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"The Sandman": Transmedia narratives as a therapy against fear

["Kum Adam": Korkuya karşı terapi olarak transmedya anlatıları]

["The Sandman": Les récits transmédia comme thérapie contre la peur]

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Abstract

The article explores transmedia narratives as a space for reinterpretation of the most widespread fears of humanity. Human culture has long been using stories to pass on knowledge about potential threats while also establishing the range of potential reactions to the menace. Over time, such shared mental representations took the form of characters, events and entire plots which serve as easily recognizable symbols of fear. The present study delves into psychological mechanisms which allow individuals to process their fears through personal and cultural narratives. Individual and cultural memory is highly malleable and subject to change via a continuous meaning-making process. While recent findings in psychology and neuroscience confirm efficiency of storytelling in coping with trauma and developing a more positive attitude to the world around, semiotics of culture elaborates on similar processes at a cultural level. Though many of the common symbols are reinforced while traveling from one text to another, they are gradually adapting to the changing realities of the people using them. Transmedia narratives, in their turn, contribute to an explosive nature of this process since multiple transformations are happening simultaneously through different media. The storyworld of "The Sandman", constructed by Neil Gaiman who published a series of comic books and co-produced a TV show based on them, is quite illustrative of such rapid change. Here, the symbolic representations of fears originating both in ancient folklore and some of the most recent events appear in quite an unexpected light. The multi-platform narrative destabilizes seemingly fixed images of Death, Desire, Sin and much more, challenging the reasons behind our fears as well as the "correct" ways of dealing with them. As the transmedia world of "The Sandman" is taken further by professionals and fans, it may be able to deconstruct our perceptions of fear and build some new ones.

Keywords: cultural memory, fear, pattern-restructuring, symbol, transmedia narrative

Özet

Makale, insanlığın en yaygın korkularını yeniden düşünmek için bir alan olarak transmedya anlatılarını araştırıyor. İnsan kültürü, potansiyel tehditler hakkında bilgi aktarmak için uzun süredir hikâyeleri kullanmakta ve ayrıca tehditlere karşı bir dizi potansiyel yanıt oluşturmaktadır. Zamanla bu paylaşılan zihinsel temsiller, kolayca tanınabilir korku sembolleri olarak hizmet eden karakterlere, olaylara ve tüm olay örgülerine dönüştü. Bu araştırma, bireysel ve kültürel anlatılar aracılığıyla insanların korkularını işlemesine olanak sağlayan psikolojik mekanizmalara odaklanmaktadır. Kişisel ve kültürel hafıza çok esnektir ve sürekli bir anlam oluşturma sürecinin bir sonucu olarak değişime tabidir. Psikoloji ve nörobilim alanlarındaki son keşifler, hikâye anlatımının travmanın üstesinden gelmedeki ve çevremizdeki dünyaya karşı daha olumlu bir tutum geliştirmedeki etkinliğini doğrularken, kültür göstergebilimi kültürel düzeyde benzer süreçleri inceler. Yaygın olarak kullanılan birçok sembol, bir metinden diğerine geçtikçe güçlenmekle birlikte, onları kullanan kişilerin değişen gerçekliklerine de yavaş yavaş uyum sağlar. Öte yandan, transmedya anlatıları da bu sürecin patlayıcı doğasına katkıda bulunur, çünkü farklı ortamlarda aynı anda birden fazla dönüşüm meydana gelir. Çizgi roman dizisini

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yayınlayan ve bunlara dayanan televizyon dizisinin ortak yapımcılığını üstlenen Neil Gaiman'in yarattığı *Kum Adam*'ın dünyası, bu kadar hızlı değişimi mükemmel bir şekilde gösteriyor. Burada tamamen beklenmedik bir şekilde, hem eski folklordan hem de çok yakın tarihli bazı olaylardan kaynaklanan sembolik korku imgeleri ortaya çıkıyor. Çok platformlu hikâye anlatımı; ölüm, arzu, günah ve daha fazlasının sabit görünen görüntülerini istikrarsızlaştırarak korkularımızın nedenlerine ve onlarla başa çıkmanın "doğru" yollarına meydan okur. *Kum Adam*'ın transmedya dünyası profesyoneller ve hayranlar tarafından genişledikçe korku kavramlarımızı yapısöküme uğratma ve potansiyel olarak yenilerini yaratma fırsatına sahip olacak.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kültürel bellek, örüntünün yeniden yapılandırılması, sembol, korku, transmedya anlatısı

Résumé

L'article explore les récits transmédias en tant qu'espace de réinterprétation des peurs les plus répandues de l'humanité. La culture humaine utilise depuis longtemps les récits pour transmettre ses connaissances sur les menaces potentielles ainsi qu'établir l'éventail des réactions appropriées. Au fil du temps, ces représentations mentales partagées par la plupart des membres de société ont pris la forme de personnages, d'événements et d'histoires entières qui fonctionnent comme symboles de la peur faciles à reconnaître. La présente étude se penche sur les mécanismes psychologiques qui permettent aux individus de traiter leurs peurs à travers des récits personnels et culturels. La mémoire individuelle et culturelle est hautement malléable et susceptible de changer via un processus continu de construction de sens. Alors que les découvertes récentes en psychologie et en neurosciences confirment l'efficacité de la narration pour faire face aux traumatismes et développer une attitude plus positive envers le monde, la sémiotique de la culture s'intéresse aux processus similaires au niveau culturel. Bien que de nombreux symboles communs soient renforcés lors du passage d'un texte à l'autre, ils s'adaptent progressivement à la réalité qui ne cesse d'évoluer. Les récits transmédias, à leur tour, contribuent à un caractère explosif de ce phénomène puisque de multiples transformations se produisent simultanément à travers différents médias. Le monde de *The Sandman*, construit par Neil Gaiman qui a publié une série de bandes dessinées et coproduit une série à la base de celles-ci, est assez illustratif d'une telle altération. Ici, les représentations symboliques des peurs issues à la fois du folklore ancien et de certains événements les plus récents apparaissent sous un jour tout à fait inattendu. Le récit multiplateforme déstabilise les images de la mort, du désir, du péché et bien plus encore, remettant en question les raisons de nos peurs ainsi que les façons "correctes" de les gérer. Alors que le monde de *The Sandman* est enrichi par les professionnels et les fans, il peut être en mesure de déconstruire nos perceptions de la peur et de créer celles qui vont mieux nous servir.

Mots-clés: mémoire culturelle, peur, récits transmédia, restructuration des schémas, symbole

1. Introduction

Fear has always been part of human experience alerting us about potential threats. Being essential for survival, it gave rise to numerous stories that have been told and retold since the dawn of time to warn the generations to come against potential dangers as well as suggest potential solutions. In many ways, storytelling has turned into the society's memory bank enabling its members to learn from the experiences of their predecessors, accumulate knowledge and pass it on, thus, "transmitting survival-relevant information while avoiding the costs involved in the first-hand acquisition of that information" (Bietti, 2018, p. 711; Boyd, 2017; Scalise Sugiyama, 2001).

Today many of the threats our ancestors were confronted with no longer exist, some of them have become less serious since at present they can be addressed efficiently. On the other hand, there are certain risks that would seem inconceivable a thousand years ago. Still, stories remain one of the most powerful tools humanity exploits to share their fears and explore ways of tackling them both collectively and individually.

Storytelling seems to be a universal mechanism which is lying at the very core of mental processes turning us all into narrators shaping our individual stories. We are also surrounded by stories told by others which, at a broader cultural level, transform our own narratives. Many of our fears are based on real threats but the way we deal with them, in many instances, is determined by the images of fear we have inherited from previous generations and their interpretations. Therefore, it appears relevant to study how our experience of fear evolves with and through transmedia narratives which add new, often unexpected components to seemingly well-known stories, expanding them linguistically, visually, acoustically and more.

The present study focuses on the embodiments of fear in the "Sandman" comic books (Gaiman, 1989; Gaiman, 1989–1990) and the TV series released on their basis in 2022 (Heinberg et al., 2022), exploring the evolution of these images both in relation to their traditional interpretation and each other. The "Sandman" storyworld begins in ancient myths, finds a new life on the pages of a comic created by Neil Gaiman and moves on to the

big screen being transformed into a transmedia narrative able to play with the border of fiction and reality, fantasy and horror. The research combines the psychological and semiotic approaches to the role of transmedia narratives in human life.

The first stage of the study focused on singling out the images of characters, events, places, etc. which serve as recognisable symbols of one or more of the common fears in the comic book, the series or both. The transformations that such images undergo in the storyworld of the "Sandman" were further traced to establish the link between the images of fear evoked by Neil Gaiman and the traditional embodiments of fear in the Western cultures. One of the main research questions consisted in determining the new patterns in making sense of fears which could emerge as the storyworld of the "Sandman" continues its path in the field of culture.

2. Identity crossroads: From personal to cultural and back again

Narratives play an important part in the way our identities are shaped and further re-shaped to form the unique cultural environment at a certain stage of its development. Our culture is believed to revolve around symbols, ideas, beliefs, and other "stable patternings of meaning" (Parsons, 1977) which emerge from the stories we tell over and over for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, stories perform the function of "social glue" (Bietti, 2019, p. 711), maintaining social bonds or group-level cooperation (Smith et al., 2017) and forming collective memory of a culture. It is through narratives that we inherit our basic beliefs, norms and values, including what we admire or fear. Still, stories are highly adaptive - as soon as a person or a community sees the benefits of changing the existing narrative, they do so.

Fear can be paralyzing, it prevents us from moving on, therefore, any progress requires overcoming fear or stripping it of its power over us, making it a simple companion. Thus, stories have long been used to make sense of fears, to better understand them, to find ways to co-exist with them. Ultimately, sense-making is one of the main functions stories fulfill in our lives. Humans are wired to give meaning to experiences in order to deal with new situations most efficiently. The human tendency to bring order to a seemingly chaotic world through stories was confirmed by an already classical experiment conducted in 1944 (Heider & Simmel, 1944) where the participants were shown pictograms with abstract shapes and further asked to describe them. The replies the researchers received took the form of short stories with a beginning, a middle and an end, the usual structure of a narrative. "We are all tellers of tales. We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging the episodes of our lives into stories" (McAdams, 1985, p. 11).

There is a growing corpus of evidence confirming the power of stories in our well-being (Singer, 2005; Wilson, 2011; Rutledge, 2018). It has been proven that a coherent and meaningful narrative of a traumatic event is crucial for coping with post-traumatic stress disorder (Smyth et al., 2001; Brewin, 2001; Pennebaker & Stone, 2003; Adler, 2008). Positive psychology uses personal narratives "to shift from a negative to positive self-assessment that enables the 'rewriting' of personal scripts and stories" (Rutledge, 2016). The narrative techniques used by psychologists and neuroscientists have confirmed their validity which has one fundamental implication - our stories can be changed.

Whereas we weave our own stories on a daily basis, we are also exposed to those of others which are suggested to improve social cognition (Mar & Oatley, 2008; Nussbaum, 2010). Social cognition is defined as the ability of individuals "to make sense of other people and themselves" (Fiske & Taylor, 2013, p. 1). On the one hand, it can be logically assumed that the broader our experience of the world is, the better we can deal with new situations. However, studies also show that the same cognitive systems are involved in understanding both real and imagined others (Jacobs, 2015). Narratives are described as "a series of cues to run a mental simulation of the plot and, importantly, its corresponding emotions" which trains "empathic abilities by inviting us to try to understand and embody the emotions and beliefs of others. This process has even been termed "empathic imagination" (Koopman & Hakemulder, 2015).

Thus, it appears that exposure to fear in a fictional narrative activates the same mechanisms of social cognition as it would in the real world with one significant difference - it is a safe environment. S. Keen described this characteristic of a narrative as "protective fictionality" (Keen, 2007 p. 8). Recipients "face" and re-conceptualise their fears "without facing real-life consequences (Hakemulder, 2000). It is argued (Djikic & Oatley, 2014, p. 500) that "literary features of a text can temporarily destabilize the personality and emotional system of the reader, which then allows for changes brought about by the narrative content".

However, the advent of new technologies changed the role of language in storytelling. R. Hodge and G. Kress even consider "the limitation to verbal language as a major inconvenience… Meaning resides so strongly and

pervasively in other systems, in a multiplicity of visual, aural, behavioral and other codes, that a concentration on words alone is not enough" (Hodge & Kress, 1988, p. 7). Stories which "express social structure, affirm social roles and transmit systems of values and knowledge" (Adami, 2016) now unfold across the entire range of media available. Moreover, in the present-day culture no story has to end, the phenomenon which has become known as transmedia storytelling.

H. Jenkins, who coined the term, defined "transmedia storytelling as the art of world making" [Jenkins, 2003]. "A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best" (Jenkins, 2008, pp. 95-96) bringing in new meanings which can potentially be used to take the story further. P. Torop perceives culture as "unlimited semiosis" (Torop, 2000) where "we 'import' signs from other contexts (another era, social group, culture) into the context in which we are now making a new sign, in order to signify ideas and values which are associated with that other context by those who import the sign" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001, pp. 10–11). If our culture is constantly using already existing stories to generate new meanings, it can infinitely expand any storyworld to suit the needs of the present without losing touch with the past which is crucial to work through our relationships with fears.

Once the story starts, it can be picked up in any new medium and reinterpreted at the discretion of the new author. Thus, culture is represented as the "supply of themes" that are ready to use in any communicative situation (Luhmann, 1984, p. 163), however, it does not tell the speaker what to say. Our culture has been grappling with fear for centuries creating a variety of fixed images deeply entrenched in our mind. Many stories work because they meet our expectations, because we can use our previous knowledge to predict what is coming next. Nevertheless, sometimes what makes a story worth telling is its contrast with the audience's expectations (Bruner, 1991; Labov 2010), especially when it comes to dealing with fears.

3. Symbols of fear (re)constructed across media

Human brain is used to looking for sense, patterns, causality (Bor, 2012), otherwise any new situation would feel like a brand new challenge. It could be one of the reasons why stories of fear work, they create vivid images and suggest what should be feared and why. Meanwhile, the storyworlds built by means of different media have the potential to enrich the initial story with new meanings, each new embodiment giving reasons to be less afraid or providing tools to turn fears into points of growth.

By deconstructing the familiar images, new extensions of the initial narrative could help the audience to progressively restructure the patterns embedded in their mind and develop new models (Kurzweil, 2012) without disrupting the continuity of the cultural narrative. This process has certain similarities with cognitive restructuring, one of the cognitive behavioral therapy types. "Cognitive restructuring, or cognitive reframing, is a therapeutic process that helps a person discover, challenge, and modify or replace their negative or irrational thoughts" (Clark, 2013). It prevents individuals from excessive reliance on their thoughts which can be biased in a variety of ways and reflect the reality not as closely as the person would like them to. But if cognitive restructuring functions at the level of individual patients, a shift in the cultural narrative could produce a similar effect on a much broader scale.

Immersing themselves in transmedia narratives, recipients find new ways to interpret fear, to challenge their preconceived notions since "each piece also contributes to a larger narrative (…) to create a communication experience instead of a message" (Rutledge, 2011). All the variety of semiotic resources involved in transmedia storyworlds ensures that the experience is comprehensive and easy to identify with. The use of multiple channels brings those images alive much more than language alone could, each element in the narrative being part of a larger picture that unfolds before the recipient's eyes like a puzzle which gradually becomes whole (Hovious, 2016).

The research proceeds from the view that transmedia narratives work as cultural memory whose natural dynamics has been emphasized by the representatives of the Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics. "Cultures are processes, never products" (Merrell, 2001, p. 400). Though culture acts as a mechanism of structuring and stabilizing our experience, it also evolves through its symbols. Yu. Lotman considered symbols to be "text genes" (Lotman, 2000) which ensure cultural unity, many of them dating back to the very early days of human history. However, the researcher also emphasizes the paradoxical nature of a symbol since it possesses an almost infinite creative potential to unfold in different plots depending on the cultural context where the story is created (ibid.). The processes that such symbols undergo may prove unexpected and irreversibly transform the cultural environment. Moreover, those symbols seem to call for reiteration to reaffirm their value for the

new era, otherwise they become inert (Olick & Robbins, 1988). “Culture takes the shape of a heterogeneous whole bustling with multiple rhythms of development and transient dominants” (Żyłko 2001, p. 400).

Communication mediated by narratives takes place not only between the senders and recipients of messages but within culture itself. Auto-communication is inherent in every cultural environment appealing to the sense of “self-existence, self-discovery and autopsychotherapy” (Lotman, 2000, p. 29). Today, the space for auto-communication is growing much broader due to the variety of media exploited to generate new meanings. “Memory is always moving across different platforms, evolving cultural forms and changing social contexts” (Rigney, 2018), especially in the modern world developing at a breakneck speed. Drastic technological as well as societal changes raise new questions about what we need or want to remember and, even more importantly, how.

P. Torop considers transmediality “as the mental aspect of text’s existence in culture” (Sütiste & Torop, 2007, p. 203). Transmedia narratives perpetuate what is considered relevant or valuable while providing unlimited possibilities for reinterpretation as human culture attempts to use its past to look ahead. “Repeating a text in different sign systems is thus simultaneously a storing and a creative activity and transmedial memory of culture is dynamic memory, enabling the semiotic, meaningful growth of a texting culture” (Ojamaa, 2015, pp. 32-33). Addition of a new text into the system reinterprets and transforms the previous whole which in turn appears as a part (ibid., p. 29). Any new creation not only complements the storyworld, it has a profound impact on the way representatives of the culture or group of cultures view the initial story or even all of the texts that came before. It is this transformation that constitutes part and parcel of the present research.

Stories that speak of human fears attract audiences for a variety of reasons from search for extreme sensations resolved at the end of narration to the desire to explore the darkest sides of humanity (Fischoff et al., 2003). Judith Halberstam suggests that films but also any elements of a transmedia narrative “are meaning machines that can be programmed and reformulated by the given society to represent unconscious or even conscious fears of humanity” (Halberstam, 1995, pp. 21-22). On the one hand, many of the embodiments of fear in the work initiating a transmedia narrative draw upon traditional symbols such as skeletons, black cats, darkness, etc. The authors expect that these images will be recognised by the audience due to shared cultural heritage. Essentially, any text, whatever code it is written in, enters into conversation with the recipient, their previous knowledge and values to provoke a certain emotional response.

In the meantime, such symbols can be reinterpreted at the discretion of the creator of a new work since they mostly belong to the space of culture, not a specific text/author that could potentially “invalidate” the reimagined representation. Sometimes, the source of the symbol remains alive in the memory of society but the image has reached a level where it is associated with a certain set of fixed cultural associations unrelated to the original work. In this case, authors use such symbols in their creations without any reservation the way they would in everyday speech. Interestingly, while the form remains unchanged for a certain image of fear to be evoked, the idea behind the symbol can easily clash with the recipient’s expectations. This mechanism can be illustrated through multiple examples such as the "Monster Mash" song by Bobby Pickett who makes Dracula, Wolfman, and Frankenstein's monster dance at a party or Jack Skellington from "The Nightmare Before Christmas" challenging the idea of Halloween and Christmas being incompatible.

Our mental representations are highly flexible and ready to expand and evolve. Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner argue that we are able to combine our background knowledge and the incoming information in order to create new mental spaces to interpret the situation at hand (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). The newly formed mental representations determine the way we are going to deal with new contexts, including fear-related ones. When we are interpreting books, movies, comics, memes, etc., we activate the same schemata as in real-life experiences. It is only natural that, as a result, our interaction with reality changes. The influence of transmedia narratives is reinforced through frequent and prolonged exposure to the story with all of its variations (Mar, 2018) which eventually lead to transformations in patterns of fears, what triggers them, how we react and what lessons we learn from them. Moreover, slight modifications in the original work can be intensified in the following extensions of the storyworld.

4. “The Sandman” or fears revisited

The image of the Sandman, in fact, originated in the Scandinavian oral tradition. It can also be encountered in many stories for children where he sprinkles sand on their eyes. The name of Sandman is claimed to have first appeared in German dictionaries of the 18th century. It is during this period that two different figures emerge, one being kind, bringing good dreams, and another scary, causing nightmares. However, until recently it has

been quite uncommon to see a creature that would combine the good and the evil alter ego. "The Sandman" of Neil Gaiman is, on the contrary, a controversial character reigning over the realm on the border between the Waking World and the Dreaming. Neil Gaiman has always considered himself to be good at creating gods and still the latter feel incredibly humane (Gaiman, July 30, 2022). All of them are flawed, all of them make mistakes and fight against their own fears. It is for this reason that viewers are able to identify themselves with the images he brings to life both on page and on screen. The greatest merit of Neil Gaiman's storytelling consists in his ability to build an impossible world which is still based on universal values as is the world of dreaming.

The series is filled with symbols of human fears that go back to some of the most common images in the human unconscious which makes them almost instantly recognizable though they were also reinterpreted to reveal how the society has evolved since the time when the metaphor emerged.

The main character himself represents a symbolic figure that reigns over the dreaming realm, except his image is nothing a recipient could reasonably expect. When meeting Lord Morpheus for the first time, the viewer/the reader would probably place him somewhere in-between Dracula and a member of goth subculture. Dressed in black with raven-black hair, pale skin and, the King of Dreams and Nightmares is one of the Endless, almost all-powerful forces that resemble gods of the ancient world, gods that became one of the first incarnations of human fear before Mother Nature. The king of dreams but also nightmares appears to be an ultimate representation of fear itself. The comic book introduces the audiences to a thin young man whose eyes remind stars in the night sky. He sometimes lacks sensitivity, and is frequently self-centered which is perilous for the realm of Dreaming.

"The Sandman" perfectly exemplifies the power of transmedia narratives since, although the core features of the character remain quite stable traveling from the comic book to the screen, cinema as a medium provides for a space for a greater development of the character. While readers have to rely on their own imagination when filling the gaps between static images and brief lines, the viewers' experience is expanded through the actor's play as well as music and sound effects. The melody serving as the background for Dream's first appearance in the series only reinforces the feeling of presence of somebody omnipotent and leaves the viewer in suspense when Lord Morpheus is not yet there. We are only able to hear his deep voice which starts haunting the recipient as if it came from their worst nightmares. Interestingly, his eyes no longer resemble impassive skies, they eloquently express all of the emotions Lord Morpheus is going through over the course of the story as reflected in a considerable number of close shots.

The series starts when Dream gets captured for over a century which triggers a range of events that will guide the audience through the journey of continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of the character and his storyworld in the comic books and in the TV show. Transmedia narratives show a clear tendency toward expansion over time in order to reflect new developments in the society using familiar plots to embrace and process change. In the TV series, Morpheus' capture causes humanity to succumb to sleeping sickness, they fall asleep peacefully not to wake up in the morning. On the one hand, the idea for this condition is based on a real disease, an inflammation of the brain called lethargic encephalitis. On the other, it reveals one of the fears entrenched in human minds, that of a global pandemic. Interestingly, the comic book has no mention of the disease. Since "Sandman" was being made when the world was in the grip of COVID-19, this event could provide viewers with a safe environment to process their horrible experiences, look them in the face and, at least potentially, let them go as the story goes on. Nevertheless, this element of the plot was not part of the original comic book, depicting a fear that humanity has encountered only in more recent times.

However, the sleeping disease is not the only consequence of Dream's long absence. His realm started to decay, many of the dreams and nightmares were left to themselves and escaped to the real world, but Morpheus does not have enough power to restore his kingdom. In order to start his quest to reclaim it in the series, he needs to absorb the energy of some of his previous creations, Gregory, the gargoyle who can be found in quite an unusual company. These are Cain and Abel who befriended him. From the Book of Genesis, we know the two brothers who both propose their sacrifices to God but it is Abel's sacrifice that is given preference to. Unable to check his anger, Cain kills his brother and is then condemned to wander the Earth till the end of time.

Meanwhile, "The Sandman" suggests its own version of the narrative as Abel is resurrected every time Cain kills him and bears no grudge. The comic book depicts a similar relationship between the brothers, except for the fact that it is them who take care of Dream until he regains his powers. This episode symbolizes the sin of fratricide and no matter how religious we are or even which religion we follow, at least at a subconscious level,

being punished for a sin by any entity considered to be a god is a common fear. Such an interpretation may seem inappropriate to some but there are times when only irony can help us fight our fears or, maybe, that weird premonition telling us that the story does not always end where it appears to.

Dream's search for the attributes of his power, his helm among them, brings him to Hell, a terrifying place inspired by Dante where souls of the sinners go through nine circles of torture. In order to regain his helm, Morpheus faces Lucifer Morningstar in a metaphoric duel where the duelists assume the roles of various concrete or abstract concepts that are supposed to overpower those of their opponent. However, it is Lord Morpheus and one of the many demons in Hell that are competing for the right to possess the helm in the comic book. N. Gaiman commented that this change was mainly due to the medium of cinema and its constraints as well as Gwendoline Christie's desire to make the most of the role. "She's 6'3″, 6'6″ in heels, and 7'5″ with wings. And you want her on the stage as much as possible" (Wasalamudalige, 2022). Opting for Lucifer to confront Dream personally, the film-makers also raised the stakes for the duel, making it more personal. Interestingly, the episode of the series is entitled "A Hope in Hell". At the end of their confrontation, Lucifer takes the form of anti-life and asks Lord Morpheus what could possibly survive it. The King of Dreams and Nightmares chooses hope at which point Lucifer has to acknowledge his defeat.

Though the duel is part both of the comic and the series, the image of hope was not explicitly evoked in the former. This scene in the series, however, leaves quite a profound impression as it is accompanied with a powerful image of light rising over Lord Morpheus and illuminating the darkness of the realm of the damned. The idea of hope, even in the underworld, is further developed when the ruler of Hell refuses to let Morpheus leave with his helm, claiming that neither dreams nor himself has any power in this kingdom. However, Dream's reply makes Lucifer cede. "You say I have no power here. Perhaps you speak truly. But to say dreams have no power in Hell… Tell me Lucifer Morningstar, what power would Hell have if those here imprisoned were not able to dream of Heaven?" (Heinberg et al., 2022, ep. 4, 36.67-36.92).

Dream's companion, a raven named Matthew, deserves attention as well. In many Western cultures, ravens have long been surrounded by quite dark symbolism which is probably due to their representation in Christianity where ravens are normally associated with evil and sin. However, the storyworld of "The Sandman" in the comics and in the TV show combines references to a variety of images, including that of Apollo accompanied by a raven who, according to one of the versions of the myth, used to be Apollo's lover who was turned into a bird due to his infidelity. The Greek myth added a different element of meaning to the image of the raven making it a prophetic figure. Ravens are also seen as intelligent and even cunning tricksters. Matthew, in his turn, embodies all of the mentioned above. Both in the comic and in the series the King of Dreams and Nightmares is shown with the raven on his shoulder. While in the TV show and in the comic book Matthew came to accompany Lord Morpheus through different paths, he is his messenger but also a loyal friend with a unique sense of humor. As a result, the audience has a much broader choice of interpretations than that suggested by A. Poe.

Most cultures share another common fear, that of death. Though different societies have represented it in a variety of ways, most frequently it was depicted as a dark skeleton-like figure with a scythe intended to take away human lives, an image that fully corresponds to what many of us expect it to be at an emotional level. Death in "The Sandman", however, takes the form of an attractive and gentle woman who enjoys life and admires humanity. Still, her appearance differs significantly on the pages of the comic book and in "The Sound of Her Wings", the episode where the viewer meets her for the first time. Primarily, she is pictured as a goth girl wearing a silver ankh which, perhaps ironically, is an Egyptian symbol of life. Death here does not provoke any gloomy associations and still her gothic appearance reminds the reader of the subculture obsessed with death and seeing it as a gateway to everlasting existence. When the viewers encounter Death for the first time, they might not even immediately realize who is in front of them, seeing Dream's caring sister.

Both in the comic books and in the TV show, the audience watches many people of all ages and walks of life who have to face their last hours and still, every time Death is depicted as a pleasant companion holding their hands to help them overcome fear, anger and regret. The film-makers emphasize this idea through the interplay of light, color and music. While Dream is mostly walking in the dark, Death is shown to travel in the broad daylight to the sound of sad but soothing music that does not incite any fear. She seems to be happy to do her job as she finds it meaningful, a perspective she shares with Dream who feels lost. "The only reason we even exist, you and I, and Desire and Despair, the whole family. We are here to serve them. It isn't about quests or finding purpose outside our function. Our purpose is our function. We are here for them" (Heinberg et al., 2022, ep. 6, 19.32-19.61).

This view of death which is not so widespread, at least not in Western cultures, the fact of meeting her "in person" can help the viewers rethink their fear and even their perception of the purpose of death. Neil Gaiman, the author of the comic book and one of the executive producers of the series, remembers that once

> I took Kirby Howell-Baptiste who plays Death aside… and I said to Kirby '...I should have warned you before you took the part and I didn't. So let me just tell you now that for the rest of your life people are gonna come up to you and say: My son died, my daughter died, my grandfather died, my husband died, my lover died, my friend died, somebody that I cared about died and I watched you in that episode "The Sound of Her Wings" meeting people as Death and I… and it let me cope (Gaiman, August 19, 2022).

Many fears appear in "The Sandman" under different masks, some easier to recognize than others. It is Confucious who the following words are frequently attributed to "Fear your desires for they tend to come true". We are used to thinking of our desires as a driving force of progress, motivation to accomplish our goals but fear and desire seem to be two sides of the same coin. If we long for something, we are inevitably afraid to be unable to fulfill our wish. Meanwhile, even if granted, its implications could sometimes prove unpredictable or even dangerous. It is quite logical that the history of storytelling has seen so many examples of creatures holding the power to carry out human wishes. Whether genies or gods of Antiquity, they served as illustrations of what our most innocent desires could result in. However, the representation of Desire in "The Sandman" is more ambiguous. First of all, they represent a remarkable gender fluidity transitioning between male, female, both, or neither, depending on the circumstances. Visually, Desire from the comic book is shown as a figure with their skin "pale as smoke," and their eyes "tawny and sharp as yellow wine" casting two shadows, one intense black and the other translucent and variable which perfectly represents Desire's dual nature. On the one hand, this character appears to be the antagonist of the story, the one who seeks to take Dream down. On the other, Mason Alexander Park who played Desire in the series mentions "One of the first things Neil ever told me about his character was that he never played Desire as a villain. Desire is the hero of their own story" (Tewksbury, 2022).

Some other symbolic figures are seemingly easier to identify, unlike their purposes. Due to Dream's long absence, a number of nightmares left his realm to live in the Waking World and now Lord Morpheus is looking to bring them back. One of the runaway nightmares is Corinthian who is free to move between the realms and he does so to kill people to consume their eyes. Lord Morpheus created him to become a reflection of the truths humans are unable to admit even to themselves. While meeting Corinthian in the Dreaming, people were supposed to understand who they are and move on. In the comic as well as in the TV show, Corinthian is typically well-dressed opting for white clothing. His most distinctive characteristic, however, is his eyes, each eye socket being filled with tiny teeth, concealed by dark sunglasses. Meanwhile, in the comic book, Corinthian is a minor character having no major influence on the story. In the TV show, he acts as one of the main antagonists which allows for expansion of his story as well as the message behind it.

In the real world he does not only turn into a murderer but also establishes a certain cult that, sadly, attracts numerous followers who steal the eyes of others for their "collections". Being profoundly deceived by his creation, Dream intends to unmake Corinthian. In fact, in the series Lord Morpheus rather eloquently summarizes the purposes both dreams and nightmares are supposed to serve. "Look at you, walking this Earth for over a century, infecting others with your joy of death, but what have you given them? What have you wrought? Nothing. Just something else for people to be afraid of" (Heinberg et al., 2022, ep. 10, 7.09-7.22). Corinthian was stopped but the nightmare he had brought to life survived. Those people calling themselves collectors would pursue the horrible cause of killing people to steal their eyes unless…

Unlike the comic book, the series shows Lord Morpheus putting a mirror to their crimes. "...You shall feel the pain of those you have slaughtered and the grief of those that mourn them still, and you shall carry that pain, and grief, and guilt until the end of time" (Heinberg et al., 2022, ep. 10, 13.08-13.35). While Dream is pronouncing his sentence, the viewer watches some of them committing suicide whereas others are calling the police to confess to their crimes. The music playing at that moment expresses sadness but also a certain calm. Despite the fact that the scene seems horrifying, the viewer cannot but realize that, in fact, it is not Morpheus who is imposing the punishment, it is the reality itself. If they do not have the courage to face their fears and accept who they are, those fears will consume them.

Fears as well as dreams, as paradoxical as they might sound, give us space for growth - illusions, however, can be extremely dangerous. This idea is further explored in "24 hours" which unfolds when the ruby, one of the

symbols of the Sandman's power, falls into the hands of a mortal, John Dee who believes that the world is full of lies. The subsequent events take place in a small cafe where John uses the ruby to force people around him, the staff as well as other clients, to speak the truth or so it seems to him. This results in a terrifying bloodshed which, nevertheless, is represented quite differently in the comic book and the TV show. The issue in question leaves the reader no hope to escape resembling a never-ending nightmare. When Morpheus finally appears, he does not even intervene, in fact, he hardly says a word which emphasizes his weakness in John's eyes. While the TV show follows the original plot quite closely, the corresponding episode reaches a totally different ending when Dream confronts John Dee. The latter believes that humanity is wallowing in lies but Morpheus shows him a different kind of truth. "They are lying to themselves. It's all lies. - Not lies, John. Dreams" (Heinberg et al., 2022, ep. 5, 41.42-41.50). Eventually, Dream returns his ruby and stops John Dee from causing more damage. Moreover, their final fight is taking place in the world of Dreaming which leaves the viewer wondering if the events in the diner were real or not at all.

The figure of Morpheus himself deserves special attention as the story essentially represents his search for meaning which to a certain extent reveals his fear of life without any sense, a life when he does not meet his own expectations, an overwhelming feeling any individual has experienced at a certain point of their life. At the beginning of the story, the audience faces an almost all-powerful god who can play with their dreams at his own discretion, who does not seem to care about humanity at all. Nevertheless, as the plot is progressing, we do not only witness a considerable evolution in Morpheus, it is those around him who make him do so, some of them being humans, others - his subjects.

Morpheus grows to realize the potency of human dreams which culminates in his meeting with a girl born as the Vortex, a mortal named Rose who is able to travel between dreams of others and eventually brings down walls between them which threatens to destroy the Dreaming World. The realm of dreams is saved through an ultimate sacrifice of Rose's grandmother, however, Morpheus is gently reminded that the only purpose of his kingdom is to serve humanity. Quite interestingly, the TV show reiterates the purpose of the Dreaming realm through Fiddler's Green, one of the dreams that returned to regain his place and serve Lord Morpheus again.While Dream is wondering why Vortexes even came to being, Fiddler's Green gently asks him "When a human is at the center of the Dreaming, is it not to remind us that we exist because humans dream, not the other way round?" (Heinberg et al., 2022, ep. 10, 25.52-25.58). Though Dream's path begins as a quest to regain the stolen tools of office, his final goal is to rebuild the Dreaming for humans to sleep in peace.

Nevertheless, before doing so the King of Dreams and Nightmares has to break the chains of his own past. People are so often haunted by what we have been through that we forget that our past is no more than a story we tell ourselves which is vividly shown in the last episode of the first season. Here, both readers and viewers meet Calliope, one of the Muses, captured by a mortal under the ancient laws of magic to give him inspiration in his writing. Hopeless and abused, she calls for help but nobody in the magical world is able to break the bond which is considered legitimate. Lord Morpheus is the only one who could free her and he does arrive. At this point, the audience learns that they used to be a couple and even had a son. However, his tragic death separated Calliope and Dream who had not seen each other for centuries till that day. Though Calliope does not cherish much hope, Morpheus uses his power to force the mortal writer to set her free. However, their reunion in the comic is quite brusque and, while Dream feels no hate for Calliope, he does not wish to see her again. Their conversation in the TV show, on the other hand, does not only provide a deeper insight into their relationships but also allows the Muse to see how much he changed. Dream finally accepts that he is grieving but maybe one day he will be able to mourn their son together with Calliope. "You have changed Oneiros. In the old days you would have left me rot without turning a hair. Do you still hate me… for leaving you, for blaming you for what happened? - No. I've learnt much in recent times, and… No matter. I do not hate you" (Heinberg et al., 2022, ep. 11, 55.86-56.62).

5. Conclusions

In the universe of Neil Gaiman, appearances are always deceptive. He creates stories within stories and allows them to choose their own destinies which encourages the viewers to rethink theirs. Here, Death turns into a friend accompanying humanity in one of the most difficult journeys. Nightmares rush into our sleep to force us to face our fears and overcome them. However, the principal character, Lord Morpheus, remains probably the greatest mystery. Seemingly being a full-fledged incarnation of fear, he is tortured by his own terrors and uncertainties. Yet, as the plot unfolds, Morpheus appears to be no longer overpowered by his past or afraid of trusting those around him. Moreover, he finds meaning where he would never have expected to see it before, in the human world.

In the "Sandman" storyworld, the deepest fears of humanity are given names and even faces but, more importantly, they are woven into stories which clash with the traditional narratives illustrating that they can be modified at will. Therefore, transmedia narratives go beyond the limits that familiar images impose, thus changing the way we construct meanings in the real world.

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