

SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW: REPRESENTATION OF IDENTITIES IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *THE SANDMAN*

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ABSTRACT

Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* is a graphic novel that explores the complexities of reality and identity. The main asset of this work is its presentation of a plurality of narratives that, together, create not only a completely new world vision according to comic-book standards, but also a novel conception of cultural identity. This essay aims to analyze how *The Sandman* deals with identity construction as fashioned by two different but related notions: on the one hand, identity as the outcome of the confrontation between old conceptions of the world and new roles, duties and values; on the other hand, identity as a change of situation, as the individual wilfully escaping from old masks that imprison the self inside predetermined patterns of behaviour.

KEY WORDS: Comic-book, graphic novel, Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman*, identity.

RESUMEN

The Sandman de Neil Gaiman es una novela gráfica que explora las complejidades de la realidad y de la identidad. El principal valor de esta obra es la presentación de una pluralidad de narrativas que, en conjunto, crean tanto una visión del mundo completamente nueva respecto a los cánones del cómic, así como una concepción novel de la identidad cultural. El objetivo de este ensayo es analizar cómo *The Sandman* trata la construcción de la identidad como resultado de dos conceptos diferentes pero relacionados: por un lado, identidad como el resultado de la confrontación entre viejas concepciones del mundo y nuevos roles, deberes y valores; por otro lado, identidad como un cambio de situación, en el que el individuo escapa voluntariamente de viejas máscaras que aprisionan al sujeto dentro de modelos de comportamiento predeterminados.

PALABRAS CLAVE: cómic, novela gráfica, Neil Gaiman, *The Sandman*, identidad.

“Identity” is one of the key words of contemporary cultural analysis. From Psychoanalysis to Post-colonialism, Feminism to Post-Structuralism, almost every trend tries to define “identity” in a period in which it is considered to be in crisis (Mercer qtd. Rutherford 43). But is it really in crisis? Is the individual self really



suffering a fragmentation? (Hall 4) Or has it rather entered a new realm of definition, outside old patterns of definition? Actually, it may be said that it is not “identity” as such that is in crisis. What has actually fallen into decadence and fragmentation is the notion of “metanarrative,” conceived as the old roles that defined old Weltanschauungen, and therefore, individuals. As Lyotard pointed out “the meta-narrative apparatus of legitimation” has suffered a crisis parallel to that “of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution” (xxiv). In this sense, nowadays, there is no place for an absolute Truth to define individuals. Hence, “identity” as such is not really in crisis, what *is* in crisis are those globalizing discourses that gave unifying patterns to define large groups of individuals. There are no new forms of identity as Madan Sarup affirms (*Identity* 42), only new ways of defining identities.

A definition of identity will prove helpful to understand this point and the aim of this section. Identity can be seen as an individual process for the definition of the self, primarily based on cultural —social— pressures, and on personal —subjective— development. It represents the “point of suture” (Hall 6) between the social subject of particular discourses, and the individual processes of subjectivities. Thus, two processes are articulated in this conception of identity: on the one hand, the socializing process by which “the self becomes an individual in that it becomes a “social” being capable of language, interaction and cognition” (Benhabib 5). On the other hand, a subjective —individual and private— process of development based on the interpretations of Time and Memory of the individual (hi)story (Sarup, *Identity* 38). However, I believe that there is not a balanced relationship between the two processes in the definition of the self. The socializing process is previous to the subjective one. In this sense, identity can be perceived as the subjective appropriation of a cultural construction. The individual which I will refer as “it” (as an abstract sexless entity) creates its own definition of the self by means of a subjective appropriation of the cultural and social discourses that surround its life. Through this process, the individual incorporates social discourses to its personal and individual characteristics —such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and physical aspects that are proper and unique of that individual in particular. Then, this perception of identity is not essentialist, but rather a cultural construction that is in continuous movement according to how the passing of time affects institutions, ideology, sociology, the individual processes and its body. In this respect, identity is “somewhere in motion” (Rutherford 13), something like a never-ending process of becoming.¹

¹ Hence, identity is neither in crisis nor “fragmented and fractured” (Hall 4). I cannot completely agree with Stuart Hall when he affirms that “identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured” (4). Of course, individual identities can never be unified, for they are always in progress and change. But they are not now increasingly fragmented and fractured. As stated before, what is in crisis are those old globalizing patterns that are the “metanarratives” (see footnote 2).

In relation to identity, Postmodernism has brought about the “decadence” of those metanarratives² or globalizing discourses that stifle individual identities through the imposition of unifying social patterns, based on pre-existing archetypes. Instead, what we have is an outbreak of repressed voices that try to define themselves outside the globalizing discourses. For this reason, it is not identity, but the “old” processes of definition of identity that are being transformed.

It is within this aspect of the crisis of the metanarratives that I place the object of analysis of this essay. Neil Gaiman’s *The Sandman* (1988-1996)³ can be considered as an example of the postmodern breakdown of metanarratives as a means to define identity. The aim of this essay is to analyze how *The Sandman*, as a graphic novel, portrays the effects of the destruction of the old discourses in favour of a plural reality. The seven volumes that collect the central story line of the complete work of *The Sandman* present two different approaches to the effects of metanarratives over the individual identity: destruction and change. The first thematic orientation is the construction of the individual’s identity after the *destruction* of old patterns of definition. In other words, this strand focuses above all on the creation of a new idea of the self against old values and prejudiced traditions. Within this grouping, I would assemble the following story arcs: *Preludes & Nocturnes* (volume 1), *The Dolls’ House* (volume 2), *A Game of You* (volume 5), and *The Kindly Ones* (volume 9).

The second strand is made up by those volumes whose thematic line centres on the necessity of “change” to wiggle out of, or get away from imposed masks

² In relation with identity construction, a metanarrative can be seen as a globalizing discourse that defines the identity of the individuals according to pre-existent general archetypes, part of a unifying pattern, without pluralism. Using the image employed by Gao Xingjian in his novel *Yige Ren De Shengjing* (1999), a metanarrative is a fixed “mask” that is imposed on the individual in order to form part of a globalizing structure. As long as it is imposed, it does not come from the individual’s voice, and therefore, it prevents the development of pluralism.

³ As a means of situating *The Sandman*, Neil Gaiman’s work stands originally inside the trend of the 1950s EC comics and the 1970s DC horror comics. These comic-books were “analyzed” by Dr Fredric Wertham in *Seductions of the Innocent* (1954), and later on, they helped Mr Estes Kefauver submit an interim report on comic-books and juvenile delinquency to the U.S. Congress on March 14, 1955. This report led to the creation of the Comics Code —certain “censorship” rules— and subsequently the Comics Code Seal, that was to appear on the covers of the CMAA (Comics Magazine Association of America) as a proof of their decent nature. The Comics Code has been revised at least on two different occasions, one in 1971, the other in 1989, but has never been abolished. This censorship code affected comic-books both as a genre and as an industry. The politically correct requirements published according to these guidelines plunged the comics into a series of dull and excessively patriotic creations. However, in the 1980s, the comic-book started to think for itself as an artistic production that was not necessarily tied to that industrial correctness. Out of this more “depraved” strand, *The Sandman* made its appearance at the end of the 1980s, following the path of authorial freedom already started by Alan Moore in *The Saga of The Swamp Thing* series. Thus, *The Sandman* can be described as basically a violent story that deliberately ignores the political correctness legally imposed on the comics genre. Nevertheless, this violence is not gratuitous. On the contrary, it soon turns out to be one of the work’s essential thematic elements, promptly establishing itself as one of the sources for self-identification.

in order to keep on existing. From this perspective, the metanarratives are conceived of as those old roles that persist in time and imprison characters. This, I believe, is the basic theme of *Season of Mists* (volume 4), *Brief Lives* (volume 7), and *The Wake* (volume 10).

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH THE DESTRUCTION OF METANARRATIVES

Inside the first strand, three examples stand out most conspicuously. The first one, taken from *Preludes & Nocturnes* (volume 1) represents the effects of metanarratives and fixed roles over the individual's identity, and how the imposition of a pre-existing definition of the self leads to a certain death. In the second issue of this volume, Cain and Abel⁴ make their first appearance at the Dreaming—the kingdom of Dream, also called The Sandman. Cain, first killer, lives in the House of Mysteries, whereas Abel, first victim, dwells in the House of Secrets, both on the borders of the kingdom. From the point of view of identity and its representation, page 78 of *Preludes & Nocturnes* (last page of the second issue), introduces the definition of the self according to which identity is understood as an imprisonment inside old roles. In order to understand this particular page, reference has to be made to the beginning of this episode (p. 55) when Abel describes his brother Cain as “the kind [of brother] who kills me [Abel] whenever he’s, uh... mad at me, or bored, or just in a lousy m-mood.” It is a common practice that Cain kills Abel repeatedly all along the series. The following example portrays Abel sitting on the steps of his House of Secrets, recovering from his “last death” (writer: Neil Gaiman, artists: Sam Kieth and Mike Dringenberg).

As can be appreciated, the page is made up of two panels, each divided into three pictures, intercalated by a deformation of the frame. The “movement” of the frames of each picture leads from a setting/descriptive illustration of the situation, showing Abel sitting on the steps (panel 1, picture 1), to a extreme close-up of his mutilated face (panel 2, picture 1). This “movement” also entails the entrance into the subjectivity of this character, into his deepest desires and longings. What he is craving for is, in fact, a change of the old tradition in which he is the first victim. As he says in the third picture of the first panel, his is a secret story, because he wants to transform that world which has made him the first victim. His secret desire is to rewrite the ‘story’ which imprisons him, the metanarrative which prevents his freedom. However, as his words show in panel 1, picture 2, he is painfully conscious that he will not be able to change this tradition. That metanarrative will keep on

⁴ Cain and Abel are not an original creation of Neil Gaiman's. Apart from their biblical origins, they “were respectively hosts of two highly popular [horror] titles during [the 1970s], *The House of Mystery* and *The House of Secrets*” (Bender 244).



killing him every day. Hence, instead of demonstrating any kind of determination, he childishly shows his resignation, hiding his true feelings (“I’ll “think” of you as Irving really”) about being trapped into old roles that define his existence. Both Cain and Abel exist inside a kind of repetitive compulsive existence that makes them live inside their old roles of killer and killed. And it is this imprisonment that Abel is crying for—or bleeding for—on this page.

In this sense, the arrangement of the page is quite meaningful. The verticality of the page, its straight lines, and the lack of separation in the middle sections between pictures, conform the feeling of imprisonment through its visual configuration of thick window bars, typical of a prison cell. The space left outside the narration, between the pictures, is occupied by tears that gradually turn into blood as they descend. Abel’s identity is defined as long as he stays imprisoned in his role.



He accepts his role and duty as victim —and as keeper of secret stories— and rejects any possibility of change to improve his situation.⁵ However, Abel is not only part of this story, he *is* the Story, and a change would mean his own “destruction” in the sense of self-meaning. This final statement can also be applied to most of the characters of the series, but especially to Dream, the main character, whose shadow can be perceived in picture 1, panel 1.

The second example of how metanarratives destroy the individual’s identity is taken from *The Doll’s House*, the second volume of the series. Thematically this story deals with the creation of a new identity against old values and prejudiced traditions. According to the author, the stories that make up this volume are “about women, and men’s attitudes to women; about the houses and walls that people build around themselves and each other, for protection, or for imprisonment, or both; and about the tearing down of those walls” (Bender 41). In contrast to the linearity of the previous volume, this one is fragmented in seven different but inter-related stories. From my own perspective, this fragmentation is the outcome of the formal purpose of this volume. *The Doll’s House* is formally the representation of the Modernist stream of consciousness, in the sense of the important presence of the inner, mental world. There is a constant dichotomy between the real world and mental reality, between established materiality and illusory fantasies that collide and clash in an endless struggle. In this respect, the title of the volume, *The Doll’s House*, apart from being a reference to Ibsen’s famous play, represents the convergent point of the different stories in echoing the clash of realities suffered by every character of the story arc. In this way, the doll’s house becomes an iconic symbol that reflects those worlds/realities the self has to build in order to either escape or imprison him/herself. These worlds can be soothing solutions to harsher realities —just like little Jed’s fantasies of a perfect imaginary mental world against the physical abuses of his uncle in the real existence—, or escapist creations that later on become the origin for imprisonment —as in the shocking “Collectors,” where all those serial killers are trapped inside their own fantasies. However, the imposition of one reality over the rest not only leads to the rupture of the plurality of voices, it also heads to the destruction of the individual —as can be seen with the imposition of metanarratives such as the American Dream in “Collectors,” or the Vortex in “Lost Hearts.”

The Vortex, at the end of this volume, can be considered as the clearest example of a metanarrative imposed over the plurality of identities. At the end of the story line, Rose Walker’s powers as Vortex awaken. The Vortex, as explained by Dream on page 208,

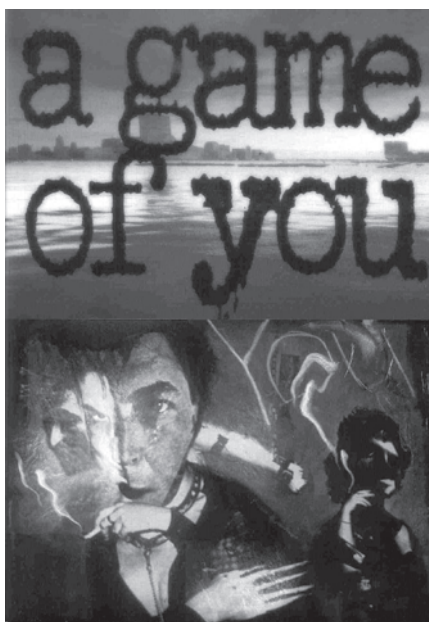
⁵ In this way, the couple made up by Cain and Abel stands quite near the conception of Beckettian existentialism, as portrayed in the Vladimir and Estragon couple of *Waiting for Godot* (1956). Beckett’s characters are unable to move or change while waiting for the coming of Godot. All they can do is accept their situation, outside time, creating their own humour in the tragedy of life as imprisonment.



By its nature, destroys the barriers between dreaming minds; destroys the ordered chaos of the Dreaming... until the myriad dreamers are caught in one huge dream... Until all the dreams are one. Then the vortex collapses in upon itself. And then it is gone. It takes the minds of the dreamers with it; it damages the Dreaming beyond repair. It leaves nothing but darkness.

The Vortex is a symbol of the conjoining nature of metanarratives imposed on the individuals. It destroys the plurality (in this case of dreams) that makes every living creature different from the rest. It unifies dreams into one monolithic discourse that tries to globalize the complete world of dreams. And this world of dreams can be considered a reflection of the deepest desires and longings of the individuals in search for an independent identity. In other words, I think that in this story dreams reflect the never-ending quest for identity, the never-ending process of becoming. In this respect, there is a very good visual example of the plurality of dream-quests for identity on page 193 (writer: Neil Gaiman; artists: Mike Dringenber and Malcolm Jones III).

This page illustrates the different dreams of Rose's neighbours and also the plurality of (hi)stories that make up a global reality. That is, just as all those dreams are integrated inside the conjoining image of the house, every dreamer possesses his/her own independent dream world or mental reality. Hence, although all of



them create a unity of reality —symbolized by the house— they are separated by thin and fragile walls. The page thus graphically shows how independent subjective processes are what makes all individuals create their own identity. The main idea of this volume is the necessity of plurality in order to keep on defining identity, and therefore, existence. When one reality is imposed over the rest —as in the Vortex effects—, there is a crisis of identity, and therefore, a danger of metanarrative discourse being imposed over the identities of the different selves.

The last example of the first strand is *A Game of You*, volume five. This story line recovers characters and the thematic orientation of the second volume, *The Doll's House*. Once again the central topic of the narration is the construction of (a) new identity(ies) by means of the confrontation and destruction of old values. Besides, this volume's original contribution to the general theme resides in its visual and narrative emphasis on dichotomies, on opposed perceptions of realities. Let's take for instance the first of Dave McKean's covers for this series.

There is a clear opposition between the two pictures that make up the cover: the calm landscape of the upper panel, and the disturbing close-up of the unsightly figures, in the bottom panel. In the upper picture, hidden under the type-written letters of the title, the image of a city (New York) is portrayed; a city bathed in the calm and peacefulness of the water. It looks like a picture-postcard that can be thought to “illustrate” the volume's main theme: two clashing definitions of the identity of a city and its population. In this sense, the upper picture portrays the commonly accepted identity of that city, the traditional representation of that world. Contrariwise, the second picture shows the opposite idea. It portrays

the hidden world of the citizen; the world of vice and sexual fantasies —as the chains of the masochist in the background; the world that is kept silent for it does not represent traditional —Christian and patriarchal— values for the construction of identity. The cover as a whole seems to be based on a Manichean representation of good and evil, of light and darkness.⁶

The thematic aim of this volume is to put to test all these traditional values that are supposed to identify both a city and its citizens. *A Game of You* tries to question those iconic postcard representations that destroy identity in favour of uniform stereotypes. According to the author, “one of the points of *A Game of You* is that nobody is a stereotype, and nobody is what he or she seems on the surface, once you get to know the person. Every single one of us has glorious, weird, majestic, stupid, magical worlds inside us” (Bender 122). In this story no one is as simple, stereotypical, and straightforward as he/she seems to be on the surface. Every single character has created a new identity for him/herself, a new self-definition that defies traditional reactionary conceptions of identity and cultural determinism. I will centre on three different characters from this volume as the best examples of identity building: Barbie, the leading character; George, the Cuckoo’s henchman; and Wanda, the preoperative transsexual.

Barbie moved to New York after the Vortex episode narrated in *The Doll’s House* in search for a new life without dreams. As soon as she stopped dreaming, Barbie also felt the loss of part of her identity. For this reason she “reinvents” herself everyday by means of making herself up, for instance, as a chess board —an example of a Manichean conception of a black and white world that will again be taken up in *The Kindly Ones*. The loss of her dream-world —called “the Land”— as a result of the imposition of the metanarrative discourse of the Vortex, meant the destruction of her past life, but also the crisis of her identity. Hence, by means of the make up, she adapts and changes her identity every day, without having a unifying perception of her own self. Thus, her identity is based on different “body projects.” According to Chris Shilling:

Body projects provide individuals with a means of expression, and a way of feeling good and increasing control over their flesh. If one feels unable to exert influence over a complex society, at least one can have some effect on one’s body. (Woodward 71)

Barbie is unable to control the foreign —social— forces that prevent her from dreaming. Thus, the subjective process that allows her to build her own identity is destroyed. Furthermore, her body project does not fulfil the stabilising role she needs, since she is continually changing her perceptions of identity through physical transformations. However, after the death of the huge dog-like Martin

⁶ Visually, the contrast between light and darkness is emphasised on the opening pages of the first chapter of this volume.



(Page 25. Writer: Neil Gaiman; artist: Shawn McManus. Page 36)

Tenbones, one of the dream inhabitants of “the Land,” her illusory identity crumbles, as can be seen in the blurring of her make up.

At this moment she will be forced to start her quest for identity, towards somewhere over the rainbow that, in her case, is somewhere inside her dream-world. She will have to recover her past dreams, her memory of the past, in order to reorganize her subjective process of adaptation to social structures and thus create her own stable and independent identity. Hence, in my opinion, she incarnates how a new identity is built after the *destruction* of old impositions: i. e. the meta-narrative discourses of the Vortex, and then the Cuckoo (the ominous figure who tries to destroy “the Land”).

The second character of this volume to be analyzed is George, the Cuckoo’s henchman on Earth. He embodies the postcard type of globalizing identity reflected in the upper picture in the first cover of the volume, for he tries to destroy the plurality of dreams just like the vortex did in *The Doll’s House*. The second picture of the first panel on page 52 reveals that relationship between George, as projection of the Cuckoo, and the city (writer: Neil Gaiman; artist: Shawn McManus).

New York becomes a projection of George’s identity through the reflection of the city in his glasses. New York, inside its postcard identity based on traditional values, has been defined as the city that never sleeps —according to the well-known song by Frank Sinatra. And just like New York, George, and therefore the Cuckoo, affirms: “everybody but me’s asleep” (52, 2nd panel, 3rd picture). In this way, George is a projection of that —Christian and patriarchal— traditional identity that tries to impose itself over the individual, in the fashion of a metanarrative. George’s birds irrupt inside the sleepers’ dreams provoking Manichean —simplistic— visions of Reality, based on black and white worlds, that is, good against evil identities. As an example of this, Wanda —the preoperative transsexual— dreams about



the “Weirdzos.”⁷ In her dream, gender identity is portrayed as either male or female in biological terms. She sees herself in her dream portrayed as a man in female clothes, against her own perception of herself as a woman. This is the product of the Manichean intrusion of the Cuckoo’s metanarrative of traditional values. Thus, George, as the representation of the Cuckoo, embodies that traditional discourse, the old metanarrative, that tries to impose itself upon the individual. It is precisely this kind of metanarrative that is to be avoided in favour of a plural identity, and therefore, reality.

The character of Wanda also embodies the idea of the construction of new identities as a defence against old values. Thus, when she meets Death, she does so as a woman (like “Glinda in the Oz movie,” 185). She has had to transcend those religious values that attempt to impose themselves on her own conception of the self, of male and female, and of good and evil. For this reason she felt identified with the “Weirdzos,” because they were symbols of the imperfection of the system that tries to define masculinity and femininity in terms of reactionary metanarratives. Only through death can Wanda be physically embedded inside her identity as Alvin Robert Caleb Mann (1966-1991). And it is only through death that she can finally return to her own hometown with her family, instead of having just a photograph of them over her bed, as can be appreciated through the comparison of pages 54 and 179. These two pictures reveal the important presence of those old roles in her everyday life:

Wanda is not only an example of body project to create a personal definition of the self, she is also an example of how past times and memories affect the present identity of a person. She has had to destroy her reactionary traditional past in order to find her own female voice. She has had to fight those religious metanarratives that interfere with her own perception of her self. She may portray

⁷ This is a reference to the Bizarros (imperfect copies of the original Superman) taken from old *Action* and *Superman* comics.



(Page 54; *Writer:* Neil Gaiman; *penciller and inker:* Shawn McManus. Page 179)

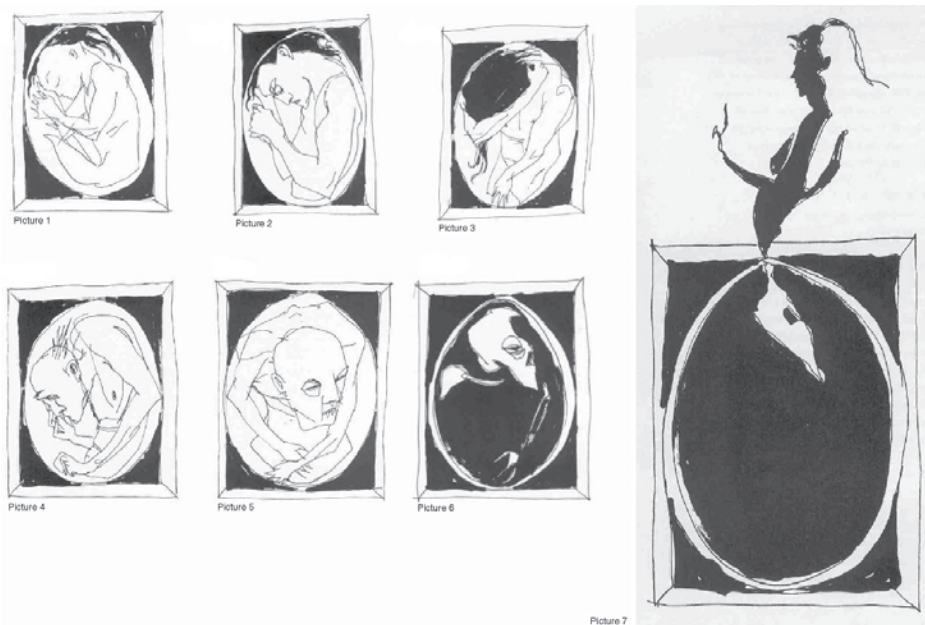
the effect of metanarratives over the individual leading to death for at the end she dies. But when she meets Death, ‘she is perfect [...] Drop-dead gorgeous. There is nothing camp about her, nothing artificial. And she looks happy’ (185). Thus, at the end, but only after death, she is completely defined as a woman, outside the traditional values that try to imprison her inside a male role in a Christian society.

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH *CHANGE*

As in the previous strand, I shall here make use of three examples to illustrate the definition of identity as a result of a sudden and willing change of behaviour that breaks with old patterns of existence. The first example of this type of identity construction comes in a set of seven drawings by Dave McKean, included in the first volume of the series, *Preludes & Nocturnes*.⁸ Each of these drawings appears individually between the chapters. It is only at the end of the volume, therefore, that one realises how deftly the development, progression or evolution of the human being has been outlined in the midst of the story.⁹

⁸ Although the story-line of this volume is representative of the first strand, that is, of identity resulting from the “destructive” forces of metanarratives, the sequence of images I have extracted from the volume is, as I hope to demonstrate, clearly illustrative of the second approach.

⁹ These drawings did not appear in the monthly original series (1988-9). They have been introduced in the collected volume of 1991, which is the work employed for this essay.



(Respectively 53, 79, 105, 131, 157, 183, 235)

Sequentially arranged, these pictures illustrate the evolution and final change of the human being. A linear vision of the drawings reveals the process of maturation and death of every human being, from its birth in 1, to its final death and darkness in 6. There are two different spaces in each drawing: the outer space, white, without boundaries —except the page limits— suggesting the infinity of knowledge linked to the unknown; and an inner space, inside the coffin-like cage that frames the growing human figure. Moreover, inside the cage another dichotomy is established: the womb-like form that encircles the human body, and the blackness that first surrounds the circle and then enters into the womb at death. Thus, the sequence from 1 to 6 portrays the construction of an individual inside the boundaries of a cage that was supposedly there before his/her birth, and that will remain long after her/his death. The drama for human beings is that the whiteness inside the womb somehow reflects an unrelenting longing for the whiteness outside the oppressive frame. But this whiteness can only be achieved by means of the death of the imprisoned self.

Picture 7 shows the new-born identity in the form of a mature being, integrating in itself both the blackness of the inner world and the whiteness of the outer space. After the death of the old self, built inside the constraints of the frame —the old roles— a new identity willingly escapes from that cage into the whiteness of the page, mid-way between two worlds, melting one and the other in a new created “third space.” This process of integration into a new identity can be applied to

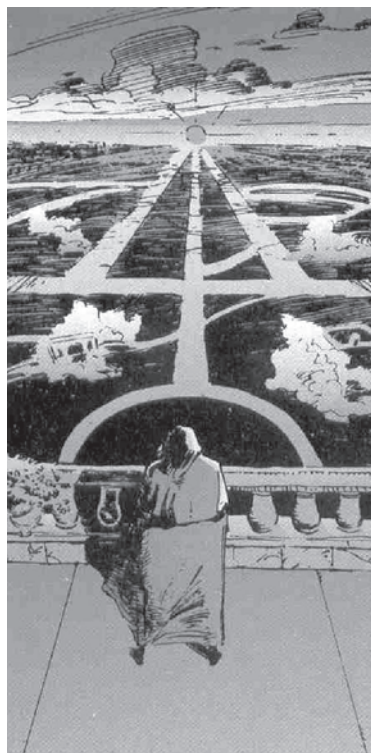
different levels of abstraction related to *The Sandman*. Hence, the sequence from 1 to 7 reproduces the same development as the one undergone by Dream, the main character of the complete story arc: from his imprisonment in the crystal prison and his (almost) physical death (152), to his integration of realities (with the help of Dr Dee and the destruction of the ruby, 202) and acceptance of the change to his new identity outside the cage (in the epilogue, with the strong presence of his sister, Death).

A second example of this thematic line is *Season of Mists*, volume 4. Thematically I include this volume in the group of stories that stress the necessity for *change* and adaptation to new existences as a means of escape from imprisonment inside old roles and patterns. This story introduces a new idea in this theme: the conception of *hell* as something personal. Everyone creates his/her own hell, and it is only through change that one can get rid of one's own pain.

Formally, this fourth volume can be described as a conscious recreation of the tight, formal organisation of Victorian novels —a fact that contrasts with the Romantic origin of its title. For example, each one of the chapters opens with a short paragraph that briefly summarizes the events that are going to be narrated. For this reason, this story arc is the least innovative in terms of visual display. Compared to the previous issues, especially volumes 1 and 2, the arrangement of pictures and panels on each page follows a classical pattern of clearly defined and separated illustrations. This formal patterning highlights the linearity of the cause-effect relationship of events. Furthermore, the omniscient narrative voice at the beginning of the story's prologue disappears, thus producing an effect of legitimization of events as real. With its disappearance, pictures seem to portray reality in an omniscient way rather than filtered through the eyes of any character —a technique employed in *The Doll's House*. This realistic form finds its clearest exposition in the description of a character in the story, *Destiny of the Endless*. As is explained by the narrator in the frame break of pages 21 to 23:

Destiny is the oldest of the Endless; in the beginning was the Word, and it was traced by hand on the first page of his book, before ever it was spoken aloud. Destiny is also the tallest of the Endless, to mortal eyes. There are some who believe him to be blind; whilst others, perhaps with more reason, claim that he has travelled far beyond blindness, that indeed he can do nothing but see: that he sees the fine trceries the galaxies make as they spiral through the void, that he watches the intricate patterns living things make on their journey through time. Destiny smells of dust and the libraries of night. He leaves no footprints. He casts no shadow. (22)

Destiny is the representation of order inside a life that is written in a linear way of cause-effect relationships. He is associated with the classical order of the "hortus conclusus" and with the labyrinths that make up his garden. In this sense, Destiny is visually related to the straight line and the classical patterns of beauty and correctness. And it is inside this type of pattern that Dream's fourth story arc is embedded. The story begins with Destiny reading what is going to happen in his book, and ends with Destiny closing the book. In this way, Dream's story is framed



by Destiny's, producing a confrontation between the symbology of the two Endless. There is a tension, both visual and narrative between these two *Weltanschauungen*—conceptions of worlds: on the one hand, Victorian Realism is associated to Destiny as a frame narration; and on the other hand, Romantic fantasy and the dream world related to Dream as an embedded narrative. In this way, the form seems to oppress Dream's narrative, as can be appreciated in the visual arrangement of page 32, picture one, panel one (writer: Neil Gaiman; artists: Mike Dringenberg and Malcolm Jones III), when the king of dreams has to face precisely those duties that will lead to his own destruction. In this picture, there is a clear opposition between the straight line of Destiny's garden, and the curved forms that are continuously associated with the king of dreams. These straight lines, with the sun at the point of convergence, symbolizing an absolute Truth, can be seen as representation of those old roles and duties in which Dream is imprisoned. Therefore, in order to keep on with existence, he will have to change his nature of Endless, his old role of universal figure, in order to create his own new identity. However, his inability to do this will lead to his final destruction in the following volumes. Hence, there are just two possibilities, either change or death—which is in fact the thematic orientation of the interlude chapter 4 of this volume.





The final example of this strand, taken from the seventh volume of the series, *Brief Lives*, further develops the theme of the need for change and the necessity of ridding ourselves of old masks and roles. As Peter Straub points out in the afterword to this volume, this story is mainly about mortality and change, and that “change introduces unpredictability, uncertainty, a universe of disorder. Right before an amoeba splits in two, it says to itself, *“uh, uh, no way, I ain’t gonna do that, nope (author’s italics)”*. It is by means of those changes, those little deaths that existence as a whole can keep on developing. For reality is made up of a multitude of never-ending, always-changing, tiny voices that die and are reborn, that constantly change and transform the idea of Reality as a whole. This is clearly exemplified by Dave McKean’s cover for the collected edition (1994).

This painting portrays an indefinite face made up by different repeated faces. The idea emphasized is that Reality, as a higher entity, compresses all those tiny faces which are brief lives inside a complete pattern. Reality, as a metanarrative, depends on those brief realities which are part of the common day citizen’s existence. To understand this reality, one has to understand all those different perspectives, in order to put a new face on to contemporary world. Dave McKean’s main aim focuses on the covers for all this story line to highlight those little things, fragments of stories that make up the reality of the story arc.

This volume is the most interesting one in terms of the necessity of change for the definition of the self in contrast to old roles and duties, and how these roles and duties continue to affect the identity of the individual. A good example is provided on page 16, chapter 8, when Destruction defines the roles and nature of the Endless as patterns that help to define reality.



(Writer: Neil Gaiman; artists: Jill Thompson and Daniel Vozzo)

Destruction defines the Endless as mere patterns, ideas, and wave functions. Thus, the identity of each one of the Endless is defined by his/her duties, as long as they remain in their old positions. However, despite the nature of the Endless as “ideas” or “repeating motifs,” Destruction, as Lucifer in *Season of Mists*, chooses to leave the imprisonment of his old role in order to achieve his ultimate freedom. Hence, even the oldest tradition can be altered in favour of freedom. In this sense, duty appears to be one of those recurrent elements that lead to the imprisonment of the individual inside foreign patterns of behaviour. Duty becomes a tool through which the metanarrative apparatus exerts its control over the subject. This explains why it is mainly because of his inability to escape from his feeling of duty that Dream is finally destroyed.

Dream cannot escape the old traditions and rules. Although after his imprisonment in Burgess’ cellar, most of these old roles have changed, he does not adapt to the new conception of the world, which will lead him, as explained before,





to kill his own son Orpheus at the end of *Brief Lives*. Dream is imprisoned by the old traditions, as can be visually appreciated in chapter 9, page 6 (1st panel; writer: Neil Gaiman; artists: Jill Thompson and Vince Locke), after he has killed Orpheus. The picture is fragmented by means of bar-like separations which, as in the picture of Abel (analyzed at the beginning of this section), reinforce the idea of imprisonment. The blood that flows from Dream's arm is transformed into tiny red flowers, symbolizing the creation of a new existence by means of the changing process of death/destruction. Life and existence are too brief to be lived inside old roles and masks, and it is because of his inability to change and destroy those old rules that Dream will face his own destruction as a direct result of his son's death.

CONCLUSIONS

Gaiman's graphic novel series portrays characters affected by the passing of time and by the need to find their own place inside reality. As demonstrated along the essay, *The Sandman* deals with identity construction as fashioned by two different but related notions: on the one hand, identity as the outcome of the confrontation between old conceptions of the world and new roles, duties and values. This would be the case, for instance, of Cain, imprisoned inside his role within the story that invariably presents him as the first victim. In *Preludes & Nocturnes* (vol. 1), he is portrayed as craving for release from this characterization and in need of defining himself outside that old structure. Another example could be the Vortex (in vol. 2), that imposes its own reality over the individual identity; and finally the Cuckoo of *A Game of You* (vol. 5), that also tries to destroy plurality in favour of a globalizing reality that prevents the development of the individual's conception of the self.

On the other hand, identity is also perceived as a change of situation, as the individual wilfully escaping from old masks that imprison the self inside predetermined patterns of behaviour. This particular mode of establishing one's identity is the way chosen by characters such as Lucifer in *Season of Mists* (vol. 4). Tired of being imprisoned inside the pattern of king of Hell, he decides to leave his king-

dom and open a restaurant in Los Angeles. For his part, Destruction, the Endless brother of Dream, escapes and abandons his duties in search of his own destiny (in vol. 7), outside the patterns of behaviour that the Endless represent. This is also the tragedy of the leading character of the narration: Dream is unable to adapt himself to changing reality. His imprisonment inside his role as well as his feelings of duty will ultimately lead to his death. However, his role as Endless will be fulfilled by another anthropomorphic representation, named Daniel, who becomes a new conception of Dream, more in line with contemporary definitions of reality and dreams.

In this way, Neil Gaiman explores the complexities of reality along this graphic novel, demonstrating by the same stroke of hand that nothing is as simple as it seems. The complexity of every mind's world cannot be subordinated to old metanarratives, old roles that destroy the necessary plurality of individual identities. In this respect, the main asset of Gaiman's work is its presentation of a plurality of narratives that, together, create a completely new world vision, a novel conception of cultural identity as well as a new definition of the comic-book in the form of the hybrid genre of the graphic novel.

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