolving around it. In *Genesis*, for example, particular parts of the world are created seriatim; in an Egyptian myth, Kheper, the creator deity, says, “I planned in my heart,” and in a Maori myth the creator deity proceeds from inactivity to increasing stages of activity. as a result, people resort to myths, symbols and legends to fill in the gaps. Taking America as an example, when having a look over the American socio-historical background, one can simply notice the richness of its mythological and spiritual side. The land of dreams is full of myths and legends that tackle a variety of topics, one of which is religion. The question posed here would be who first created such myths and what purpose did they serve and might even still do? (L. K. Nielsen n.p)

Religiously speaking, the vast majority of people, especially those of faith, believe that religious matters should not be segmented or studied in separation to their religious meanings. Instead, we are asked to follow our ancestors’ steps as they have done before, all being part of our history. If not, we would miss the true essence of worship (Douglas).At the same time, many others had the urge to look for some answers to the things that their humble knowledge about their religion was incapable of explaining. Mircea Eliade in his work *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* explains that we are a part of a transcendent reality in which repetition is the key to a healthy spiritual life. “The primitive” simply does what has been once done by others before him; Following gods and religious doctrines is a must if people want to have a healthy

straight life. As a crucial part of these primitive religions, obedience to gods is something undebatable, even for a polytheistic religion like the Indian Sanskrit; “We must do what the gods did in the beginning” (*Shatapatha Brahmana*, VII, 2, 1,4). If not on the basis of logic, it’s because it is what he was told that his grandparents used to do: “His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others” (Eliade 5).

Myths can be used as a tool to transfer such ideas/beliefs through time and from one generation to another. Some might believe that certain matters could not be explained by reason that is why we need supernatural and surreal powers, legends and myths to make them more "realistic" and comprehensible. Using the Aborigines of southeastern Australia, as an example, who used to use a stone knife in circumcision because that was what their ancestors once did (21). In the Egypt of the later centuries, for example, the power of rite and word possessed by the priests was due to imitation of the primordial gesture of the god Thoth, who had created the world by the force of his word. The Bible also offers a solid proof of such words as Jesus says: “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15). implying that following his deeds is part of their ‘salvation’ and that it is a part of their religion to do as he does “... as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34; 15:12).

Endless examples of such repetitions are found in our societies and religions. All of which share the idea that starting from the universe’s and our own creations to the existence of the world as we know it today, everything happened and is happening for a reason and that following our grandparents’ footsteps and religious doctrines does not make our lives invalid and meaningless. It actually shows the opposite, we are part of a process. If something happens to anyone of us, good or bad, eventually we’ll be able to see the bigger picture and get the message being sent to us. Eliade explains that “In the frame of such an existence [where man lives his life according to

extra human models], what could suffering and pain signify? Certainly not a meaningless experience that man can only [tolerate]. Whatever its nature and whatever its apparent cause, his suffering had a meaning” (Eliade 19).

As time went by these myths of creation started to fade away, and people preferred to live by their own rules and question all the truths told to them before. It is no longer about following their ancestors nor their religious beliefs, rather a revolution over everything they once believed in and a move towards tangible concrete proofs and results rather than being governed by spirituality or faith. This change has reshaped the world and brought along a new era referred to as ‘the era of the Rees; REthink, REquestion, REcheck.

5. The Power of Universal Myths:

As Philip Wilkinson and Neil Philip put in their book *Mythology*, “Every human culture has its own myths that are passed on from one generation to the next” (14). Myths are often identified as the set of sacred stories that inform us of the very beginnings of humanity and the creation of the world as we know it today, starting from the emergence of gods and the first humans to the day when life comes to an end. In between these two periods we also find numerous stories, legends and myths about the journeys undertaken by heroes, evil tricks of villains and the concepts of life and death, heavens and hell and the secrets of the underworld (14). These myths often relate to different aspects of the given culture including spiritual and social inclinations, all of which form a guide book to such cultures.

What would link metaphors to myths is the fact that in order for us to transform these ‘ideas’ into actual beliefs or rules, a proper context is needed and this context would be more

accurate only if linked with a suitable metaphor as Philip explains. Such metaphors could link elements together, even if they are unrelated in real life, in a way that would enable us to reach our intended truth/fact. The anthropologist Maya Deren said in description of myths: “Myth is the facts of the mind made manifest in a fiction of matter” (qtd. in Murray n.p). As a result, some might see these myths as an exaggeration, but if we look at them through the eyes of the teller or the believer, they would then make perfect sense (Philip 15).

Myths are parts of our lives and even our identity. In this context, Michael Ayrton in his book *The Midas Consequence*, says: “We live by myth and inhabit it and it inhabits us. What is strange is how we remake it” (197). They are what sets cultures apart and grant them uniqueness going from the legend of King Arthur to the long list of Greek gods and goddesses to the legendary epics of Hindu mythology (Morris n.p). In *The Power of Myth* by the mythologist Joseph Campbell, the writer argues that despite this individuality of mythological tales and the different interpretations of myths according to each cultural or religious groups, there is still some commonality of themes in world myths. Such similarities create a certain relief and comfort for believers especially when it comes to deep principles. Similar thought was mentioned in the insight of the Hindu scripture: “Truth is one; the sages call it by many names,” stating that certain truths which may be found in different cultures or religions are almost the same no matter how different the cults they represent may seem, they only use different connotations to identify them (9).

One of such universal myths is the one of God’s Resurrection. For thousands of years, people have shared the belief of the revival or rebirth of a dying divinity or important creature (Morris). In an article entitled “Death, Resurrection, and Shrine Visitations: An Islamic Perspective” written by Mohamed Elaskary and Eun Kyeong Yun, they mention some of these numerous cases that include both Sunni and Shia Muslims who believe in the coming of the Mahdi,

who, according to their beliefs, will save them from the temptations of the Antichrist and help them prevail the Jews in their final battle with them (Elaskary and Yun 1). As for the Christians, Jesus Christ is their true savior. His coming back to life again will resurrect all of his followers, dead and alive, and therefore grants them eternal afterlife. This being representative of the cycle of life. Jesus from the gospel of John says “Verily, Verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). This fascinating act of rebirth is the core essence of almost all religions.

Another popular example of universal truths or mythological patterns is The Hero’s Quest or Journey. In this regard, and as a response to Bill Moyers’ question concerning the reason why myths tend to include heroes quite often, Campbell states that: “A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself” (113). In almost every epic story over the course of history, a special character is used to describe a heroic persona that holds the good qualities of man and took part in good deeds only. He says “Well, there are two types of deed. One is the physical deed, in which the hero performs a courageous act in battle or saves a life. The other kind is the spiritual deed, in which the hero learns to experience the supernormal range of human spiritual life and then comes back with a message” (113).

In his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell uses the theory of the monomyths to explain the fact that almost all the tales including such hero share a similar narrative structure. This only confirms the idea that the world, despite all the differences found, is somehow interconnected using these legends. Such connection is even more evident nowadays than in ancient times; as referred to in *Idylls* by Theocritus “...this mighty man, a broad-chested hero, supreme of all creatures, shall rise among the stars to a throne in heaven...” (Theocritus XXXIV). This only confirms the idea that the world, despite all the differences found, is somehow

interconnected through the use of these legends. Such connection is even more evident nowadays than in ancient times. With the emergence of social media that are adopted as quickly as they are developed across the globe.

Another example would be the myth of The Great Flood or the Deluge. A flood that would drown the whole world is a thought that is present in probably all different cultures. In the Ancient Sumerian Religious Epic *Eridu Genesis*, humans were created to be servants of gods in order to cultivate the lands and worship them (Britannica). Later on, the gods decided to destroy all humanity and a huge boat was built by Ziusudra to escape and survive such a disaster who was later on rewarded with the gift of immortality for his deeds. Similar Mesopotamian story was the Gilgamesh Epic. In *In Search of the Sublime*, it is explained that the protagonist Gilgamesh “... was wise, he saw mysteries and knew secret things, he brought us a tale of the days before the Flood...” (75). Utnapishtim, the only man that escaped death, and his wife built a boat and took along with them animals in an attempt to survive the flood they were informed about by a god (Morris). Such myths also exist in Abrahamic religions, namely, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It represents Noah as the hero of the story who was ordered by God to build a great Ark and save God’s believers.

The repetition of mythology’s essential elements is one of the most fascinating characteristics of its universality. The core deities and common narratives of each religion or mythology can be found all throughout the world. This regularity can be attributed to a variety of factors. Mythologies frequently have their own deities and legends that are particular to their given location and time. At the same time, there are shared deities that appear across multiple cultures and regions. The sun and moon deities, for example, can be found in practically every mythology or religion, including many myths on each continent, ranging from Aztec to Zoroastrian. This is

significant because it demonstrates how really and completely the world is connected. This connection can be traced back to a variety of factors, including trade, conflict, and art, all of which were common causes of the spread of anything in ancient times. Trade propagated ideas by word of mouth, war by conquering people, and art by conveying ideas through painting, theater, and poetry. This explains Joseph Campbell's remark in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* concerning his theory known as monomyths, and how it states that all hero tales have the same plotline:

Whether the hero be ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian, gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan...Nevertheless, there will be found astonishingly little variation in the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained. If one or another of the basic elements of the archetypal pattern is omitted from a given fairy tale, legend, ritual, or myth, it is bound to be somehow or other implied. (35)

Lydia. L in her known installation about mythology and the commonalities that occur between cultures across the world "Universal Mythology: Stories That Circle The World", shares a similar thought. She says:

This and other similar similarities show how small the earth really is and how interconnected even the farthest apart cultures are. This connection is apparent in today's world, even more so than in ancient times. With the emergence of social media, stories spread with unimaginable speed, creating challenges, memes, and trends that are taken in as quickly as they were created across the globe. (7)

It is, therefore, no secret that despite the passage of time, people from different cultures still share some common characteristics when it comes to myths, legends, and folktales.

6. Joseph Campbell: The Monomyth Theory

Joseph Campbell in his interview on television back in 1988 explained mythology by saying “The images of Myth are reflections of spiritual and depth potentialities of every one of us. Through contemplating those we evoke those powers in our own lives to operate through ourselves” (Campbell). For this study, it was of interest to look into Joseph Campbell’s works. The twentieth century’s most eminent mythologist has worked for fifty years as a teacher, scholar, compiler, and thinker to develop a comprehensive overview of all the mythology that humankind has created. He believes mythology is just a result of human biological processes; in other words, mythology is sociobiological. Campbell, who was heavily inspired by Jungian philosophy, thinks that myths have shared archetypal features that are replicated incomparable or equivalent forms or patterns in geographically and historically various cultures. These myths are man’s fundamental images. He began compiling some of his lecture notes early on, eventually producing one of the century’s greatest works, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), a work whose title reveals his archetypal preconceptions (Hauptman 58).

According to Paris Mawby, despite Campbell’s interest in mythology, it is vital to recognize his associated religious concerns, not least since he often tackled the religion question explicitly. Misinterpreted mythology, according to Campbell, was merely one of several issues that included humanity’s frequently erroneous religiosity; and the advantages of properly religious understanding were available through the same interpretative methods he brought particularly to the examination of mythology. Although for Campbell, a certain form of religiosity was nothing more than misunderstood mythology, elsewhere he advocates a methodological re-appropriation of religious concepts in support of his broader purpose for human flourishing. Religion and mythology, in this sense, can both serve valid human interests (Mawby 79).

Mawby further explains that one of the most intriguing and maybe fascinating aspects of Campbell's work is how he depicts the typical obscure spirituality of the modern secularist. Though what appear to be religious utterances, Campbell often avoids direct supernatural claims whenever possible. While every mythical concept is a metaphor for human spiritual potential, any participation of the eternal is attainable in the here and now. Although Campbell stated several things that indicated sympathy for the concept of enduring consciousness—though not permanent personality—he considered that the most obvious benefits of mythology were for the lives we are most acquainted with. Part of myth's function is to ease the proper integration of individuals into societies, however, in today's world of fast societal change, this vital role is hampered. Myths may have provided valuable insights into the culture from which they emerged over thousands of years; modern societies are far too diverse and unreliable to permit this. Myths had time to grow and reflexively nourish their parent cultures in the past, but the contemporary world confronted Campbell with a new issue. Campbell's ultimate recommendation for mythology to continue serving humanity was for people to see beyond their culturally constrained religious personas, for understanding the universal spiritual potential that they were born with (80-81).

Furthermore, Campbell initiates his exploration of mythic traditions by defining the bounds of his philosophy. Thus, upon emphasizing the extent and universality of myths, he describes myth as a global possession of all humans, without geographical limitations. As a result, he opines in *The Hero with A Thousand Faces* that myths have evolved, and they have served as the vital inspiration for everything else that has emerged from the processes of the human body and mind throughout the inhabited world in all ages and under all conditions (Okoro 11). As he puts it,

It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestations'

religious philosophies, arts and the social form of primitive and historic man, prime discoverers in science and technology, the very dreams that blister steep boils up from basic magic rung of myth. (1)

Campbell uncovered a great deal of information in mythology, whether in a traditional or modern environment. He contends that myth, in all generations, bears a distinctive efficiency that touches and inspires the inner creative center of the human psyche. Thus, his idea of the monomyth is a generalization of the mythical quest and central character; the legendary hero whose mission was to achieve some ultimate or spiritual objective. Despite the fact that there is a wide range of mythical adventure tales from many cultures around the world, what the notion of monomyth indicates is that there is a universal narrative beneath all myths. Kingsley Okoro argues that in this case, Campbell employed the concept to convey the idea that the entire human race can be considered as retelling a single tale, the immense spiritual significance of which is related to our quest for the basic and everlasting force that is the origin and into which everything will return (12).

The structure of the story may be categorized using three stages of the hero's quest; each one contains its phases: the departure stage, as Brigid Flynn explains in her online work, starts with the step of the call to adventure, or the call to action, it can manifest itself in a variety of ways. It disrupts the hero's everyday life—a danger to his life, dear ones, or society. The hero cannot ignore the call to action. It is an interruption to his normal life, a task that must be faced (Flynn n.p). In the “Refusal to Call”, the hero may not always reply promptly to the call, but may stop and perhaps choose not to answer at all (Delahay 13). During the journey, the hero often receives “Supernatural Aid.” This means that the hero accepts the call to action eventually and his mentor

or mystical companion appears. This supernatural help will act as a guide archetype, providing the hero with the physical or metaphorical equipment required to begin the quest.

After that, the “Crossing of the First Threshold” is the point at which the hero's quest officially launches; this stage of the hero's journey might bring with it peril and the mystery. After crossing the first threshold, the hero encounters the “Belly of The Whale” or the first serious challenge of the quest. This phase represents the hero's complete separation from the version of himself and the universe they formerly recognized. It leads the hero to an important stage which is the initiation part; it begins with the “Road of Trials”, the protagonist here faces a sequence of rough times that will catalyze his metamorphosis into the genuine hero he was born to be. In this process called “Meeting with the Goddess”, the hero becomes friends with a supporter or mentor and helps him on their journey (Flynn n.p).

Next, in the “Woman as Temptress” phase, the temptation happens in which a woman persuades the hero to forsake the mission. Furthermore, we have the phase called the “Atonement with The Father.” this phase marks a significant major shift in the story. It is at this point that the hero realizes the full meaning of his quest. From the previous step comes the “Apotheosis”, where the hero becomes completely conscious of their power, purpose, or talent because of their encounter with the metaphorical “father.” Campbell concludes this stage with the “Ultimate Boon”; during this process, the hero finds fulfillment by completing the objective he made for himself. This brings “Refusal of the Return” in the Return stage, during this, the hero feels hesitant to rejoin to the world they formerly knew. Despite the fact that the hero has finished their goal, certain alternative forces may continue to pursue or follow them in the “Magic Flight” element (Flynn).

In addition, similarly to how the hero was helped by the “goddess” during the Initiation Stage, they are helped by an ally or mentor to peacefully return home in the “Rescue from Without”. Also, when “Crossing the Return Threshold”, he returns to the everyday life he or she left behind. And after his step of successfully completing his journey, the hero is now a different person and he is the “Master of the Two Worlds”. Finally, In the final step of “Freedom to Live” The hero has finished his mission, avoided terrible danger, matured into a better person, and gained the right to live peacefully and contentedly. (Flynn) According to Campbell, these stages, along with the symbols encountered throughout the tale, create the required metaphor for expressing the spiritual reality that the story is attempting to portray (Okoro 12).

In conclusion, the recurring presence of certain themes and times in many myths leads to the conviction that these elements depict universal and eternal realities about humanity. Mythology serves as a cultural framework for a community or people to teach their children and give the method of coping with the many stages of life from birth to death because it is closely linked to society and time in which it exists and cannot be separated from it.

7. Friedrich Nietzsche and “the Godless World”:

Friedrich Nietzsche is notable for declaring that God is dead and for writing numerous of his works and theories with the assumption that man must establish a new mode of being given the death of God. The term “God is dead” was originally used in “The Madman,” that appeared in the *Gay Science*. It is stated as follows:

Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly, "I seek God! I seek God!"... “Whither is God?" he cried. “I shall tell you. We have killed him -

you and I. All of us are his murderers.”...“God is dead. God remains dead.
And we have killed him. (25)

Nietzsche believed that society no longer needed God when he said this. As a cultural truth, God was cognitively superfluous. Humanity is unaffected by the existence or lack of faith, and hence belief in God is superfluous (Langford 1).

Nietzsche recognized the severe ramifications of this stance; we are practically on our own without God. The death of the Christian God involves the demise of Christian principles, which have anchored Western society since Constantine's conversion to Christianity in the fourth century. Langford explains that according to Nietzsche, civilization was corrupt and decaying. He believed that, at best, individuals were unconscious of this truth; at worst, they were informed but chose to avoid confronting the reality of the situation by engaging in self-deception. He saw that people were not prepared to confront either their own mortality or the truth and consequences of a Godless world. Religion's endurance was proof of this. Notably, Nietzsche believed that Christianity's emphasis on the search for truth, he refers to this as the drive to truth, which has liberated humanity from the necessity for Christianity itself (1).

He proposed that the quest for certainty resulted in the creation of the scientific method, which resulted in the revelation of the “truth” that naturalistic explanations of our place in the world are all adequate. God is superfluous since we have found our ultimate solutions to life's major questions. We fill the last gaps, and the God of the Gaps is no longer mandatory. Nietzsche, finally making this revelation, explains that society has failed to see that God is dead. The explanation, he claims, may be revealed in religion's fundamental function. To argue that religion may play an instrumental role is to raise the possibility of religion being used to achieve the goals

or objectives of a certain individual or group within a specific community. The role of religious belief or practice is therefore brought into question. (2)

Nietzsche was critical of Christian ideas and beliefs, but he was more focused on the purpose of religion. He was claiming that even if Christian ideas are incorrect, their utility is not always reduced. Langford explains that Nietzsche, like Marx, regarded religion's origins as having a sociological foundation. He considered that religion arose in primitive communities as a means of appeasing or regulating nature. These societies thought that natural forces were 'aware and volitional creatures' to whom all blessings and curses were attributed. A society would strive to appease the deity with offerings in the hope of earning blessings rather than punishments. Religious practices were formed in this manner, but they were nothing more than human-made constructs. According to Nietzsche, Christianity was not an exception to the rule; it, as well, arose as a result of human need (Langford 2).

Unlike many around him who had failed to recognize the death of God or those who realized but preferred to believe otherwise, Nietzsche welcomed the task of a godless society. He saw that this revelation had made humanity free, but that freedom was frightening since the burden was now on humans rather than God. Simultaneously, he saw this new freedom as humanity's best chance to take advantage of the power and direct its fate (6). Nietzsche states that:

We philosophers and free spirits in fact feel at the news that the 'old God is dead' as if illumined by a new dawn; our heart overflows with gratitude, astonishment, presentiment, expectation - at last the horizon seems to us again free, even if it is not bright, at last our ships can put out again, no matter the danger, every daring venture of knowledge is again permitted. (343)

He opposed a dualistic worldview, claiming that because there are no certainties to be revealed, we must create our own. Morality, he claims, is perspectival - influenced by culture and so pluralistic. He sought a “revaluation of all values” as a result of which the previous religious principles would have to be reconsidered. Living could not be sustained as previously without a revision of society's moral rules (Langford 3).

Since culture is getting progressively secularized, the explanation is not hard to decipher. In the 16th century, the scientific revolution that started at that time quickly provided a means of comprehending natural phenomena that were demonstrably superior to previous attempts to understand nature by making use of religious beliefs or scripture. This approach gained traction during the Enlightenment in the 18th century, which solidified the concept that reason and evidence, instead of scripture or tradition, should serve as the foundation for our ideas. When combined with 19th-century industrialization, the increased technological power released by science gave individuals a sense of ultimate control over nature.

Nietzsche explains in various parts of *The Gay Science*, his statement that “God is dead” is more than merely a religious conviction. According to him, much of our default way of thinking has religious aspects that we are unaware of (Nietzsche 340). For example, it is quite simple to talk about nature as if it has objectives. Alternatively, if we conceive of the cosmos as a massive machine, this metaphor implies, subtly, that the machine was designed. Possibly the most core of all is our belief in absolute truth. What is meant by this is something akin to how the world might be depicted from “God's perspective”; a vantage point that is not simply one of several, however, for Nietzsche, all knowledge must be viewed through a constrained lens (Westacott).

Nietzsche's work serves as the foundation for current theories for current beliefs concerning the present perspective regarding the system of beliefs' position in society. The conceptual work of Nietzsche offers a great framework for comprehending the key problems of his ideological and cultural writings. Besides, his engagement is highly instructive for understanding another major narrative of a key major theorist, Charles Taylor, whose works marked a crucial step in presenting the contemporary world and society.

8. Charles Taylor and the new modern world:

As an indicating alternative to Nietzsche's ideas, Charles Taylor examines the various forms upon which modernity incorporates religion into its set of beliefs and values as a paradigm for studying the connection of both modernity and religion. Charles Taylor is, without a doubt, one of the most well-known and important contemporary philosophers. His exceptional ability to explain his ideas in the broadest intellectual and cultural framework conceivable receives this acclaim. His ideas connect the past and the present, and culture is viewed as a diverse mosaic of discourses. Taylor expertly wanders across religion, art, science, philosophy, politics, and culture in his exploration of their underlying patterns and fundamental meaning. His theoretical contribution is unquestionably compelling. Furthermore, as part of his colossal work *A Secular Age* (2007) demonstrates, the issue of secularization to which Taylor devoted all of his efforts onto putting it (Garbowski 7).

Secularization is generally seen as an offspring of modernity for its longstanding tradition. It is related to the epistemological perspective and the creation of the Cartesian *ego cogito* as a philosophical notion. Taylor uses terms such as "disengaged self," "functional reason," and "autonomous individual" to describe this situation. The contemporary self strives to build its universe from scratch, regardless of prior knowledge or tradition. As a result, such an attempt was

sure to call into doubt the previously unquestioned hierarchies and classifications, which it did, as Taylor calls it after Max Weber, the initiation process of increasing disenchantment. Following that, there was a divergence between faith and reason, science and religion. The political ramifications have been no less serious (8).

Furthermore, disenchantment is considered a key aspect of secularization according to Taylor (*Dilemmas and Connections* 288). Disenchantment can therefore be rendered as demagnification or demystification and it is highly connected to spirituality and magic instead of the death of a Christian Omni-God. Besides Nietzsche, Taylor attributes the contemporary West's disenchantment to the Enlightenment and other advancements happening during that period, including empirical science and rising individualism. "The dominant outlook of modern Western technological society" is described according to Taylor as "Enlightenment rationalism", which is characterized by a utilitarian view of notions like freedom and rationality (*Sources of the Self* 234). Aside from these findings, which are consistent with Nietzsche's argument, both philosophers provide new elements to the discussion. According to Taylor, the ideals and values of the Enlightenment stem from eighteenth-century deism, because it emphasized human flourishing as a major concept in God's goals while creating the cosmos. Deists felt that what God had granted them could be used to fulfill our divine purpose. Taylor emphasizes that the necessity for comprehending this is a pragmatic reason, meaning; God gave us the ability to build a scientific perspective on nature and religion. In addition, Taylor, although concerned about the implications of disenchantment, also addresses the potential aspects of disenchantment for the modern individual, through demystifying the universe, the world is limited to a materialistic means to an end that is exploited and controlled by human advantage. (I. T. Peeters 19)

Taylor characterizes the premodern ego as having permeable boundaries between the self-spiritual, and moral impulses while the contemporary self is a “buffered self,” safeguarded by the limits of pragmatic rationalism, while the self-governing and uninfluenced personal agency is what modernity prides itself on governing and uninfluenced personal agency is what modernity prides itself on. The buffered self's attitude, on the other hand, has major implications. As Nietzsche demonstrated, modern society suffers from nihilism, existential crises, and a pervasive sense of dissatisfaction and restlessness. To put it another way, the human part of humankind does not suit the principles of the Enlightenment and is in peril. (I. T. Peeters 21) This occurs, Taylor claims, because the Enlightenment-era ideal of freedom has been overemphasized, resulting in excessively high use of the term individualism. The experience of nothingness, hopelessness. Thus, occurs not just on an individual level, but also in the public domain (Taylor, *A Secular Age* 308)

Moreover, aside from expressions of anguish over the contemporary world's disenchantment, Taylor also makes remarks about the possibilities of re-enchantment. According to Germain McKenzie, Taylor affirms clearly that the process of marginalization of religion is not continuous, but encompasses both the collapse of existing religious forms and the emergence of other ones. He also believes that religion will never die since humans are spiritual individuals who seek purpose in their life (McKenzie 4). Similarly, Taylor is discussed in relation to the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, who once claimed that humans believe in God who possesses the most desirable attributes to an extent that humanity cannot reach. This means that this concept is basic: believing in a specific deity serves as a reflection of a person's character and goals. The issue therefore becomes, what kind of deity does a statistical subject in a consumer culture require? (I. T. Peeters 22)

In today's world, supermarkets have become the commercial shrines of consumer culture; the barrier for living necessities (material things like a television or automobile) is increasing, while fewer objects are deemed luxury. This process is described by Taylor using the term “(meta)topical” spaces rather than consumer metaphysics: Happiness would be attained through positive deeds in premodern times which is the metatopical space (I. T. Peeters 23). In modern times, people purchase brand apparel or shoes (topical) worn by great figures to feel more connected to them and their world (metatopical). This is due to the contemporary belief that material items might provide touch with some type of exalted existence. It is a sort of re-enchantment in which a group worships a god for the sake of personal benefit because Re-enchantment can take two forms: The first is the understanding that there are components of the cosmos that do not belong in science's rationalist epistemologies, such as fate, luck and the need for a moral, spiritual higher realm. While the other features communal attachments such as ethnicity, sexualities, intoxications, and epiphanies; the escapism of television, and the internet; and consumerist cultural pleasure (24).

Taylor undoubtedly agrees that, despite the death of God, modernity has not caused the vanishing of religion and the rest of the system of beliefs. Given human nature, religion is unlikely to disappear entirely due to Spirituality and devotion emerging in many ways since premodern times.

9. Science and Technology as a New Religion:

The clash between the ancient and new gods in Gaiman's novel, i.e. the confrontation between religion and technology, exemplifies what is important in American culture. From prehistoric times to the present, technology in all of its different forms and religion in all of its various traditions and expressions have had a long and perplexing connection. The world's

religions' constantly developing formal systems of religious ideas and more informal everyday practices exhibit a wide range of challenges, conceptions, attitudes, and values regarding technology. The complicated influences that various technologies have had on the religious impulse, whether explicitly or implicitly can be clearly seen (Cheek). In its interrelation definition, the realms of knowledge of science are empirical inquiries regarding the universe's constitution, while the domains of expertise of religion are moral ideals and spiritual meaning. One distinction between science and religion is that science is concerned with the natural world, but religion is involved with both the natural and spiritual worlds. Supernatural beings such as gods or angels are not considered in scientific explanations. Neuroscientists, for instance, often explain human ideas in terms of brain states rather than an intangible soul or spirit (De Cruz 3).

Western cultures have always had conflicting knowledge as driving factors. According to John Caiazza, a religion expert, the secular and the revealed, and when science and religion were separated, modern science came to symbolize secular knowledge. Whereas religion arrived to represent the revealed or divine knowledge (Caiazza 208). Furthermore, along with the emphasis on empiricism and theoretical frameworks in the seventeenth century, Modern science began to form and distinguish itself from other ideas and areas, such as philosophy and natural history. The Scientific Revolution highlights the transition from a variety of beliefs to scientific knowledge, as well as the swift development of new technologies. Modern science has evolved into its own complex set of worldviews and beliefs. Science, like religion, has become an umbrella term when various views are grouped together (Pohjalainen 20).

The secular and revealed knowledge have always been conflicting elements in Western cultures, following the separation of science and religion, contemporary science began to demonstrate secular knowledge, while religion came to symbolize revealed knowledge

(Pohjalainen 22). Religion now has less authority than it did earlier, whilst science has risen to prominence. Looking at how prevalent technology is, one may see the contemporary relevance of science. This is strong evidence of the importance of techno science and how people have opted to accept it as their source of authority. Of course, this does not imply that techno science is the sole authority, but it has strengthened its position in society. That leads to the question, why cannot personal techno science accomplish the same as personal religion in terms of beliefs and explanations? Pohjalainen explains that making one's own interpretations of scientific facts without any objective discoveries would be absurd. People, however, decide how they use technology, for example, by studying and experiencing techno science as if it were a personal religion. Individuals choose how they spend their time and focus on freely expressing their opinions (22).

Techno science is a technically and scientifically based worldview and knowledge system that may be contrasted to conventional forms of religion that are founded on divine knowledge. It may be done with the help of technological advancements, and it has a highly materialistically religious form on a personal level. This will be illustrated in the second chapter of the dissertation by connecting it to the characters representing the new Gods' in the novel.

Conclusion:

This theoretical chapter represents a general view concerning myths and religion and their role in shaping America, specifically, and the whole world in general. American spirituality and the immigrants' faith and how these immigrants succeeded in bringing their cultural and religious heritage with them to the new world. Finally, we tried to shed light on how myths were used as religious explanations by citing numerous examples from around the world. The next

part is the theoretical framework in which we used the works and arguments of Joseph Campbell, Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Taylor as a reference and a backup to the ideas presented in the work. Also, we investigate the powers that universal myths wield and the role they play in shaping the world as we know it today.

Chapter TWO:

The Ramification: The Paradigm Shift of Culture and Beliefs in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*.

1. Introduction:

This chapter provides an analysis of some key elements and major themes found in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, mainly the paradigm shift from old cultural and religious beliefs to modern beliefs. It first offers a short overview about both the writer and the novel. Also, it investigates the existence of old gods and the emergence of newer ones within the novel. Moreover, this chapter addresses the protagonist's, Shadow, journey seeking truth, meaning, and spirituality. Furthermore, it explores the world of mythical beings created by Gaiman and how their life and death experiences have shaped both the novel and the world. Finally, it sheds light on the conflict taking place between the old and new gods, its cultural significance, and its impact on those characters representing gods.

2. Neil Gaiman and *American Gods*:

In an article entitled "Whatever I Loved About Enid Blyton Isn't There when I Go Back As an Adult" by Gaiman that appeared in *The Guardian*, the author declares:

I don't recall there being a time that I ever didn't want to be a writer, but CS Lewis and his Narnia books definitely made me realize that these stories I loved were being written by a person. Lewis wasn't pretending to be invisible, he was very happily there in the text, making these lovely friendly asides to the reader. I loved that so much, and loved the idea of doing it too (The Guardian).

Neil Richard Gaiman, born November 10, 1960, Portchester, Hampshire, England, is an English author of short fiction, novels, comic books, graphic novels... He is best known for the comic book series *The Sandman* and novels *Stardust*, *American Gods*, *Caroline* and *Neverwhere*. Gaiman gave a huge credit to librarians for encouraging his love for reading:

I wouldn't be who I am without libraries. I was the sort of kid who devoured books, and my happiest times as a boy were when I persuaded my parents to drop me off in the local library on their way to work, and I spent the day there. I discovered that librarians actually want to help you: they taught me about interlibrary loans. (ettron)

Gaiman gained huge success and was widely praised by critics for his works, his perfectly pictured fantasy tales, and his excellence in employing dark humor in the matter (Ray). In a review talking about where his early passion for writing came from, Gaiman says:

I think the most important thing I learned from Stephen King I learned as a teenager, reading King's book of essays on horror and on writing, *Danse Macabre*. In there he points out that if you just write a page a day, just 300 words, at the end of a year you'd have a novel. It was immensely reassuring – suddenly something huge and impossible became strangely easy. (Diamond)

While most authors prefer following a more consistent style of writing, Gaiman rather favors writing all that may suit his readers and the themes of his works. Since the majority of readers enjoy being able to relate to the protagonist/main characters of the works they read, Gaiman often creates such a realistic and easy way to connect to characters. The progress that the characters go through sometimes from a humble man to a local hero, such a quick and yet smooth transition of

events and characters is a very unique characteristic of Gaiman's incredible writing style (Hana Sabo).

When asked about the writers he admires and might be his source of inspiration, Gaiman says: "I'm not the best person to say if something's influenced me or not" (Diamond), but he had various views on different popular comic, horror and fictional tales authors, which said to have similar writing styles as his own. In a review entitled "Neil Gaiman on the Writers Who Influenced and Inspired Him," he was asked about Edgar Allan Poe's influence on him; Gaiman declares "Poe isn't for everyone. He's too heady a draught for that. He may not be for you. But there are secrets to appreciating Poe, and I shall let you in on one of the most important ones: read him aloud." Concerning Rudyard Kipling, he answered: "I definitely don't write like Kipling but he was a literary hero as a kid." In addition to that, his answer about J. R. R. Tolkien was: "Tolkien's words and sentences seemed like natural things, like rock formations or waterfalls, and wanting to write like Tolkien would have been, for me, like wanting to blossom like a cherry tree or climb a tree like a squirrel or rain like a thunderstorm." (Diamond).

Ancient mythology has always been the drive behind Gaiman's writings. He enjoyed knowing and telling ancient tales and stories through his works. In Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*, one of the very few writings and works that addressed this topic, he tries to keep it real and present the most authentic version of these ancient myths he could find in a narrative form that is both enticing and informative. He starts the narrative with the genesis of the legendary nine worlds, mentioning dwarves, giants, the existence of deities to the talk about the rebirth of both a new time and people and the creation of worldwide popular characters such as Odin and his son Thor, in addition to the giants' son, the trickster Loki. Gaiman had such a vivid and sophisticated style of writing that he allows his readers to indulge into the work and be able to actually live through the

events of the story. One can simply dive into the story without any preconceived intent (neilgaiman.com).

Gaiman has written numerous outstanding and widely popular works along his rich career, and one of the most talked-about books of the new millennium is his novel *American Gods* (2001). *American Gods* is one of Gaiman's bestselling novels. The novel, as countless critics described it, is a fantasy work of art; St. Louis Post-Dispatch posted a critical praise that appeared on Neil Gaiman's official page, about the novel, saying that the novel is:

A fascinating tale . . . by turns thoughtful, hilarious, disturbing, uplifting, horrifying and enjoyable -- and sometimes all at once, in a curious sort of way. Those who are familiar with Gaiman's earlier work will find a satisfying yarn by a familiar master storyteller. Those who are meeting him for the first time may be surprised at just how good he is. (neilgaiman.com)

It tackles almost everything from world's ancient mythologies to the idea of rebirth and death, what people believe in as gods, things that might qualify one to be a god and how all of that changed through time creating a vicious conflict between old and new gods in the novel. The novel has won many awards, including the Hugo and Nebula Awards in 2002. It is quite simply, a contemporary masterpiece.

Gaiman employs an extremely broad definition of "gods" in this novel. His work covers various mythological creatures and legendary figures such as Norse Gods, Egyptian gods, leprechauns, minotaurs, and Johnny Appleseed. It also includes gods and figures who are still worshiped and revered, such as Jesus and Shiva. The concept of *American Gods* is that all of these

gods actually exist and that they have driven by human faith. Gods vanish when people cease believing in them. In fact, this idea has become a common fantasy motif (Inverarity).

One of the book's numerous draws is its premise. the United States has all kinds of old gods originating from different countries, and living in the myths, legends, tales and imaginations of the migrants who brought them there. It's a novel that delves into the American experience with all its beliefs and paradoxes. It also proves that gods walk among us if only we know where to look for them (Hale).

The novel *American Gods* is a reaction to the presumed viciousness of a tech-heavy, media-heavy, politicized, citified, sophisticated society. Along the novel, Gaiman contrasts belief in the old gods with the flattening, meaningless forms of contemporary media and digital technology. Wednesday, the character that presumably represents Odin, wonders what chance there is for civilization without the old gods, who represent the meaningful link with life and the earth. but it soon becomes clear that Mr. Wednesday is just as much a heartless con-artist as any of the new gods he allegedly disdains, manipulating the war for his own advantage. Shadow then must make a genuine, fundamental sacrifice, across all the fraud and grasp taking place there, to realize that eventually all you have as a person is yourself (Hale).

3. An Overview of the Old and New Gods:

Deities are strong anthropomorphic entities who wield authority over many areas of the universe. They are thought-forms generated by humanity's collective belief as well as the worship and rituals of faiths all over the world. Both the novel *American Gods* and its television version center on the gods. Whiskey Jack, in Part three, Chapter eighteen of *American Gods*, says: "This is not a good country for gods" (414) referring to America, since the existence of gods is

determined by the territory, on which they reside. North America, as depicted in *American Gods*, is a land that is not suitable for gods, leaving them somehow weaker and delicate. However, if a god is present in its home territory, they will be stronger, and their connection to the place will help them once again to resist the fall of their religions or the suspension of their worship better (Deities).

3.1 The Old Gods:

“Old Gods” is a term used to refer to the numerous supernatural entities that the immigrants, slaves and travelers brought with them to their new land. In *American Gods* for that matter, the label “Old Gods” refers to all of the gods and related creatures, including different kinds of gods such as fairies, jinns, trolls, and others, who were introduced to America by human action. All of these beings are based on existent civilizations, religions, folklore, and myths. They are, nonetheless, duplicates of the original entities (Deities).

Odin, Anansi, Chernobog, Ibis and Anubis, Thoth, Bast, Wisakedjak, Shiva, Zorya, Easter, and Kobold are among the old Gods who appear in this story. These are the Gods of foreigners who migrated to America. This novel does not feature Jesus or the Greek Gods. In many aspects, the old Gods are our educators. These Gods’ main role is to teach good manners and how to be good humans. They teach morals, virtue, things people should or should not do, and the kinds of humans they ought to or ought not to be (Weebly).

3.2 The New Gods:

In the novel, the characters representing the new gods are creatures born of Americans' unconscious adoration and belief in things like technology, money, and media. These holy beings do not belong to any mythology or folklore, but rather are born from the gap of faith left by the "Old Gods" fall. They are a newer breed of deities that frequently oppose the Old Gods. The new Gods who show up in this novel are Media, Technical Boy, Mr. World (the Leader of the New Gods), and many others. Mr. Wednesday gives a sermon to Shadow and the Old Gods when trying to convince them to join the war. He says:

Now, as all of you will have had reason aplenty to discover them for yourselves, there are new Gods growing in America, clinging to growing knots of belief: new gods of credit card and freeway, of Internet and telephone, of radio and hospital and television, gods of plastic and of beeper and of neon. Proud Gods, fat and foolish creatures, puffed up with their own newness and importance. (*American Gods* 123)

His words right here can be the most accurate description of the new gods Gaiman tries to introduce in *American Gods*. The idea of Globalization was also mentioned in Gaiman's book, embodied in the character of Mr. World. His character represents the culture of the new world in which we are all seen as a small village tied up together using the strings of technology and the internet instead of being divided into small entities and groups. The more this belief in these newer gods grows, the less our old gods can rule or actually exist (Weebly).

The Old gods are dying because humans no longer have faith in them, but rather they are being replaced by computer gods, automobile gods, media gods, corporate gods, and so on, as people are slowly becoming more materialistic. This is when the clash over power begins where

the old gods fight for their right place back in the scene, and the new gods' battle for the right to have their share of the crown. As a result, Shadow finds himself in the heart of a gods' conflict, despite the fact that he has no clue why Wednesday is interested in him or why he's so important to him (Inverarity).

4. Seeking a Personal Meaning: Shadow's Journey.

Shadow Moon is the central character and major subject of *American Gods*. A regular man from the Midwest who strangely when Mr. Wednesday recruits him as a bodyguard, finds himself entangled in the battle between the Old and New Gods. When we encounter his character in the novel, he is devastated, mourning, and struggling to get through the day after the news of his wife's death Laura, and his closest friend Robbie who happens to be having a secret love affair with her. Their deaths struck them in the midst of one of their illicit encounters. This title demonstrates Shadow's journey from doubt to belief by referring to Joseph Campbell as a firm background along with his scheme of Monomyth theory in relation to Shadow's quest because it is certainly presented as a figure in the novel.

At the beginning of the story, Shadow has no special personality traits and is rather uninteresting. A blank and skeptical slate would be a suitable first impression of him. Yet, undeniably, he is an observing person, and his doubtful thoughts during his prison years led him to develop an extra space for self-learning and improvement in order to answer his existential limitations, dread, and meaning. Later on, these are unexpectedly reflected in the next events that will guide his spiritual discovery and forge the hero and demi-god that we will see in the upcoming analysis.

Initially, Shadow has utterly lost everything. “This came from the Johnson Memorial Hospital in Eagle Point . . . Your wife. She died in the early hours of this morning. It was an automobile accident. I’m sorry.” (*American Gods* 13) he discovers that the car accident that took his wife's life also killed Robbie - and that the offer of a job perished with him. Being discharged from jail is not the worst scenario that could occur for Shadow or anybody else who has served their sentence and is eager to head to society as freshly redeemed individuals. However, it indicates a significant shift and adjustment in his life. In Nielsen’s thesis, he claims that Shadow is deprived of the ability to return to his usual bed and take solace in life's rhythms. As a result, Shadow is entirely lost, with no solid and stable point in his existence to which he can cling. When he returns to bed at night, nothing in his life is the same as it was that morning. All of that has shifted. Every way he would have set earlier for himself, everything he would have always lingered onto is now gone. Yet certainly, no person can survive in today’s society without the involvement of other people. Nobody is an island, as the expression goes. Since he appears to require work and believes that he has nowhere else to go and nothing else to do, no motive to cherish his own life so seriously any further, he chooses to take the job proposed to him by Mr. Wednesday (Nielsen 38).

Shadow is sent on a voyage across America because of this, an adventure that will alter destiny - not only for the gods but also for him. In his conversation with a guard called “Wilson” during his last day in prison, Wilson felt curious about Shadow’s character and says:

“I don’t get you, Shadow,’ said Wilson, as they walked.

“What’s not to get, sir?”

”You. You’re too ... quiet. Too polite. You wait like the old guys, but you’re what? Twenty-five? Twenty-eight?”

“Thirty-two, sir.”

“And what are you? A spic? A gypsy?”

“Not that I know of, sir. Maybe.”

“Maybe you got nigger blood in you. You got nigger blood in you, Shadow?”

“‘Could be, sir.’...”

“Yeah? Well, all I know is that you ... spook me.” (*American Gods* 12)

In the passage, we see several ways in which he is defined by others rather than himself, and how, at worst, he is an absolute wreck. An unknown person with no cultural heritage or identity. There is no specific indication that Shadow is anything other than a regular human being and he himself does not believe he is special in any way possible. Since he began working with Mr. Wednesday, he has been continuously appalled and perplexed by almost everything he has witnessed in the universe of the gods. We may describe his journey as spiritual as well. Because we will see that Shadow's path is about becoming his own person, obtaining independence and self-reliance.

Moreover, shadow is an individual who is also navigating his experience of spiritual transformation in his journey, as Delahay explains in his thesis, a connection to the mythological components is needed and included in which he occupies two important roles. At first, he is an intruder and an observer with the perspective of a common mortal. Shadow, like the characters in several of Gaiman's previous works, serves as a metaphor for everyday life, a comparison and contrast element between the gods and the realm of myth. However, as he evolves into a mythical hero and willing partner, he acquires mystical powers and abilities, and his decisions, determined by his own judgment, have a massive impact on the conflict's fate (Delahay 38). Campbell's Hero's Journey sheds a ray of light on the subject, highlighting his storyline in its given stages. However, not the entire scheme is applicable because the theory does not serve the analysis of novels but it is more concerned with the purpose of comparing mythologies and their hero's stories.

To begin with, the initiation part starts with the departure stage; Shadow has a typical life until being summoned to his quest. Although he is in jail, his experience there has been peaceful, and he is eager to return to his normal life. His 'call to adventure' is then relatively simple — a man he had never met before grants him work. This was a forceful call rather than voluntary, given that Odin and Loki planned the circumstances preceding up to his approval. He initially declines the job, believing that he still has a guaranteed job waiting for him. Until he discovers that, his alleged boss who happens to be his friend is also actually dead and that he had a secret affair with his wife. Shadow is enough shaken by it that he is sent on his quest.

In terms of supernatural aid, Shadow is aided many times. The leprechaun Mad Sweeney offers him the golden coin as an amulet after his first encounter with him. Shadow discovers later, after tossing it on Laura's grave, that it is an extremely powerful amulet obtained from the sun and its hidden ability to resurrect the dead. This results in Laura visiting Shadow, despite the fact that she is still dead. As a substitute for the gold coin symbolizing the sun, Zorya Polunochnaya offers him a silver liberty dollar depicting the Moon (Koudelková 20).

“Watch,” said Zorya Polunochnaya. She raised her hand and held it in front of the moon, so that her forefinger and thumb seemed to be grasping it. Then, in one smooth movement, she plucked at it. For a moment, it looked like she had taken the moon from the sky, but then Shadow saw that the moon shone still, and Zorya Polunochnaya opened her hand to display a silver Liberty head dollar resting between finger and thumb. (*American Gods* 98)

This token earned him his freedom twice and guides him through the afterlife's gloom. These two helping tools were only introduced at the start. Shadow, on the other hand, had multiple supernatural helpers during his quest from Ganesha, Anubis, and Eostre to revive him, and so on.

Additionally, “The Land”, a personification of America, visits and guides him in his dreams. It was extremely significant to his transition and provided needed support.

In Shadow's First Threshold Crossing, it all begins with Shadow's release from jail after three years. Additional crossings occur, one of which takes the employment offer from Wednesday. Therefore, he is metaphorically joining the new universe of gods. Finally, he set his foot in the world of gods in the House of Rocky following Odin to Valhalla, which is a great hall in the Norse mythology where heroes slain in battle are welcomed (Koudelková 21). Through the Crossing, Shadow is confronted with the full extent of America's supernatural quality.

Shadow's presence at Lakeside may be regarded the next step in his journey and stage. Furthermore, during the novel's plot, Shadow is kidnapped and kept captive, only to be rescued by Laura who morphs into another mystical helper putting him temporarily outside of the action in the imaginary belly of the whale. Once again, this occurs when he dies following his stay on Yggdrasil, a massive ash tree that spans the globe and connects earth, hell, and heaven. and he chooses to vanish entirely (22). Shadow does not depart the belly of the whale until later in the narrative because he feels an emptiness in his own soul. Even the gods Odin and Bast notably observed it, the latter of which is when Shadow realized what he had been doing all this time “holding his breath... three years... maybe longer” (*American Gods* 230). We may believe that this began the minute he realized Laura had died, and the heaviness on his spirit was carried much greater when he discovered the love of his life had betrayed him with none other than his closest buddy. Campbell describes this as a transition that the hero must experience in an attempt to metamorphose into someone better (Roslan 376). Shadow embarks on a spiritual quest while on the tree that is essential for him to advance to the next stage of the journey and determines that rather than fading away, he will begin living completely.

Additionally, the “Initiation” part of the theory explained by Campbell, is extremely difficult to apply to Shadow. The Road of Trials stage of Initiation is difficult to identify for Shadow because it appears that he is continuously confronted with challenging events, problems, and obstacles. After dealing with his wife's death and betrayal, he is consistently put to the test by Wednesday, who wants him to assert his devotion. Shadow must make quick and wise judgments while being the person he aspires to be. Koudelková explains that the most difficult test will most likely come after his death when he must pick between “the route of brutal realities” and “the way of fine lines” in the afterlife (22). Shadow's challenges occur after he has given his sacrifice and died, but the enlightenment he gains from them is essential to his path and improvement.

Next, to choose one of the Goddesses Shadow encounters on his journeys, Bast is perhaps the most similar to Campbell's definition of someone who represents “the hero’s mastery over life” (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 111). By making love to each other, Shadow and Bast join into a magical marriage, and then he’s given a choice of his desired path of life by Bast “One way will make you wise. One way will make you whole. And one way will kill you [permanently]” (*American Gods* 517). Shadow says he trusts Bast to make the decision in his place. After Bast weighed his heart against a feather, Shadow took the middle path. Shadow had to face his last judgment there, and he had to choose what he wanted his afterlife to be, to which he answered “...nothing. No heaven, no hell, no anything” (517). Shadow then undergoes a spiritual process that Bast launched for him.

While Shadow does not actually feel the physical repulsion mentioned in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, we will shift to the ‘Atonement with the Father’ stage. In *Norse Mythology*, the last battle happens against Loki after which Odin the Allfather will be resurrected. In *American Gods*, it is revealed that Odin and Loki (Wednesday and Mr. World), are the ones staging the war

among the gods in order to give Odin his final resurrection. Koudelková explains that after uncovering the truth about Odin being his father and learning about the conspiracy to slaughter gods, Shadow prevents the war, thus, forbidding Odin's resurrection (22). Shadow will not confront Odin because the god has already devoted himself as a sacrifice according to his plan. It appears to match Campbell's description of "Atonement with the Father" in which Shadow overcomes his own passivity by stopping Odin's goal of drowning the world in chaos.

Shadow's stay at Yggdrasil represents the next phase of the enlightenment stage, an essential factor of his entire quest that entirely changes him. During the final stage of initiation, Shadow receives his reward, which is not tangible, but rather the physical and mythological salvation of the world (Koudelková 23). This is primarily why the hero went on a journey (typically connected with esoteric magical powers). The hero may have won his trophy through pure willpower. Machiavellian ways, or the hero obtained it as a reward, and this will influence how it is returned (Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 159-178). In a sense that is distinct from other myths, Shadow's ultimate boon is advantageous to the mythological realm. To be more specific, it is his desire to live and acquire knowledge of the actual occurrences and truths that he has discovered while on his voyage. Shadow has been able to avoid any senseless massacres on the battleground, whether it is deity or personification (Roslan 381).

In the concluding section of the return, when offered the option of choosing his afterlife, Shadow declines to continue in any form and wishes to vanish forever, causing the intervention and assistance of Eostre who revives him from the world of the dead. Shadow suffers a significant transformation because of this interference and tells Eostre after his lengthy slumber "You called me back." He said it slowly, as if he had forgotten how to speak English. There was hurt in his voice, and puzzlement. ... "I was done. I was judged. It was over. You called me back. You dared."

(*American Gods* 545) The “you dared” is extremely powerful and unusual for Shadow. He slowly but steadily awakens from the realm of the dead as a powerful force, portraying a new character’s growth after being granted a fresh start in life (Roslan 382). Shadow has no regrets about being resurrected and believes he is strong enough to face any future challenges. The narrator clearly expresses that “Shadow felt good. ... He couldn't remember the last time he had felt so alive and so together” (*American Gods* 549). After all, Shadow must become a form of the controller of two realms, having gone through the godly trial at Yggdrasil and being in continuous interaction with gods - he just cannot remain the same (Koudelková 23).

The hero’s journey is not only metaphorical but also literal as well for Shadow. We can also describe it as merely a more elevated representation of the life path of society. In truth, the journey's true purpose is to demonstrate Shadow's progression from someone who had zero faith and was a non-believer into a spiritual individual with a purpose in his life. The leading events of his character development and his quest of meeting the new gods gave meaning to his life. Shadow reflects the novel's mythical roots in himself since he has evolved from the start in the aspirations of unfolding the layers of his complex character and his existential issue resulting in the exploration of a new identity.

Based on Campbell’s central purpose of this pattern, the encountering of dragons and challenges depict the spiritual troubles and difficulties that a person must conquer. The traditional hero myth's purpose is an individual's spiritual improvement (*The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 29). Likewise, undeniably, the stages of the theory do fit the scheme of Shadow’s quest except for some, which were not applied because they had no sign of presence in his storyline. However, the purpose of tracing his adventure in relation to the hero’s journey was to demonstrate the shift in his life and character.

5. Mythical Beings in Gaiman's World.

The novel of *American Gods* represents the characters of the old and new gods, each deity has brought his or her own belief, and their tales and myths tie common things, people, and places to mythological creatures and places. Along with their importance in today's society and their function, these two features are always in a collision that gives power to our understanding of the modern world and how we correspond to myth and technology. Gaiman employs mythology in ways that are appealing to a modern audience. In his article "Reflection of Myth", he says:

Myths are compost. They begin as religions, the most deeply held of beliefs, or as the stories that accrete to religions as they grow. And then, as the religions fall into disuse, or the stories cease to be seen as the literal truth, they become myths. And the myths compost down to dirt, and become fertile ground for other stories and tales which blossom like wildflowers. (75-84)

He strives to develop a unique perspective on mythological figures that are not simply based on traditional mythology but, instead, combines its elements to properly fit the story and he depicts a universe in which Gods from numerous mythologies have been brought to the United States. Also, in the long run, the reader discovers that God's spirits dwell in the souls of their followers, and their potency is related to the group of followers and believers they hold (Ševc 48).

Gods and myths from all over the globe are much more than that. They are not just metaphors and figures. They are symbols of something greater: the cultures and individuals who arrived in America with these ideas, the values, and customs that these people possessed. When we deeply observe the gods featured in *American Gods*, it instantly seems clear that they hail from

all over the universe because the majority of the supernatural and mythical characters Shadow and the reader meet did not stem in America. For example, Mad Sweeney is a leprechaun from Ireland. He reveals his identity to Shadow during their first meeting. Shadow at first does not believe him, he says “You don’t have an Irish accent. “I’ve been over here too ... long.” “So you are originally from Ireland?” I told you. I’m a leprechaun. We don’t come from ... Moscow.” (*American Gods* 29). Mad Sweeney’s name is actually inspired by an Irish ruler who featured in Celtic folklore and was cursed thus, Sweeney went mad (Cotterell 168). We encounter the Zoryas, Slavic folklore sisters who keep an eye on the skies for the fleeing of the doomsday hound, Simargl, a deity from Slavic mythology. In addition, a variety of Egyptian deities are present in the novel. Thoth (also known as Mr. Ibis and Horus). Thoth was not only the deity of the moon, wisdom, and writing but also the god who sentenced the dead, whereas Horus was a king and god of the skies. Lastly, Mama-Ji should be mentioned, she is a possible allusion to the Indian goddess of devastation and death, Kali. However, she is also regarded as a mother goddess and a compassionate deity (Nielsen 26).

For Gaiman, the major objective of *American Gods* is to demonstrate that mythology is not a belief system associated with primitive societies. The thoughts, desires, and beliefs that gave meaning and life to Odin and all the other gods may still be present in society today where it leads to people worshiping material objects in the very same manner that ancient gods were worshipped (Mueller). Moreover, in the same way humans gave life to deities who govern natural forces, contemporary people in the novel handed this power of devotion to technology, which is embodied in the guise of Technical Boy and Media. As said by Mr. Wednesday when he was informing shadow about the threat his facing by these new gods “There are new gods growing in America,

clinging to growing knots of belief: gods of credit card and freeway, of Internet and telephone, of radio and hospital and television, gods of plastic and of beeper and of neon.” (*American Gods* 107)

Undoubtedly, Gaiman reveals to the reader that myths and beliefs are the two devices that help humans control their own fate and existence by putting people in life-or-death situations where they must choose on their own. For instance, the reader soon discovers in chapter one the appearance of the Buffalo man in Shadow's dream, he says

“Believe,” said the rumbling voice. “If you are to survive, you must believe.”

“Believe what?” asked Shadow. “What should I believe?” He stared at Shadow, the buffalo man, and he drew himself up huge, and his eyes filled with fire. He opened his spit-flecked buffalo mouth and it was red inside with the flames that burned inside him, under the earth.

“Everything,” roared the buffalo man. (17)

This figure counsels Shadow on how to interact with the gods, these new ideas, and the stories that he has been exposed to since meeting Mr. Wednesday. He emphasizes to Shadow the importance of believing in order to live. This case highlights the contribution of faith in our existence. Gaiman contends that people must believe in something in order to provide value and meaning to the universe in which they inhabit (www.ipl.org)

Throughout the novel, Gaiman presents us with plenty of gods and goddesses and tries an attempt to expose us to concrete examples of how various beings or creatures were introduced into the culture and their continuous influence on people's lives, and how they survive in the absence of believers. We reach the observance of how these cultures begin strong and eventually decline, with some of them being completely vanished while others being newly molded figures. And we witness how components of foreign cultures that either align with or are assimilated into Western

society will thrive. To illustrate, Easter is a good example; She is in good condition; life is serving her nicely, as people continue to celebrate and execute typical Easter traditions in her honor. She tells Mr. Wednesday “I’m doing fine. On my festival days they still feast on eggs and rabbits, on candy and on 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” (*American Gods* 242). However, people are unaware of the original roots of these celebrations. Wednesday inquires a woman working at a café about the origin of the term "Easter." He asks: “My friend and I were disagreeing over what the word ‘Easter’ means. Would you happen to know?” (243). The girl has no clue and avoids answering, claiming that she is not interested since she is a pagan - plainly like many others believe that Easter is a Christian celebration. People celebrate her event but are unaware of whom she is and what her purpose is meaning this has become a completely new culture and has morphed and turned into something different.

Another example of the expansion, altering and fading of culture is Essie Tregowan a Cornish girl who lives off con-tricks and ancient legends about pixies and how to satisfy them by always remembering to leave milk for them. As a response, she maintains her wellness and owns consistent good luck and fortune. She carries them with her to America to grant her luck with her family. We may see how she maintains the ideals she took with her. “She was not a hard worker but was forever slipping off and away to listen to stories and tales, if there was anyone who would tell them: tales of the piskies” (74). However, she warns others on how to be cautious of creatures such as pixies and that they should believe in them. Her grandkids are unimpressed by her tales and careless to pay attention to them. In addition, when the myths fade, so do the creature's memory and the rituals designed to placate it. When Essie dies at the end of that chapter, it is doubtful that anybody will continue to make the numerous small offerings she demanded, and thus the worship

fades out. Nielsen explains that all of these are depictions of how the ancient gods are clearly battling to be acknowledged or to deserve the same amount of love and attention that they typically used to get (29).

Yet, the new gods appear to be doing well. Technical Boy, the embodiment of the god of technology such as computers and the internet asks Shadow to relay the following message to Wednesday: “You tell Wednesday this, man. You tell him he’s history. He’s forgotten. He’s old. And he better accept it. Tell him that we have ... reprogrammed reality. Tell him that language is a virus and that religion is an operating system and that prayers are just so much ... spam” (*American Gods* 59). The new gods are portrayed as almost universally negative, if not evil. Although Shadow's final understanding is that neither the old nor the new gods are good or bad, certain old gods are instructive and sympathetic to Shadow, the new gods mainly offer him bribes or fight him. This inconsistency renders it ambiguous how readers should feel about these characters (Andreadis 33). The issues happening between the old and new gods are simply an implication of current western society’s attitude towards technology and religion and modern values against traditional ones.

In addition, the allegations of “fighting for survival” made by the gods drive shadow into saying “This is a bad land for gods ... The old gods are ignored. The new gods 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” (*American Gods* 582-583), implying that all deities from around the world are prone to being accepted and assimilated or denied and forgotten. Everyone is able to find home in the country whether people or gods of old and modern even though it can be a bad center to expect worshipping and love. The constant shifting and transformation in time and people will not allow

anyone or anything to stay the same and this includes new Gods as well, the beginnings and collapse of new gods said by Mama Ji in the novel, and notably mentioning railroad worship as an example and how it has already disappeared (151-152).

As a last illustration of how deity worship may have vanished, Gaiman uses Mr. Ibis and Mr. Jacquel - or Thoth and Anubis, as they are called in Egyptian mythology. Anubis was said to have created Egyptian burial procedures and to have assisted in passing judgment after they died. Thoth was said to be the one who wrote down a person's last judgment when they died. And the fact that Mr. Ibis and Mr. Jacquel run a funeral parlor and teaming up to join forces actually makes sense. They are allowed to fulfill their spiritual tasks, the ones they are skilled at, and earn a living out of them. Jacquel - or Anubis - even rips out little chunks of the person's intestines when inspecting a dead body as part of his duties. In one instance with a dead body Jacquel "sucked all the blood out of her chest with a vacuum pump, and measured the volume. Then he inspected the inside of her chest" (*American Gods* 156). He also keeps some in preservatives and eats others. This may be deemed a sacrifice too even though the situation has changed since the gods who were brought up by pure belief were originally set up through prayers, sacrifice, and imagination, therefore, some things never change (Nielsen 36).

The human impulse to believe in anything and have an ongoing faith in entities are two contradictory aspects or possible outcomes as it is revealed in the title. Yet, gods are said to be created by culture and people, and it is the worshipping of and the belief of people who allow them to thrive and survive in a powerful and potent position. These myths do not only serve an impartation of a specific value, but it is to furnish these gods with their spiritual lifeblood belief. However, we may describe that the way they were penetrated through the human psyche before,

it is the same way in which people took material things, cultural trends and phenomena as new worshipping in modern world.

6. The Death of the Pantheon Gods

The novel's depiction of the gods' fading position due to modern factors is a metaphor for the shift in the position of religious beliefs. The description of the status of these gods is connected to the concepts shared, and discussed by Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Taylor and is presented in the novel. The world is rapidly changing and nothing stays the same, *American Gods* illustrates this in its characters, the ancient Gods. They came from different cultures and societies and their path was crippled by the transformation of people's views on religion and spirituality.

The novel examines this case of old gods fighting for survival and based on their perspective, it is the new gods depicted in characters such as Media and Technology boy are the reason for their struggle of maintaining their position and reclaiming their power. During Shadow's encounter with the gods, he develops an understanding of how these gods die. As stated by Kurtz, "gods are not immortal in the strong sense" illustrating Shadow's imagination, where he wanders into an unknown place in a hallway lined with sculptures of old beings who were faded from history (1). Gaiman's novel suggests that "Gods die. And when they truly die they are unmourned and unremembered. Ideas are more difficult to kill than people, but they can be killed, in the end" (*American Gods* 47). Gods are always in the state of being vanished and erased from people's memories through time and kept forgotten. In addition, Wednesday reveals that death is not so significant to gods as "the possibility of reincarnation" (470). They may die physically but they can be remembered as long as they are nurtured with people's worshipping and attention, they will live on but they will ultimately disappear and die if no one keeps a memory of them.

Following Kurtz explanation, she depicts the gods as they are bearing the brunt of mortal experience, and they are possibly to perish when other gods interfere and defeat them like Mr. Wednesday who lost his power and died, and if they lose the path of finding their place again in people's minds (2). This is highly related to the concept of disenchantment by Taylor and Nietzsche. The reason why they die too is connected to the emergence of contemporary Western disenchantment and it is linked to several causes such as the enlightenment and other advancements during that period of time, including empirical science and growing individualism. Taylor describes this "dominant outlook of modern Western technological society" as "Enlightenment rationalism", which is characterized by a utilitarian view of notions like freedom and rationality (234). In one occasion, Mr. Wednesday (Odin) states "We may not die easy and we sure as hell don't die well, but we can die. If we're still loved and remembered, something else a whole lot like us comes along and takes our place and the whole damn thing starts all over again. And if we're forgotten, we're done" (*American Gods* 341). Mr. Wednesday in this quote implies that the notion of gods surrounds people's constant belief in them. This takes us back to Nietzsche's "God is dead" famous expression that provided the world back in the 19th century with his unusual new thoughts on how society no longer needs a god. In the context of *American Gods*, gods are enduring constant difficulties to survive in this highly materialistic and individualistic nation and the challenges they face are a reflection of where society now is shifting its focus and straying away from having a divine entity to believe in.

Furthermore, the novel's main theme is the impending conflict between the gods, in which both sides will combat their existence as mentioned in the novel, it is "a cold war at this stage, a phony war, nothing that could be truly won or lost" (400). Regardless of the fact that no one was aware of it, the conflict had already launched. The new gods Mr. World and Mr. Town, for

instance, are the primary factors for secularization in which they both represent Globalization and urbanization and became modern-day phenomena, notions in which people place their trust. In Peeters' thesis concerning *American Gods*, he states that the emphasis is on the value that gods may provide to modern society, implying that for humans, gods turn to tools for selfish gain (31). The individuals do not necessarily "see what is valuable – all [they see] is what [they] can do with it" (*American Gods* 361). And as said in the novel too, the new gods are "proud gods, fat and foolish creatures, puffed up with their own newness and importance" (151) describing that the new gods have already won this war (I. T. Peeters 31). Technical boy who is the representation of the Internet regards this as "a ... paradigm shift. It's a shakedown" (*American Gods* 537), and he expresses that the new gods will not arise until the old gods are completely withered and dead. As he considers himself reasonable, he suggests, "letting market forces take care of it" (395), depending on capitalism and rationality to decide on issues of faith. He represents what Taylor proposes has happened to humankind ever since Enlightenment.

Technical Boy employs technological jargon to depict the transition from premodern to today's world and mentions that the new gods have reprogrammed reality, language as a virus, religion as an operating system, and "prayers are so much ... spam" (59). His thoughts stand on the point that religious beliefs have shifted and died (I. T. Peeters 32). In addition, marked by a deep lack of credibility, and an environment of skepticism, western society has made everyone assume the ability to do everything without the need of any god in the process. Mr. Nancy believes that America is not a nation that accepts gods and Shadow agrees by affirming that it is "quickly taken up as they are abandoned, cast aside for the next big thing" (*American Gods* 420). The evanescence of gods is the result of Taylor's exclusive humanism. Peeters claims that individuals

have their own goals, which may lead to the formation of a deity. When the individual's interests or ambitions change, this deity will become outmoded (34).

7. Old Gods versus New Gods: The Outcomes

The ongoing battle between the old and their new modern-day rivals, known as new gods is a depiction in the novel to reveal the struggles and challenges that the old gods are enduring in a highly modern society influenced by technology, materialism, etc. which led to the failure of maintaining their legacy and getting replaced by the new contemporary gods. Consequently, leading the old gods like Mr. Wednesday, Belquis, Mad Sweeny and many other gods into losing their position, their sense of belonging and identity.

Since these gods are depictions to reflect certain sorts of cultures and mainly beliefs that persist today, the new ones represent the decline of belief and the heavy credence on new technologies. The narrative weaves together how these gods influence society and how are they are fading with the sharp decline in interest of the worshippers. This alters what some may perceive to be the conventional power dynamic between the god and the worshipper. If a deity fails in the loss of his or her believers, he or she loses power and becomes temporal (Wilkins). America is a bad land for gods; "Look," said Whiskey Jack. "This is not a good country for gods. My people figured that out early on... So, yeah, my people figured that maybe there's something at the back of it all, a creator, a great spirit, and so we say thank you to it, because it's always good to say thank you" (*American Gods* 649), revealing the harsh reality and impossible purpose of staying relevant in a technologically advanced, media-rich and sophisticated world. Dzikrina in his thesis says that the ancient gods are those who realize they do not fit in America and this has been a source of contention for them since their arrival in this land. The old gods swiftly see and admit the fact that their 'new country' is not inviting to gods (145). Jacquiel, known as Anubis, an

Egyptian deity who managed the preservation procedure and escorted dead rulers to the afterlife realizing the negative consequences of attaining his purpose in America tells Shadow “We lost this particular battle when we came to this green land one hundred years ago or a thousand or ten thousand. We arrived and America just didn’t care that we’d arrive” (*American Gods* 208).

The majority of the old gods live a modest existence on the verge of society and behind shadows hidden and no one to believe in them. They have had a difficult time in life considering that they landed in the country centuries ago and things, places and people have changed. We may describe this as an issue of displacement because it may also be defined as going unnoticed or unheard of because anyone who are part of a society will feel at ease interacting and blending with the public but this is not found in the case of these gods (Dzikrina 144). The fact that they are incapable of it demonstrates that America is not a suitable environment for these ancient gods. Besides, when reflecting this in the reality of american society, cultures that have perished are connected to these gods’ demise because they have been unable to adapt the altering of America and resulted in their neglect. Their hunger for power and relevance by the wrong individuals caused them to experience identity distress.

Dzikrina explains that many of the old gods attempt to blend in with average Americans while maintaining their authenticity. Most gods appear to be regular humans, however, in a few uncommon cases, a peek of the gods’ true reality is shown (146). This includes Belquis, an ancient goddess of love and sensuality who feeds on her devotees to stay youthful and strong forever, she is the epitome of reaching purpose no matter what it takes. She is in a dispute with her identity and struggles to set loose of her old powerful self. There is “...nothing holy left in her profession. Not anymore” (*American Gods* 373), claimed by her, that obtaining what she requires leaves her no choice. She is desperate to feel her old powers by acting in accordance with people's expectations.

The questioning of one's own values is a key component of going through an identity crisis. Mr. Wednesday for example has been in two separate life scenarios with his current condition, this is particularly noticeable in him, since he was formerly one of the most powerful gods. It causes him to question the significance of his own existence and doubts whether being a deity is a great option. This incident suggests that the elder gods are dissatisfied with their lives. People used to believe them because they were necessary. However, the scenario has shifted into making them want people instead (Dzikrina 147).

8. Conclusion

To sum up, the novel examines the aspects that were the key to this shift. Gaiman employed old gods from different cultures and new gods of today as metaphors to indicate the shifting views of modern individuals towards beliefs. Additionally, it represents the manifestation of the contributing contemporary aspects of this change illustrating it in the clash between the old and new gods and its effects illustrating the experience of some gods in the American society.

General Conclusion

Mythologies have always had a significant effect on human communities in which they served as stabilizing spiritual forces throughout history along with many systems of beliefs. They are overlapping aspects yet they are the compass for western society. They have undergone cultural and social changes that eventually caused their demise in the American land in specific. The suppression of mythology has produced spiritually undeveloped and modern individuals, and this has led the way to notable decay in western culture and has resulted in a materialistic meaningless community. Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* examined these themes in his novel in which he discussed the importance and the fading of myths and how society has shifted to new myths and new modern gods. He presented many numbers of characters such as "The Old Gods" known as the embodiments of myths and deities that came from outside America. He portrayed this issue in a battle of power and position between them and "The New Gods", which are the depiction of contemporary America. This work laid the groundwork for our examination of the ancient gods' cultural role in the context of *American Gods* by establishing a profound historical and cultural background on how religion was the basis of founding America.

The first part of this dissertation offered some insights into how the religious perspective was changed into a spiritual one due to the transcendental movement's impact which, later on, contributed to the upcoming shift of religion and its deprivation. This was achieved by exploring some of Friedrich Nietzsche and Charles Taylor's ideas. These elements provided a guide to the novel's characters and discussed the issues regarding the modern attitude towards religion and faith. Moreover, the study employed Joseph Campbell as a theoretical reference of mythology's importance and its different facets in our daily lives. This helped us demonstrate the process

undergone by Shadow, the protagonist, of finding a purpose in his life and spiritual journey of encountering the gods. These gods offered him a chance to become a hero. Using Campbell's "hero's journey" model in the process of this spiritual transformation, aided in unfolding the layers of his identity and the positive reinvention of himself. It is merely a more imaginative depiction of society's life path and it supplements people's lives and the problems and challenges they experience.

The analysis, later on, led to the following current position of religious beliefs and the function of mythology in the portrayal of old gods' stories and their role in American society. They functioned as a mythical narrative in a highly materialistic and individualistic country that cares less about its history or its existence that can be approached as it withheld people with an approach to comprehending the world. The confrontation between the Old Gods and the New Gods within the context of the novel can be directly read as the confrontation between old spiritual and religious belief systems that guided the lives of the various waves of immigration and new belief systems that are far from any spirituality. The novel shows a secular perspective on the subject by demonstrating how society dictates it, hence, weakening the divine and spiritual aspect and highlighting it as purely a human-made construct. There is nothing new about this criticism, yet it is hidden under an endless debate on how religious belief fulfills a unique function in society. Indeed, these new belief systems that Gaiman embodied in the characters of Mr. World, Technical Boy, Media, representing globalization, technology, and mass media, are the new characteristics of contemporary America, a land we came to learn that values materialism, capitalist profit, mass media and scientific premises more than any faith or religious systems.

Therefore, this study concludes that the shifting beliefs have occurred because people replaced the old belief systems with a materialistic alternative that was created by men that

functions the same as divine entities do. The war between the gods is a paradigm shift and reflection of the contemporary attitude towards spirituality. The significance of these deities and legends goes beyond just conveying a message or imparting a certain value. But it is to supply these gods with a real vital part, which is belief. However, the survival dilemma of the old gods from feeling culturally displaced and losing a part of the divinity and strength is a direct result of people roving their worshipping and beliefs into a concrete one. This has made them grasp one truth: America is an unwelcoming country for gods and beliefs that no longer have a settled home but rather it is becoming more and more ineligible in its nature; In this land gods are dead.

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الملخص:

الأساطير هي قصص انتقلت عبر الأجيال. بعضها مبني على أحداث حقيقية، والبعض الآخر وهمي تمامًا. إنها أكثر من مجرد قصص لأن لها دورًا أعمق في كل من الحضارات القديمة والحديثة والذي يتمثل في تقديم إجابات أبدية على الاهتمامات الخالدة مثل: أسئلة حول الحياة والموت، والخير والشر، وجوهر وجود الآلهة، وحتى أصول البشرية. تبرز رواية *الآلهة/الأمريكية* لنيل جايمان تمامًا هذا المزيج المثير للاهتمام من «الأساطير والدين» وعملية التجديد التي يمرون بها. لذلك، تم تكريس هذا البحث للإشارة إلى النضال الروحي للناس مع استمرار الحياة واستبدال الإيمان تدريجيًا بـ «الآلهة» الملموسة. تهيمن القوى الجديدة مثل التكنولوجيا ووسائل الإعلام والإنترنت والعولمة على حياة الشعوب خطوة بخطوة مما يؤدي إلى تحول نوعي في علاقات القوة والمعتقدات وحتى أنماط الحياة. وبالتالي، تسعى هذه الأطروحة إلى تسليط الضوء على الصدام الكبير بين الآلهة القديمة، التي تعكس المعتقدات التقليدية للمجتمع، والآلهة الجديدة، التي تمثل التحول الثقافي الحديث لأمريكا. كما يهدف إلى دراسة كيفية عمل هذه الآلهة كمظاهر ثقافية قيمة لكيفية تحول الثقافة وازدهارها مع مرور الوقت. من خلال القيام بذلك، فإنه ينظر إلى القوة الاجتماعية والثقافية والروحية التي تمارسها الأساطير العالمية. يتم تحقيق هذه الأهداف بمساعدة النظريات والمفاهيم من دراسات الأسطورة، وخاصة أعمال جوزيف كامبل حول الأسطورة، بالإضافة إلى رؤى حول الروحانية والإيمان من المنظرين مثل فريدريك نيتشه وتشارلز تايلور.

الكلمات الرئيسية: الأساطير، الدين، الآلهة الأمريكية، الآلهة القديمة، الآلهة الجديدة، الروحانية، التحول النموذجي.