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The Motif of Evil in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*

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Prohlášení

Prohlašuji, že jsem závěrečnou práci vypracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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vlastnoruční podpis

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Contents

Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to analyse Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* (2001) while highlighting one of its most important motifs, evil. Firstly, it describes the concept of evil in general and different scientific approaches to it, followed by its representation in literature with a focus on fantasy and mythology. The second half of the thesis is then concerned with the novel itself together with its author. The focus is on the concept of evil in this novel and how the evil is represented.

Introduction

Evil can be found everywhere in the world and it has always been a fundamental part of our society. Since the beginning of ages people have been aware of all the things evil, good, and even those in between. Since literature plays a significant role in our lives as well, it is often used as a means of projecting evil into our reality and brings it closer to us. The aim of this thesis is to analyse Neil Gaiman's famous novel *American Gods* (2001) with a focus on the motif of evil.

The first chapter is concerned with the concept of evil itself and different approaches to it. Whether we look at it from the point of philosophy, religion or psychology, opinions on evil vary depending on the internal opinion of the theorist. The aim of this chapter is to summarise these ideas and explain differences between them.

Another chapter focuses on the concept of evil once again. However, this time it is approached from the point of literature. This part is divided into two parts, fantasy and mythology. Both are very important for the further analysis of *American Gods* because the author is famous for both his wide variety of works in the genre of fantasy and his inspiration by mythology. More importantly, both these elements meet in the analysed novel and make it very original and popular.

The third chapter introduces the author of *American Gods,* Neil Gaiman. This British author living in America has written many important pieces of literature and stood behind more than one TV project as well. In this chapter, we summarize his life and his work which led to him becoming famous around the world.

The last chapter focuses on the novel *American Gods* itself. It starts with basic information about the novel, mentions Gaiman's inspiration for writing it, and summarizes the plot of the novel as well. It also focuses on the novel's connection to fantasy, namely religious fantasy which was defined in the second chapter. Lastly, it provides the reader with an analysis of *American Gods* featuring subchapters focusing on the representation of evil focusing on some of the characters and motifs in the book and overall evil which the novel conveys. This chapter is closely connected to the first chapter of the thesis because it applies its findings to the analysed novel.

1. Evil and different approaches to it

In modern history, the period, which shaped society's view of evil to the greatest extent, is the Holocaust. Because of this event, there has been a lot of attention brought to the subject of evil as it has been developed and discussed. Concerning this event, the society split up into two groups. One group asked questions related to religion: *"Where was God during the suffering in the conflagration of killing and genocide of WWII in a measure never imagined? Can and should belief in God survive these horrendous events?"* while the second group's questions were concerned with humanity: *"How can humanity come to terms with having witnessed the appalling depths of human depravity? How can humanity rise to the responsibilities facing it after the mass evils it perpetrated and continues to perpetrate?"* (Angier, Meister & Talliaferro, 2019, n.p.). These two sets of questions summarise the view on evil in society today. People either question their religion and the God in which they believe, or they question the whole humanity and how it will cope with such evil that exists in the world.

While online dictionaries, such as Merriam-Webster dictionary, define the word "evil" as *"morally reprehensible"* or *"arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct"*, the meaning of the concept of evil is much broader than that and not so easily grasped. Even though these definitions are factually true, they do not completely define the extent of mentioned moral reprehensibility or the nature of this "bad character". To fully understand the concept of evil, we must examine different scientific approaches to evil that are concerned with these issues. In this chapter, we will focus on the philosophical, theological, and psychological approach to the concept of evil and its different definitions or categories (Angier, Meister & Talliaferro, 2019, n.p.).

1.1.   The philosophical approach to evil

Firstly, we shall focus on the philosophical approach. Nowadays, the concept of evil is a controversial term within the philosophical community. Philosophers can be divided into two groups – Evil-Revivalists and Evil-Sceptics. The former defend the importance of the concept of evil and agree that it needs to be applied to contemporary actions and agents. On the other hand, Evil-Sceptics believe that using the term "evil" is inappropriate and simplistic and they think that it should be abandoned (Russel 2007, p. 89).

There are many other ways of dividing evil. For example, Svendsen (2010, pp. 7–20) differentiates between 4 types of evil. Firstly, there is *Demonic Evil*, which is powered by selfish reasons. It is used for satisfying one's own needs on behalf of hurting others or watching them

suffer. On the other hand, when evil is used to achieve a specific goal, we talk about the second type of evil – *Instrumental evil*. Even though the performer is aware of the evil nature of the action, the goal he wants to achieve is not necessarily evil. Another type of evil he distinguishes is *Idealistic Evil*. Here, performers believe that their evil actions can be justified because they are done for a higher good. The actors do not think about whether their actions are good or bad, they only concentrate on the fact, that the result is good. Lastly, there is *Stupid Evil* and that is the one which occurs based on human incompetence, despite the fact, nobody wished for it (Svendsen, 2010, pp. 7–20).

Paulson (2007, pp. 2–3) outlines another possible categorization. He describes the two participants in evil actions – *Suffering Evil* and *Doing Evil*. The latter suggests that the target is suffering evil, they either witness and experience horrifying actions, such as natural causes (earthquake, flood, etc.) or actions caused by other human beings (robbery, murder, etc.). The former describes the person who is doing evil by acting immorally and selfishly and being controlling and cruel (Paulson, 2007, pp. 2–3).

In conclusion, there are many ways of looking at the concept of evil in philosophy. One can focus on the philosophers and their opinion on evil, the purpose of doing evil acts or on individual participants in evil actions. The philosophical approach is also very similar to the following theological approach.

1.2.   The theological approach to evil

To briefly summarise the concept of evil from the point of religion, we must first go back to Antiquity, where society was confronted with the concept of evil for the first time. As Angier, Meister & Talliaferro (2018) explain, the topic of evil in this period is threefold. Firstly, there is the evil imagined in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East (Jewish and later Judaeo-Christian cultures). These cultures brought the idea of the one God and with that the peculiar fascination with evil. To them, evil not only stood as an antithesis to God, but they have also asked *"how could a perfect God create or allow evil in the first place?"*. To these monotheistic societies, evil came in the form of a snake or "the Satan" (Angier, Meister & Talliaferro, 2018, n.p.).

As mentioned above, the Jewish and later Judaeo-Christian cultures were monotheistic, and this fact shaped their overall attitude towards evil. On the other hand, ancient Greece and Rome were polytheistic and therefore, they did not have any supremely evil force or figure as could be seen in monotheistic religions. Instead, their individual gods and literary characters

possessed not only good and admirable qualities but also their flaws (Angier, Meister & Talliaferro, 2018, n.p.).

The third approach to evil in Antiquity has its roots in Asia and the Far East and is highly different from the previous two. Evil thoughts and desires are viewed as something that humans can control and subject to various techniques and skills. In order to avoid these thoughts and desires, people use practices such as Yoga, meditation, breathing exercise, or martial arts to navigate evils within them (Angier, Meister & Talliaferro, 2018, n.p.).

Another important aspect of the theological approach to evil is the problem of evil, mainly in monotheistic religions. There are many questions of why a good God would permit the manifestation of evil. They are being answered under the heading of theodicy. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines this term as *"defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil."* Theodicy is concerned with God and his connection to evil, thus resolving the problem of evil. Hick (2010) identified three main traditions of theodicy. Firstly, he mentions *The Plotinian theodicy*, named after Plotinus. He says that evil is "Non-Being" and what we consider evil is something which is in antithesis to "Authentic-Being" (Hick 2010, p. 40). Another tradition is called *Augustinian theodicy*, named after the philosopher Augustine of Hippo. His opinion was that God created the world without evil and it was the people who stood behind the creation of evil with their sins (Hick 2010, pp. 38–64). Lastly, there is *Irenaen theodicy*, based on the thinking of St. Irenaeus. Similarly to the previous tradition, he also suggests that evil is the consequence of free will. However, he believed that God was also partially responsible for the sins and suffering by creating the world imperfectly on purpose (Hick 1966, pp. 201–215).

To conclude, the division of the concept of evil in Antiquity was closely connected to religion. Nowadays, when facing evil, people still question their religion and try to find answers to the so-called "problem of evil".

1.3.   The psychological approach to evil

Apart from philosophy and theology, the term "evil" is also being increasingly used in social psychology to describe acts of violence, such as mass killings or genocide. Considering this, Staub (2003, pp. 47–51) asks whether this term has suitable meaning for psychologists. Unlike theology or philosophy, psychology is only concerned with evil performed by human beings. Forces of nature which may be viewed as evil, are from a psychological standpoint neutral because they cause harm without intention (Staub, 2003, pp. 47–51). According to him,

the most important elements of evil are *extreme harm* (pain, suffering, loss of life or the loss of personal or human potential), *instigation* or *provocation* and *repetition* or *persistence of greatly harmful acts*. When all these elements are present, it is most appropriate to talk about evil (Staub, 2003, pp. 47–51).

Another scientist who views evil from a standpoint of social psychology is Berkowitz (1999). He explains that social psychologists *"do not think of evil actions as the product of evil personalities"* (pp. 246–253). We can see the same idea in the work of Darley (1992) who says that behind evil actions one normally does not find an evil individual, but instead an ordinary person who has done evil acts, for example, because of social reasons (Darley, 1992, p. 204). However, even when most people would consider the person evil, in most cases the evil perpetrators do not see themselves this way. On the contrary, they regard themselves as trying their best to do something good and noble (Baumeister & Vohs 2004, p. 85). Therefore, evil agents cannot be the ones to question whether the action is or is not evil.

The last point we will mention concerning the psychological approach to evil is the fact that there are four main root causes of why some people do things that others will regard as evil. According to Baumeister & Vohs (2004, pp. 90–98), there is firstly the type of evil that can be employed as *a means to an end*. Here, the evil derives from the craving for a material gain which can be money, resources, power, sex, and others. The second way of employing evil is *in response to threatened egotism.* In this case, people whose pride and honour have been wounded or besmirched are the ones who act in an evil way. Another root cause of doing evil actions is *a misguided effort to do good*. We talk about this root when people think of violence as a necessary means to accomplish something good and positive. Lastly, there are people who perform evil in order to *gain sadistic pleasure*. They are the most common type of evildoers in victims' accounts and fictional depictions but the least common ones in everyday life. (Baumeister & Vohs 2004, pp. 90–98). Even though none of these root causes excuse the person who is performing evil, it can help us to understand what has been happening inside an evildoer's head in order to act the way they have.

2. Evil in Literature

As can be seen in the previous chapter, there are many ways of looking at the concept of evil. However, evil is not only a fascination among scientists. For their controversy, good and evil have also always been one of the most used themes in literature and the interest continues to this day, as Bataille (2012, p. 3) explains: *"Literature is not innocent. It is guilty and should admit itself so."*

Paulson (2007, pp. 1–33) focuses on three important terms while talking about its representation in literature. Apart from evil itself, which we have already discussed, he also mentions *sin* and *wrongdoing*. Sin is a religious term for doing evil. It means disobedience to God and therefore, the original sin comes from the Bible, specifically from the story of Adam and Eve. Sin takes the form of an abomination which is something unspeakable and detestable and refers to biblical taboos such as incest or cannibalism. While evil is man-orientated and sin god-orientated, wrongdoing focuses mainly on the law. It isn't concerned with what god or humans think is correct but what is right or proper according to a code, standard or convention. From the point of view of the law, wrongs are divided into misdemeanors, felonies, and treasons (Paulson 2007, pp. 1–33). Although evil, sin, and wrongdoing talk about the same concept – something that is the opposite of good or on the other side of the spectrum, they are looking at it from a different point of view. However, all of them have been highly represented in literature throughout the history.

An important representation of sin, god-orientated evil, in literature is, for example, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlett Letter* (1850):

> *"Thus the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast,—at her, the child of honorable parents,—at her, the mother of a babe, that would hereafter be a woman, —at her, who had once been innocent, —as the figure, the body, the reality of sin."* (Hawthorne, 1994, p. 54)

We can see that even though Hester, the main character of the book, has always been innocent, her whole status changes after she commits adultery. From that point, she takes the role of a martyr upon herself. The story is concerned with finding the source of said evil and how evil may lie somewhere where one would not expect it.

On the other hand, the man-orientated "evil" can be found for example in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë. An important character in the story is Heathcliff, who is the

perfect representation of an angry and jealous person who is filled with rage. Not only do these characteristics lead to his destruction, but they lead to the destruction of people around him as well. Bataille (2012, p. 11) explains that the evil in the book is being used *"with regard to passion, as if Evil were the most powerful means of exposing passion."* The struggle of good and evil in the book is represented by violence or by puerility. Heathcliff judges and fights the whole world because he cannot identify it with good. In his mind, he is the representation of good. Thus, in the book, he stands in revolt against good, against the so-called "adult world". He uses every means possible in order to achieve his goals which are a complete destruction of everyone who treated him badly in the past (Bataille, 2012, pp. 13–14).

Lastly, the example of law-orientated evil – wrongdoing – can be found in the work of Arthur Conan Doyle in the character of Professor Moriarty. The main character of these stories, Sherlock Holmes, describes him in this way: *"He* [Moriarty] *is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organizer of half that is evil and nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order"* (Doyle, 2009, p. 471). This description explains everything that Moriarty represents. Not only is he evil, but he also organizes other wrongdoings happening in the city of London. In the stories of Sherlock Holmes, we can watch how he is being characterized by the point of law and which crimes are credited to him.

Individual authors are often trying to find the inspiration in human souls. Lehár (1999, p. 657) asks himself: *"Where else should the epic literature find action than among the human deeds? To what other depths should it go to discover the secrets of the world and its confusing emotions, the ways of thought and the victory of reason other than the human heart and soul?"*[1] That is why evil is such a popular motif in all genres; it comes from within the human being and it is something that everyone can relate to and understand.

2.1. Fantasy

The novel *American Gods* belong to the genre of fantasy. That is the reason why we will focus on this genre together with its different forms, and the realization of evil in it. The whole theme of fantasy is very broad and there are a lot of theories concerned with its definition or typology. That is why we offer the reader a summary of these approaches and do not simply choose one of them.

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[1] My own translation.

2.1.1. Defining fantasy

As we already mentioned, there are a lot of definitions and approaches to fantasy. For example, according to Todorov (2010, p. 26), we cannot grasp the essence of fantasy because if we do understand the piece of writing it is not fantastic anymore. Penn (2013) looks at fantasy from a different point of view and says that *"fantasy is a genre that typically features the use of magic or other supernatural phenomena in the plot, setting, or theme"* (n.p.). Clute & Grant (1999, p. viii) chose a rough definition: *"A fantasy text is a self-coherent narrative which, when set in our reality, tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it."* They also say that although certain things are not possible in our world, they are normal in the fantasy world (either otherworld or secondary world) where the story takes place (Clute & Grant, 1999, p. viii). James & Mendlesohn (2012, pp. 1–4) summarise the opinions of the main theorists in the field in the following line: "*fantasy is about the construction of the impossible"* (James & Mendlesohn, 2012, pp. 1–4).

Similar to every other piece of literature, there are certain qualities that are often criticized in this genre. Hunt (2001, pp. 2–8) names some of them and tries to argue with these different types of criticisms against fantasy. Firstly, he says that there is a problem with the genre. One would expect that the different worlds of fantasy would offer infinite possibilities of creativity, expansiveness, and liberation. He adds that the reality is that the forms often used while writing fantasy are surprisingly limited. Another major criticism of fantasy is that it is childish, to that he replies that this connection of fantasy and children is bizarre. He does not understand why only children could be fascinated by alternative worlds and other tropes of fantasy. Another common accusation is that fantasy is not of a good quality because it is only escapism, however, the author of the book says that it is quite the opposite – fantasy is often a very direct critique of things as they are in real life (Hunt, 2001, pp. 2-8).

2.1.2. Different forms of fantasy

Another reason why fantasy is difficult to define is that there are different opinions on what the term "fantasy" covers. According to Penn (2013, n.p.), we can divide fantasy into eight categories: epic fantasy, high fantasy, dark fantasy, grimdark, steampunk, arcanepunk, historical fantasy, and urban fantasy. According to her, epic fantasy usually conveys extensive books or series. Under high fantasy, we can find traditional stories, similar to those of Tolkien. In stories of dark fantasy, authors add in horror or grim themes. Fantasy books with dystopian elements are referred to as grimdark and those in which the author mixes fantasy and elements

from the Victorian era are called steampunk. Stories that blend sci-fi and fantasy together are called arcanepunk. Historical fantasy is simply a combination of fantasy and historical fiction and on the contrary, urban fantasy blends together the ideas of magic and myth with the modern-day world (Penn, 2013, n.p.).

Anders (2013, n.p.) takes a different approach and she adds portal fantasy, gothic, the new weird, folklore, and magic realism to the already mentioned categories. By portal fantasy, she means stories in which the main character enters another world by some sort of portal. This is, for example, a famous book series *Narnia* by C. S. Lewis. Gothic fantasy is famous for containing a lot of supernatural characters, such as vampires, ghosts, werewolves, and others. In such stories, there is usually also an element of romance and they are often set in decaying and ruined places. A genre called the new weird blends together science fiction, fantasy, and horror. An example of this is H. P. Lovecraft's work. Another category is inspired by folklore forms, such as epics, myths, legends, fairytales, fables, riddles, songs, jokes, etc. And the last category Andres (2013, n.p.) mentions is the magic realism. It refers to literary fiction in which magic is a part of everyday life and it gives a surrealistic undertone to the storytelling.

On the server *Literary Devices,* we can find another way of characterizing fantasy. To already mentioned categories, they add modern folktales (e.g. *The Emperor's New Clothes*), animal fantasy (such as *Charlotte's Web*), toy fantasy (for example *Winnie the Pooh*), magical fantasy (including *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*), mystery and supernatural fantasy (with such stories as *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*) and even science-fiction (represented by *Frankenstein*).

Lastly, James & Mendlesohn (2012, pp. 1–4) name similar categories as the theorists in previous paragraphs. However, they broaden some of them. Instead of dark fantasy, they work with the term dark fantasy and paranormal romance and instead of historical fantasy they use the fantasy of history and religion (James & Mendlesohn, 2012, pp. 1–4).

2.1.2.1. Religious fantasy

Another subgenre of fantasy is religious fantasy. Sleight (2015, p. 251) defines it as *"a text that depicts or makes use of commonly understood religious tropes, but which recasts them in the context of additional fantastic narrative elements."* Stableford (2009, p. 345) finds this category to be awkward because of the contrast between religious people and atheists. While for the former, the stories are accepted as a matter of faith, for the latter, they seem obviously fantastic. However, Stableford still agrees that there is no reason why Christians or Jews should

not accept the existence of Christian or Jewish fantasy (Stableford, 2009, p. 345). Stableford (2009, p. 345) also mentions that even though a lot of religious fantasies are anti-religious and of a satiric stripe, there is also a lot of those which are quite the opposite.

The term religious fantasy covers a fantastical approach to both monotheistic and polytheistic religion. An example of the first type is a satiric novel written by James Morrow called *Only Begotten Daughter* (1990) which is a story about Julie Katz who has been born to a celibate father. The story follows her life in which she is being tempted by the Devil which results in her journey through Hell in which she meets her brother Jesus Christ (Sleight, 2012, p. 249).

The polytheistically orientated type of religious fantasy can be found for example in the work of Neil Gaiman, more importantly, in the novel *American Gods* (2001), which will be discussed further in the thesis. Another one of his books is suitable to fit into religious fantasy as well, and that is *Anansi Boys* (2005). This novel follows a Londoner Charlie who finds out his late father was a spider deity, Anansi. His powers are, however, passed down only to Charlie's brother whom he has never heard of before. The whole story is concerned with the negotiation between Charlie and his brother for their father's legacy (Sleight, 2012, p. 254).

Sleight (2012, p. 255) mentions another type of religious fantasy. He says that it is also possible for fantasy not to be concerned with any deities known to us. That can be seen for example in the book *Small Gods* (1992) by Terry Pratchett. The story is set in a fictional world and therefore even the gods are fictional and not connected to our world. In their reality, the deities exist to the extent that people believe in them. Sleight (2012, p. 256) gives an example of a god Om who, now almost forgotten, is disappointed because he can manifest himself into the world only in the form of a tortoise.

This subgenre of fantasy is closely connected to mythology, which, together with its relationship to evil, we will discuss in another chapter of this thesis. In the following text, we deal with the theme of good and evil in the genre of fantasy in general and with its representation in fantasy literature.

2.1.3. Good vs. Evil

In fantasy, the themes of good and evil are one of the most important and prominent ones. For example, in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955), this contrast is represented by the shift of light. Beautiful elves, who represent good, are associated with primal light, while

Black Riders (representing evil) are accompanied by shadows and lack of light in general (Guanio-Uluru, 2015, p. 40). In the books by Tolkien, both good and bad are very black and white and very easily recognized.

In more modern pieces of literature, the line between these two is more blurred (Tyce, 2013, n.p.). Guanio-Uluru (2015, p. 109) explains this difference using Rowling's *Harry Potter* series as a reference. Evil is represented most significantly by the character of Voldemort and good by Harry Potter and Dumbledore. At first, it is easy to distinguish between good and evil. However, as the story progresses, it becomes more complicated because of: *"the 'parasitic' entanglement between Harry and Voldemort, the character and characterization of Professor Snape and the deconstruction of Dumbledore's normative authority in The Deathly Hallows"* (Guanio-Uluru, 2015, p. 109). This causes evil not to be found as easily as in older and more conservative fantasy books.

Tyce (2013, n.p.) explains that the reason for this is the need for fantasy to parallel the real world, where evil is a part of everyday life. The struggle between good and evil happens around the world as well as inside every person and it is usually not as black and white as it was in earlier fantasy books. That is why authors are now being forced to *"make things as realistic as possible"* (Tyce, 2013, n.p.).

In the following part of this thesis we still stay within the fantastic genre. However, we will focus on one important portion of it, mythology. We will define myth and talk about important mythologies from all around the world that all gather together in one of Neil Gaiman's books, *American Gods*, which will be dealt with later.

2.2. Mythology

As we have already mentioned, mythology plays a significant role in the book *American Gods*. It is important to briefly mention, describe and define mythology together with its approach to evil. We will also describe important mythological figures which are represented in the mentioned book.

2.2.1. Myth and mythology

The term mythology can refer either to the system of myths or to the study of myths. Honko (1972) defines myth as: *"a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, the creation, fundamental events, the exemplary deeds of the gods as a result of which the world, nature, and culture were created together with all parts thereof and given their order,*

which still obtains" (p. 16). He also adds that the most important functions of a myth are expressing and conforming to religious values and norms of society and providing a pattern of behaviour to be imitated (Honko, 1972, p. 16).

According to Kirk (1973, n.p.), there are three main categories of myths. Firstly, there are myths told for entertainment. This reminds us that although the myths are sacred, they do not have to be solemn as well. Kirk's second category consists of operative, iterative or validatory myths. These myths are often repeated to emphasize a desirable continuity in nature or society. The third category includes explanatory or speculative myths. These myths are either simple etiological myths explaining the origins of objects, customs, or natural features or they are complex myths trying to answer the questions that have always troubled humanity, for example where people come from and how they die (Kirk, 1973, n.p.).

2.2.1.1. Norse mythology

Important mythology is, for example, the one concerned with Scandinavia. In form, the texts which comprise the mythology are narrative, and they are couched both in prose and in poetry. Concerning the time range of the texts, Norse mythology is very extensive, it spans from the beginning of times, where the stories tell of the origin of cosmos and human beings, to the destruction of cosmos and its rebirth (Lindow, 2002, pp. 1–2). The whole period between these two events is concerned with the enduring struggle between two groups – gods and giants. The gods, who are referenced to as "æsir" in the original language, are the ones who represent light. On the other hand, the latter group of "jötnar" aims for the disruption of light and the order of the cosmos. When talking about Norse mythology, it is helpful to think of three time periods in which the mythology takes place. Firstly, there is a *mythic past*. In this period the world was created and ordered by the æsir who were joined with another group, the "vanir", to create the community of gods. This time period is also referred to as the golden age. However, it was disrupted in the so-called *mystic present* and its struggle between æsir and jötnar for resources, precious objects, and women. Nonetheless, the flow of these possessions is only from æsir to jötnar. Therefore, the narratives can be divided into those in which the gods acquire something from the giants and those in which the giants attempt to acquire something from the gods and fail. Lastly, the *mythic future* is the period in which the gods and giants destroy each other and the cosmos, and the world order comes to an end. However, a new world order is to follow and in it, the world will be reborn (Lindow, 2002, pp. 1–2).

From the description of gods and giants, one would expect the gods to be positive and the giants negative characters. However, it is not as easy to find a line between these two. When we look at Odin, who is the head of the pantheon, he is the example of this statement. Together with his two brothers, he stood behind the creation of the cosmos which is very positive and admirable. However, they created it out of the body of the proto-giant Ymir whom they have killed. This is an important aspect of Norse mythology – gods killing giants but never vice versa. Here, we would normally expect the opposite. In the texts, Odin is often depicted as an old bearded and one-eyed man and he seems very wise and powerful. One of Odin's most important characteristics is his wisdom. However, he uses it in the opposite way when he puts himself atop of the hierarchy of all creatures and throughout the stories, he continues to seek wisdom to be even more powerful (Lindow, 2002, pp. 247–251). Odin is not a good character; he is feared by the common folk and has a lot of lives on his hands. On the other hand, he is not only bad either. Even though he has made some poor choices, he still cares for his people and tries to do the best for his kind.

2.2.1.2.   Egyptian mythology

Another mythology represented in the book *American Gods* is the one of Egypt. Janák (2005, p. 10) mentions that Egyptian gods are typical for their lack of individuality because the characteristics of individual gods are often overlapping. The gods have identical names, appearances, titles, or attributes. The whole pantheon consists of different types and roles (Janák, 2005, p. 10).

According to their names, Janák (2005, p. 10) divides the gods into several groups. Some of them are named after their attributes and characteristics, then there are gods named after the place of their origin and lastly, there are those whose names describe their tasks. Another fascinating aspect of Egyptian mythology is the way the gods are depicted in the old paintings. Their visualization varies from those who are zoomorphic or theriomorphic (having the form of an animal) to those who are anthropomorphic (having the form of a human). However, a depiction of most of the gods lies somewhere in between these two ends of the spectrum. Apart from the animal-like and human-like appearance of gods, some gods are neither of these. For example, gods have been depicted as things, plants or even space objects (Janák, 2005, pp. 10–11).

Egyptians perceive their gods in three dimensions – cosmical, cultic and mythical. In the cosmical dimension, deities were displayed in a specific phenomenon or energy of cosmical

spheres. Actions in this dimension are driven by the never-ending circle of time, thus they are cyclical (life, death, resurrection) Cultic dimension is concerned with the relationship between people and gods on the Earth via rituals and other events connected with the care of gods' earthly presence. Finally, in the mythical dimension, gods are depicted according to the imagination of people. Into such stories, Egyptians project the experience from their own world, hence gods act, think and feel the same way as humans (Janák, 2005, pp. 13–14).

Pinch (2002) adds that the Egyptian religion had no official holy book equivalent to the Bible or the Koran. Therefore, the relationships between deities have been changing and developing as time progressed and they have never become fixed at one moment in time (pp. 4–5).

One of the main and most popular gods and the one whom we must not forget to mention when talking about evil in Egyptian mythology is Anubis. Janák (2005) defines him as the god of the dead, cemeteries, tombs, mummification, death and resurrection. Anubis is mostly depicted as a jackal, dog or combination of both. In real life, such animals could often be found on the edge of a desert near the burial places, trying to enter shallow graves. Egyptians, while trying to prevent this from happening, have come up with the figure of Anubis as a guard of the dead. They have looked up to Anubis and other gods with canine characteristics and believed that the gods could control and rule over said animal intruders. Not only has Anubis been guarding graves, but he also possessed the role of a mummifier and his occupation was also to protect the dead from the dangers of the netherworld. In the *Book of the Dead,* he is depicted as a character who takes the newly deceased into the Hall of Justice. Their hearts are weighed there, allowing the deceased's good deeds to help overcome any evil that they had participated in (pp. 27–28). On this situation, we can demonstrate, how evil is looked upon in Egyptian culture. They do not forbid evil deeds completely, instead, they allow the deceased to compensate for them by performing good as well.

Another popular deity with the focus on evil in Egyptian mythology is Thot. In Egyptian art, he is depicted as a human with the head of an ibis. Janák (2005, pp. 175–177) explains that his origin and specialization is not as straightforward as with other gods. Originally, he was known as the god of the Moon. He has played a very important role in *Pyramid texts*, where he brings the dead monarch to the sky on his wings. He also stands next to Seth, Osiris, and Dwn-'nwy as one of the gods of cardinal points. Thot also plays an important role in mythological stories of Horus, Seth, and Osiris, where he heals Horus' eye. Later on, Thot has become

connected with writing, stories, keeping records, and generally, he symbolises wisdom. Like Anubis, Thot was part of the judgment of the dead in the *Book of the Dead*. He has taken the part of the controller and recorder (Janák, 2005, pp. 175–177).

Even though neither Thot nor Anubis are evil characters, they are often connected with both evil and death. Unlike Odin in Norse mythology, these characters do not have any negative qualities, the evil comes from the dead people who meet them in the Hall of Justice, where their hearts are being weighed. During this ceremony, gods come to a decision of whether the deceased is good or evil.

2.2.1.3.   Slavic mythology

Slavs, like other nations, have told myths among each other. Gasparini (2013, n.p.) names a myth known to all Slavs that tells us about the creation of the land from a handful of sand that God ordered the Devil to bring. In Slavic mythology, there are numerous deities that were highlighted for example by Gliński (2016, n.p.). One of the most popular is Perun, the god of thunder, whom we can find in many stories and songs. The father to all gods as well as the creator is Svarog. Together with Veles (the god of chaos and the sea), he brings balance to the world. Other important gods are so-called seasonal deities (e.g. Jarilo, associated with the fertility of the land in the spring; Marzanna, the goddess of wintertime and death) or fertility goddesses (e.g. Mokosch), who watch over women.

The main representative of evil in Slavic mythology is Czernobog (also spelled as Chernobog, Zcernobog, Chernevog…) who is referred to as the Black God. He is the god of evil and death and is closely connected to darkness. This deity has been often described as a dark figure dressed in black and he has been seen only during the hours of darkness. (Dixon-Kennedy, 1998, p. 52) Because of this exaggerated formulation, his "good opposite" has been expected in the form of Belobog – the White God; however, his legacy has not been as profound as the one of Czernobog (Profant, 2000, p. 59).

2.2.1.4.   Celtic mythology

The term "Celts" describes people who lived in Britain, Ireland, northwest France, and northwest Spain. Originally, these pagan people did not believe in written language and therefore all their stories, full of gods, monsters, and heroes, have been transmitted only orally (McKeown, 2016, n.p.). However, this oral tradition came into contact with literacy in the late 19th century when the literate people across Europe became aware of the depth of their indigenous cultures (Monaghan, 2003, p. xi).

Because of religion and the absence of a creation myth, Celts have often been described as *"positing the world that is continually creating itself, or one that had been always in existence as it is today"* (Monaghan, 2003, p. xiii). To Celts, this world includes more than what is tangible to our senses. They have believed in the Otherworld, which is a place coexisting with our reality, where deities and other powerful beings are and can affect human lives from. Unlike some other religions, the deities did not live in the sky. Their place was *"in the mountains and the sea, in trees and in running streams"* (Monaghan, 2003, p. xiii). In Celtic mythology, there is no specific, organized, hierarchical pantheon of gods. Even though there are many of them, they usually do not possess any names or a form, because the deities have had a power of shape–shifting. This is also the reason why there was no native tradition of sculpting or painting them in physical form. Also, not all Celts shared the same gods and goddesses. Each tribe usually had their own deities associated with the features of their land (Monaghan, 2003, p. xiii.)

Overall, the whole Celtic mythology *"is rich with the symbolism of life, death, and rebirth, replete with the magic of nature and the ancient world."* (McKeown, 2016, n.p.). McKeown (2016) also mentions that early stories usually do not have a happy ending, if anything, they are bittersweet. She explains that these sad tales *"can also be a source of inner strength, they remind us to live for present because death is inevitable"* (n.p.).

For our thesis, the important part of Celtic mythology is the Irish one. O'Mahony (2019) explains that for this mythology blurred timelines, flipped facts and *"characters that seemed to have a concrete home in one story dart like white rabbits through the corners of others"* are typical (n.p.). One of the most famous representatives of Ireland whose popularity continues even nowadays is the leprechaun. According to Botheroyd (1998, p. 214), even in the 19th century, common villagers considered leprechauns to be powerful supernatural forces. Monaghan (2003, p. 286) says that this type of Irish fairy is usually *"depicted as a dwarfish man with green clothing who knows the location of the pot of gold."* Geller (2016, n.p.) focuses on his personality and says that although this creature is not particularly friendly, it is not vicious either. Even though they are notorious tricksters, they save these pranks for people who have tried to harm or trap them. The author also mentions that unlike popular belief says, they are not drunkards, as this stereotype comes from Irish people in general (Geller, 2016, n.p.). Nowadays, there is still a common superstition concerned with leprechauns. People believe that if they captured one of them, he would show them a place where they could find an infamous pot of gold (Botheroyd, 1998, p. 214).

2.2.1.5. African mythology

The last mythology which we will cover is the African one. Knappert (1995, p. 7) says that *"there are many myths, legends, and fables in more than one thousand languages of Africa."* A similar idea about the diversity of African mythology can be found in the work of Lynch (2004, p. v) who says that it would be an error to refer to "Africans" or "African culture" as if they would represent all inhabitants of this continent. Each tribe has its own way of life, religion, traditions, and mythology.

Lynch (2004, p. x) also distinguishes between four themes of African mythology. These categories are based on the types of language families that the African languages are grouped into. Firstly, there is the language family of North and East Africa – Afro-Asiatic language group. Here, African mythology is highly influenced by the Egyptian one. The main theme of the myths is a journey of the human soul after death. The world is divided into three realms: the underworld, where the souls go after death, the middle world of the living and lastly, the upper world where deities live.

Secondly, there is Nilo-Saharan family covering Central Africa. The main theme in this mythology is the creation account. Originally, Heaven and Earth had been connected by a link that permitted gods and humans to help each other. However, this alliance has been disrupted and the link has been broken causing the supreme beings to recede from humanity and the dead to come into the world (Lynch, 2004, p. xi).

Another family group that Lynch (2004, p. xi) mentions is Niger-Congo in West, East, and Southern Africa. The author further divides this family into Bantu and non-Bantu mythologies. Bantu mythology includes a collection of long, narrative stories that recount the experiences of a legendary or historical hero. He usually undertakes journeys during which he suffers, and he has to confront monsters, magical forces, and evil beings. From these adventures, he returns home victorious and receives rewards. On the other hand, non-Bantu mythologies represent a sophisticated system of cosmology, for example *"in Drogon mythology, creation emerged from a series of divine words, and the human body is presented as a divine oracle"* (Lynch, 2004, p. xi) and *"in Bambara mythology, the universe was created from the root sound Yo"* (Lynch, 2004, p. xi). Lynch (2004, p. xi) also highlights that important characteristics of these mythologies are elaborate pantheons of gods and goddesses. Unlike in Egyptian mythology, each of the deities have a specific realm and function.

The last African language family is called Khoisan in South Africa. As Lynch (2004, p. xi) explains, this term combines the names of Khoikhoi and San people. This mythology is focused on the eland and the praying mantis that are known as *"the San master animal"* and are identified with the *"San Supreme Being"* who was believed to transform into these creatures.

One of the most popular representatives of African mythology (specifically Western-African mythology) is Anansi. His true form is a spider. However, he can change it and be depicted as human. Lynch (2004, p. 9) describes him as *"the spider, a trickster and culture hero."* She adds that he is known for his cleverness and ingenuity. Geller (2016, n.p.) points out that *"his interactions in the world have been very important because he brings both stories and wisdom."* Lynch (2004, p. 9) also says that Anansi has been regarded as the creator of the sun, moon, and stars and therefore is responsible for day and night.

Anansi is, like we have already mentioned, a trickster which is *"a personality who teaches moral, ethical, political, or social values based on his ability to lead a person to the truth through example, puzzles, and the least-expected turns and twists of fate"* (Asante, 2014, n.p.). This can be seen in one story about Anansi which is mentioned by Lynch (2004, p. 9). The story tells how Anansi came to own all the tales that are told. He achieved this goal by tricking other characters of the story. This "trickster" characteristic comes from his original form of a spider. Meder (n.d., n.p.) explains that like spiders, Anansi uses ingenuity, cunningness and, in his case, language as his weapon to protect himself against the big animal world and rulers. Geller (2016, n.p.) adds that in the stories *"he is always playing tricks, telling stories, or causing some other form of mischief."* Like other mythological characters, he is neither good nor bad. He has good qualities, for example, ingenuity and wisdom, as well as the ones typically frowned upon, like cunningness, trickery and to some extent lying.

2.2.1. The concept of evil

Kelsey (1974, p. 11) emphasizes the fact that the one ever-present motif in myths is a story of the hero and how they can overcome evil. He adds that *"these stories are not all sweetness and light, neither gods nor men are bound by exactly human ideas of morality or fair play"* (Kelsey, p. 11). In mythology, like in real life, nobody is completely evil or good. Some gods are changeable in their qualities; for example, the Hindu Shiva has been a giver of life but also its destroyer, many Asian mother goddesses have stood behind both destruction and giving of life, the Greek Dionysius has been the one who brought inspiration as well as madness. All

these gods are polyvalent or ambivalent and therefore there is no problem with these two opposite realities. However, with the Old Testament, the problem arises, for God becomes one all-powerful deity. Even though there are some stories that can be justified, for example, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or his punishment of the Israelites in the wilderness, we can find some purely destructive elements as well (Kelsey, 1974, p. 11).

3. Neil Gaiman and his work

Neil Gaiman is one of the most popular and celebrated contemporary writers and his work has been honoured by many literary awards, including a World Fantasy Award, British Fantasy Award, International Horror Guild Award, Nebula, Geffens, and many more (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 16). He is also known for his great versatility; this talent of his has been perfectly described by Richard Davies (n.d.):

> *"Journalism, book reviewing, comics, graphic novels, award-winning literary novels, screenplays for TV and movies, short stories and poetry, and children books too – there's no genre he* [Gaiman] *can't embrace and master, and that includes blogging and twittering"* (n.p.).

In the following paragraphs we will summarize the author's biography and mention his most important work, which clearly shows that this diversity is very apparent. His individual books do not only belong to different subgenres of fantasy, they are intended for a different audience as well.

3.1.   The Author and his life

As Wagner, Golden & Bissette (2009, p. 534) say, Neil Gaiman was born on November 10, 1960 in Porchester, England to a director of company, David Gaiman, and a pharmacist, Sheila Gaiman. An interesting fact is that as the eldest of three children (he has two younger sisters), Neil Gaiman reproduced this pattern with his first wife and they also have one son and two daughters together.

Since his childhood, Gaiman has been an avid reader, he even describes himself as *"a completely omnivorous and cheerfully undiscerning reader"* (McMahon,1996, n.p.). He started reading when he was four and at that time, he also read *Alice in Wonderland* which he has been continuously rereading his whole life and this book also inspired him to become a writer (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 534). Just two years later he bought *Tales of Egypt* with his own money and later he discovered the work of Michael Moorncock (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 534). In the early 70s, when young Gaiman studied for his bar mitzvah, cantor Reb Meyer Lev introduced him to Jewish mythology. Campbell (2015, p. 26) mentions other important things that influenced Gaiman's original style. Namely, it is a box of 60s comic books (that is where his passion for graphic novels has begun) and his musical background as a member of a punk rock band (Gaiman's belief that he can do everything comes from this experience).

In the year 1977, Gaiman started working as a journalist and he could finally make use of his writing talent. On March 14, 1985, he married Mary Therese McGrath. Together, they had a son, Michael, and two daughters, Holly and Madelaine. In 1992 they moved to Minneapolis, United States. However, their relationship ended in divorce as he admits on his website (Gaiman, 2009). In year 2009 he confirmed his relationship with a singer Amanda Palmer, on January 3 in 2011, they had a wedding (Hoby, 2013, n.p.) and on September 19, 2015, their son, Anthony, was born (Saad, 2015). While these lines focused mainly on Gaiman's life, the next paragraphs will introduce the writer's work, including novels, stories, TV scripts and others.

3.2.   The literary work of Neil Gaiman

As we mentioned in the previous text, Neil Gaiman has been a big fan of literature from a very young age. However, his early writing attempts met with rejection. After he was introduced to the artist Dave McKean, his first comic graphic novels were published, such as *Violent Cases* (1987). Their collaboration resulted in the ground-breaking series *The Sandman.* It collected many awards including the 1991 World Fantasy Award for Best Short Story which makes *Sandman* the first comic ever to receive a literary award (Mouse Circus, 2016, n.p.). The author himself describes the plot of the story as follows: *"The king of dreams learns one must change or die and then makes his decision."* It is a series of fantastical stories which are all connected by the character of Sandman who is on one hand a personification of dreams and on the other hand a human with regular emotions (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 42).

Another important point in his career was a collaboration on a humorous fantasy novel with Terry Pratchett (the author known for his elaborate series about Discworld) – *Good Omens* (1990). Gaiman himself describes the book as follows: *"A funny novel about the end of the world and how we're all going to die"* (Campbell, 2015, p. 64). This story humorously follows an angel and a devil who are trying to save the world after the Antichrist is born (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 314).

In 1996, Gaiman wrote a script for an urban fantasy TV series *Neverwhere* in which he created London Below that existed under regular London. However, because he was not comfortable with how the series turned out, he wrote a novel based on it. To Campbell (2015, p. 214) he said the following: *"And then I saw what they were doing with the TV show and suddenly it was like: no, I'm writing the novel."* Finally, he ended up with the book which was much more popular than the TV show itself (Campbell, 2015, p. 2015).

Another popular book by Neil Gaiman is for example *Stardust* (1997). This short fantasy novel is meant to be a fairy tale but the kind which interests both younger and older audience. Wagner, Golden & Bissette (2009, p. 335) explain that *"for the young there is magic, and unicorns, and wonder; for adults there is knowing humor and a lot of sexy banter and sexual tension."* This novel has also been adapted into a movie which premiered in 2007 (Campbell, 2015, p. 220).

Apart from other popular novels, such as *American Gods* (2001) which we will focus on in following chapters, and *Anansi Boys* (2005) which we have already dealt with in this thesis in connection with religious fantasy (See subchapter 2.1.2.1., pp. 14–15), Gaiman has also published some collections of short stories. Two of the most popular ones are *Smoke and Mirrors* (1998) and *Fragile Things* (2006). Wagner, Golden & Bissette (2009, p. 391) highlight the fact that Gaiman's short stories are as popular (if not more) as his novels, which is something that is not usual in bookselling business. They also mention that Gaiman's short stories *"show the wide range of his reading, tastes, and talents"* (p. 391) which is true about his work in general. In these collections one can find humorous stories as well as horrors, romances, or fairy-tales.

The last category of Gaiman's books we should mention is formed by books for children. Examples of these are *Odd and the Frost Giants* (2008), *The Graveyard Book* (2008), and *Coraline* (2002). The first mentioned book, *Odd and the Frost Giants*, is a story which connects fantasy and mythology. Specifically, it is inspired by the Norse mythology with such characters as Odin, Loki, and Thor (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 382). Secondly, *The Graveyard Book* to some extent channels Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), which is a story of a boy who is raised in a jungle by animals. In Gaiman's version, the main character is a young boy, Bod, who is raised by denizens of a graveyard, which puts the story onto more "horror side" of Gaiman's work (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 386). *Coraline* (2002) is a children's book which belongs to the genre of dark fantasy. It is a story about a little girl, who travels through a portal into so-called "other world" where she meets her "other parents" with buttons instead of eyes. They steal her parents and try to steal the girl's soul. This book is a perfect representation of Gaiman's talent because as Campbell (2015, p. 229) explains: *"Children read it as an adventure story and are never scared because Coraline is never scared, while adults know just how much danger she is in and read it through the gaps between their fingers."*

To sum up Neil Gaiman's work, he is one of the contemporary leading fantasists. His work is very diverse as he is dedicated to writing novels, graphic novels, short stories, but also to poetry, film, journalism, song lyrics and so on. Although his work is mainly in the genre of fantasy, he often connects it with mythology, horror and humour and that is the reason why not only the work itself but also the audience, his writing is targeted at, is very diverse.

4. American Gods

In this chapter, we will start with the analysis of Neil Gaiman's work by focusing on the book *American Gods* (2001). Firstly, we will describe how is the novel connected to religious fantasy. Secondly, we will look at how evil is represented in the book, and lastly, we will describe the overall concept of evil in this novel.

American Gods are Gaiman's fourth novel. Since the book *Good Omens* was only a collaboration with Terry Pratchett, *Stardust* was an illustrated story, and *Neverwhere* was a novelization of television scripts (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 345) Gaiman has always considered *American Gods* to be his first novel altogether. Wagner, Golden & Bissette (2009, p. 345) also mention two things which inspired Gaiman to write *American Gods*. The idea came to him when he was vacationing in Iceland and while thinking about Vikings and their voyages, he thought to himself: 'I wonder if they left their gods behind'.

Gaiman's other inspiration to write *American Gods* was the need to include America in his writing. Wagner, Golden & Bissette (2009, p. 345) say that one of the things which is featured importantly in the novel is *"the uniquely American phenomenon of the roadside attraction, those places that dot the American landscape."* They also add that these places serve one purpose: to give one the illusion that they have seen something extraordinary while making them part of it (p. 345).

4.1.   The summary of American Gods

The whole story follows the adventure of the ex-convict Shadow, who is released from prison a few days early because of the death of his wife, Laura, in a car accident. The years in the prison did not change him very much, Shadow is *"a huge, strong and soft-spoken fellow"* (Wagner, Golden & Bissette, 2009, p. 346) whose distinguishing mark are his coin magic tricks. On the way home for Laura's funeral he meets an older man with one eye, who introduces himself as Wednesday; later we find out that he is in fact the All Father of Norse pantheon, Odin. He offers Shadow a job as his escort and bodyguard. Although resistant in the beginning, he eventually agrees when he finds out the truth about his wife's death (she died while performing oral sex on Shadow's best friend). In the meantime, Laura starts her separate adventure waking up from the dead and she gets on a journey to find Shadow as well as gain her life back.

With Wednesday, Shadow travels across America visiting his colleagues and acquaintances (other gods and mythological figures). Wednesday is on the mission to recruit

these so-called Old Gods, whose power began to weaken as their believers decreased in number. The point of this recruitment was to make a stand against the New Gods, who manifest themselves in modern life and technology. On their journey, Shadow meets for example Mad Sweeney (who is a leprechaun), Czernobog (the Slavic god of darkness), Mr. Nancy (who reveals himself to be the spider deity Anansi) and Mr. Ibis and Mr. Jacquel (the Egyptian deities Thot and Anubis). From New Gods, the most prominent are Technical Boy, Media an Mr. World. Between the trips to visit deities, Shadow spends some time in a small, clean, and peaceful town Lakeside in Wisconsin. However, this town hides some dark secrets which Shadow uncovers at the end of the novel. During his stay, he only finds out there has been a missing girl.

In Lakeside, Shadows discovers that Wednesday was murdered by their enemies, and Shadow has to be the one to claim the body and hold a vigil (by hanging on the World Tree for nine days without food or water). His death on the tree and his subsequent resurrection prepare him for his role in the god war and along the way he finds out Wednesday is his father. The story climaxes during the final Battle of Rock City where Shadow finds out that Odin (together with Loki, who worked under the alias of Mr. World for the New Gods) has been manipulating the Old and New Gods into the battle, during which he planned to harvest the power the conflict would release. When Shadow arrives at the battlefield on the back of the Thunderbird, he single-handedly halts the carnage. Laura helps him by killing Loki after which Shadow repeats the favour and ends Laura's suffering, leaving her to finally rest in peace. After fulfilling his destiny, Shadow returns to Lakeside where he solves the mystery of the missing girl finding she is dead which leads him to uncover even more deaths of children at the hand of one of the town's citizens. This great evil was done as a sacrifice to some deity watching over the town.

4.2.   Connection to religious fantasy and mythology

From the description of the plot of the book in previous text, it is clear this book belongs to the genre of fantasy. In this thesis we defined fantasy in several ways. Penn's (2013, n.p.) theory says that for a genre to be a fantasy, it must feature *"the use of magic or other supernatural phenomena."* These are represented by the individual deities and other mythological figures in *American Gods*. Laura's resurrection could be one of these phenomena as well. Clute & Grant (1999, p. viii) and James & Mendlesohn (2012, pp. 1–4) have a similar theory which says that the fantasy genre covers those stories which could not have possibly taken place in the world as we perceive it. In the world of *American Gods*, humans and gods (together with other mythological figures) coexist in the world of the novel which makes it very

unique and different from ours, therefore such stories could have never happened in our world. Whether we choose Penn's (2013), Clute & Grant's (1999, p. viii), or James & Mendlesohn's (2012, pp. 1–4) definition, they all correspond with the book *American Gods*.

As we have already mentioned, there is a lot of forms of fantasy depending on the characteristics of the literary piece as well as the theorists describing it (See subchapter 2.1.2., pp. 13–15). To characterize *American Gods,* we chose the form described by Sleight (2013, p. 251) – religious fantasy. He says that texts written in this genre connect the elements of fantasy and religion. We have already mentioned individual gods and mythological figures who correspond with the definition of religious fantasy, however, an even more important motif is human belief, which is apparent from the following lines:

> *People believe, thought Shadow. It's what people do. They believe. And then they will not take responsibility for their beliefs; they conjure things, and do not trust the conjurations. People populate the darkness; with ghosts, with gods, with electrons, with tales. People imagine, and people believe: and it is that belief that rock-solid belief, that makes things happen.* (Gaiman, 2013, pp. 580–581)

The existence of gods and mythological figures depends on the said belief which makes it an important aspect and, to some extent, a reason for the battle between the two groups of deities (the New and Old Gods).

Sleight (2013, pp. 248–256) divides the types of religious fantasy into those inspired by monotheistic religions and polytheistic religions. The plurality in the name of the novel *American Gods* suggests that Gaiman's inspiration comes from the latter. He was inspired by many different types of mythologies while writing *American Gods*. The most apparent is Norse mythology, represented by the character of Wednesday, who is also known as Odin, the All Father of Norse mythology, and Loki, god of mischief. Other important deities are for example Czernobog of Slavic mythology, Thot and Anubis of Egyptian mythology (in the novel they go under names Mr. Ibis and Mr. Jacquel) and Anansi of African mythology (in the novel he calls himself Mr. Nancy). However, not only gods represent Gaiman's inspiration with mythology. In *American Gods* there are other mythological characters as well, such as Jinni of African mythology, and a leprechaun of Celtic mythology.

4.3. Representation of evil in American Gods

In this part of the thesis, we will focus on how evil is represented in the novel *American Gods*. There are many motifs which suggest the darkness of the story. The most important one is certainly the whole struggle between the Old and New Gods. That is where most of the evil revolves. Secondly, there is the novel's main character Shadow, he also plays an important role while talking about evil. The following pages will deal with these two kinds of representation of evil.

Before we get to that, we will briefly summarise other concepts which give the novel its dark evil undertone. Firstly, there is the theme of a storm. From the beginning, people and gods around Shadow keep mentioning a storm, which is both metaphorical and real. Firstly, it represents the oncoming god war. However, the weather itself is also closely connected to Shadow and it changes based on his belief. An example of this is Shadow's ability to control snow only because Wednesday pushed him to believe in it: *"Concentrate on making those clouds—the ones over there, in the west—making them bigger and darker. Think grey skies and driving winds coming down from the arctic. Think snow"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 119).

Another important concept associated with evil is the supernatural resurrection of Laura, Shadow's dead wife. All forms of the dead being brought back to life are usually connected to evil. They are something impure. However, Laura has been very helpful throughout the novel and stood on the side of good. Later in the book it is revealed that it was Wednesday who stood behind Laura's death, which adds another misconduct to his evil deeds.

One of the strongest symbols in the book is The World Tree connected to the mythological story of Odin and the tree known as Yggdrasil. Shadow is bound to do the vigil to his father by hanging himself on the tree for nine days, slowly shifting to the inevitable end of him. This tree is strongly connected to Shadow's dreaming, since it has crawled into his subconscious before approaching it:

> *They jolted over a ridge and Shadow saw the tree. It was a silver-gray and it was higher than the farm-house. It was the most beautiful tree Shadow had ever seen: spectral and yet utterly real and almost perfectly symmetrical. It also looked instantly familiar: he wondered if he had dreamed it, then realized that no, he had seen it before, or a representation of it, many times. It was Wednesday's silver tie pin* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 490).

Wednesday made Shadow promise he would hold the vigil for him in case he dies. Knowing of the risks, he is determined to fulfil his promise to his father, despite being warned by others it could lead to his death. The fact The World Tree is used as a means of such a big pain and suffering to Shadow gives it a sinister and bitter-sweet undertone. Such wish from Wednesday once more suggests there is evil inside him, representing itself through the godly view on life and him being more important than anything or anyone.

As already mentioned, the tree seems to have a strong link to Shadow's subconscious. Throughout the whole story of *American Gods* we are given fragments of his dreams which climax when he is hung on The World Tree. He dreams of creatures such as mammoths, spiders or an elephant-headed man, representing the gods. Such dreams themselves can be seen as a symbol in the story, since dreams are believed to mirror our inner fears and thoughts, in this case displaying some horrible visions to Shadow that he possibly supresses during his waken time. These concepts and many more help to differentiate between good and evil and navigate throughout the changes that Shadow and other characters are going through.

4.3.1. The Old Gods vs. the New Gods

As we already mentioned, the main source of evil in this novel comes from the struggle between the so-called Old Gods and New Gods. Both these parties want to gain the ultimate power in the world. They want to be the only ones to be worshiped.

The Old Gods are the gods of religions brought to America by immigrants who worshipped them and passed them down through generations. Their main motive is to remain as powerful as they have been in the past. Mr. Nancy, a representative of the Old Gods, proclaims: *"We like to be adored and respected and worshipped* […] *We like to be big. Now, in these shabby days, we are small"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 473). They are very traditional in their ways and that is where their evil comes from. Gods of all sorts of pantheons have been associated with both good and evil qualities (See subchapter 2.2.1., pp. 16–23). This overall need to be worshipped is what makes them evil. They need to feel powerful.

A great example of this is Wednesday/Odin, the all-father of Norse pantheon. In this thesis, we already discussed his place in Norse mythology. He is known for his wisdom and he dedicates his existence to becoming even more powerful. (Lindow, 2002, pp. 247–251). Gaiman's adaptation of this figure is very similar to the original stories. Wednesday is constantly seeking a way to put himself on the top of the hierarchy. He wants to overpower the

New Gods and wants to be worshipped once more. It is also the only reason why he wants to start the war:

> *"You* [Wednesday] *wanted a massacre. You needed a blood sacrifice. A sacrifice of gods."*

> *"And why the hell not? I've been trapped in this damned land for almost twelve hundred years. My blood is thin. I'm hungry."* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 577)

Here, Wednesday admits that he only cares about himself, even though, the war which he created would cost other deities their lives. This self-centeredness is rather negative.

Another important figure is Mr. Nancy, who is an American version of West African god Anansi. In mythology, Anansi is a trickster, character who often plays tricks, tells stories and causes other forms of mischief (See subchapter 2.2.1.5., pp. 23–25). In the novel, Mr. Nancy is not a particularly evil figure, although, he often makes fun of Shadow. He is a close ally to Wednesday and believes in his cause. At one point he mentions the following: *"I like them to be tellin' tales about me, tales showing my cleverness"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 473). This shows that his power originates in pride.

Other important figures from the Old Gods are Anubis and Thot (in the novel referred to as Mr. Ibis and Mr. Jacquel). Originally, they belong to Egyptian pantheon and are both associated with death and the afterlife, as we mentioned earlier in this thesis (p. 15). Their occupation and purpose are connected to the Hall of Justice, where human hearts are weighed. In the novel, this association with the dead is represented by their job in a funeral parlor. Similarly to their Egyptian mythology versions, they are not evil, they are only associated with evil through the dead people and their evil deeds. Mr. Jacquel describes the process as follows: *"Back in my day, we had it all set up. You line up when you die, and you answer for your evil deeds and for your good deeds, and if your evil deeds outweighed a feather, we'd feed your soul and your heart to Ammet, the Eater of Souls"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 222).

The darkest character in the novel is Czernobog. He is an American version of a Slavic god of the same name. We described him as the god of evil, darkness, and death (p. 15) whose power comes from blood sacrifice: *"They worshipped him here, over a hundred years ago. They made blood-sacrifice to him, libations spilled with the hammer"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 463). While the original Czernobog was purely evil and dark, Gaiman's version possesses some

positive qualities too. He is more of a moody old man with a dark sense of humour. In the end, Czernobog's inner good side (Bielobog) is coming through, thus saving Shadow's life.

Lastly, we will mention Mad Sweeney. Although not a god, he is on Wednesday's side in the war. Mad Sweeney represents himself as a leprechaun and he has the abilities of one as well. We described leprechauns as dwarfish trickster figures, who know the location of a pot of gold (p. 16). Mad Sweeney certainly has supernatural qualities, such as pulling coins out of thin air. Other things that he has in common with mythological leprechaun are trickery, lies and dishonesty, which is apparent from his first appearance in the novel:

> *Shadow looked down at Mad Sweeney. "Are we done?" he asked. Mad Sweeney hesitated, then nodded. Shadow let go of him and took several steps backward. Sweeney, panting, pushed himself back up to a standing position.*

> *"Not on yer ass!" he shouted. "It ain't over till I say it is!" Then he grinned, and threw himself forward, swinging at Shadow* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 47).

He certainly bears all the qualities of a stereotypical leprechaun, except for his appearance. The dwarfish man whom we described earlier is in the novel described as a very tall man that wears clothes from the 1990s.

The opposite of these old-fashioned, arrogant and mysterious Old Gods are the so-called New Gods. The Old Gods think of them as follows:

> *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. Proud gods, fat and foolish creatures, puffed up with their own newness and importance* (Gaiman, 2013, pp. 150–151).

They are the gods of everything that people are obsessed with nowadays, the concepts which they worship. Their behaviour corresponds with the society. They are very deceptive and shadowy. While the Old Gods are aware of their evil side and it is part of them, the New Gods pretend to be only good and prosperous. They are often being manipulative and deceiving: *"We can make you* famous*, Shadow. We can give you power over what people believe and say and wear and dream. You want to be the next Cary Grant? We can make that* happen*. We can make you the next Beatles"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 475). In these lines, you can see the way they are trying to manipulate Shadow to join their side. These are the main differences between their perception of evil and that of the Old Gods. The leader of the New Gods is so-called Mr. World, who we

find in the end to be Loki, son of Odin. Together, they created this figure to gain control over both groups of deities and to create a conflict between them.

The most prominent representative of the New Gods is so-called Technical Boy. He is a personification of the Internet, computers, technology and such. In the novel, he is the most unstable of all the deities because he is depicted as a teenage boy and acts as one as well. His low self-esteem, and the need to please others is what makes him the most unpredictable. At the beginning of the novel he kidnaps Shadow and uses threats to prove him that he is powerful and worthy of being frightened of:

> *"You tell Wednesday this, man. You tell him he's history. He's forgotten. He's old. And he'd better accept it. Tell him that we are the future and we don't give a fuck about him or anyone like him. His time is over. You fucking tell him that, man. Yes? He's been consigned to the dumpster of history while people like us ride our limos down the superhighways of tomorrow"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 59).

However, in the end, we find out that he only compensates his inferiority by bullying others turning his weaknesses and uncertainness about himself and his inner anger against others, the weak ones in his mind.

Another important deity of the New Gods is Media, a reincarnation of television. Although appearing only in a female form in the novel, they could possess any television character's appearance. In the same way that people can abuse the media (such as the television, broadcast, or social media) and share false information, the New Gods take advantage of this deity and abuse their power. The New Gods led by Mr. World communicate with Shadow through Media and manipulate reality:

> *"The screen flickered and went black. The words "LIVE FEED" pulsated in white at the bottom left of the screen. A subdued female voice said, in voice-over, "It's certainly not too late to change to the winning side"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 437).

This deity is perhaps one of the strongest messages given by the New Gods and is perceived by the reader strongly due to the fact we live in such society that depends on the information we get and the media are known for their abuse of this, creating the so-called Fake News and thus manipulating people in this process.

However, even though the New Gods are not good, they prove they are not completely evil. At the end, they prove themselves to be quite reasonable, as Technical Boy explains:

"Look, I'm not the only one who feels this way. I've checked with the crew at Radio Modern, and they're all for settling this peacefully; and the Intangibles are pretty much in favor of letting market forces take care of it" (Gaiman, 2013, p. 548).

The only one who stands against this idea is their leader, Mr. World. While appearing as Wednesday's opponent, these two deities work together. In the end, we find out that Mr. World is in fact Loki, the son of Odin and that their plan was to dedicate the deaths of the gods in the war to him, which would cause Odin becoming even more powerful. In order to achieve his goals, Mr. World kills Technical Boy after explaining him the true motive behind the war: *"The outcome of the battle is unimportant. What matters is the chaos, and the slaughter"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 549).

This proves that the main source of evil cannot be in fact found among either of these groups of deities. It lies in their leaders, Odin and Loki. Their greed and hunger for power lead them to the betrayal of their kind and using them for their own selfish reasons. Once more, we face the situation where evil goes hand in hand with power, and these two complement each other.

In the following subchapter, we will focus on the character of Shadow, who belongs to neither of the groups of gods and who is a mere observer of their struggle that in fact sneaks into his own life.

4.3.2.   The character of Shadow

When discussing evil in *American Gods* it is important to mention the novel's protagonist, Shadow, who was described as *"big enough, and looked don't-fuck-with-me enough"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 3). His appearance and his time spent in prison would suggest this person is evil, or very close to it at least. However, the opposite is true, throughout the novel, he does nothing but good, and apart from being somewhat moody, he would be a perfect representation of good in the novel.

However, from the beginning of the book, we can see that evil constantly surrounds him. From the moment his wife dies, while committing adultery, to the end of the novel when he unravels the reality of the peacefully looking town, Lakeside, he is surrounded by evil deeds happening to him or the people around him, as he proclaims: *"Okay. My life, which for three years has been a long way from being the greatest life there has ever been, just took a distinct*

and sudden turn for the worse" (Gaiman, 2013, p. 42), which describes his destiny throughout the whole book.

Shadow passively accepts everything that is happening around him. He does not expect anything good from the world and he knows that everyone around him is full of evil and therefore he is not surprised when he encounters something evil in person. Rather, he only calmly observes. Although not doing evil acts personally, he lets them happen and does nothing to stop them, almost as if he was detached from his feelings. His lack of trust in the mankind is apparent in his disbelief in anything and anyone: *"As sure as water's wet and days are long and a friend will always disappoint you in the end"* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 241). It almost seems as he is not a real person and part of the world. He is only on the edge, leaning to reality as a mere shadow (as his name suggests) of a human being.

4.4.   The concept of evil in American Gods

In the first chapter of this thesis, we established different theoretical approaches to evil. We looked at evil from the philosophical, theological, and psychological point of view and in the following lines, we will apply these to the novel *American Gods*.

Starting with the philosophical approach to evil, in this thesis, we used Svendsen's (2010, pp. 7–20) characterization in which he describes different reasons of why evil is practiced. These are *Demonic evil*, *Instrumental evil, Idealistic evil, and Stupid evil*. In the analyzed book, the most apparent one is Idealistic evil which Svendsen (2010, pp. 7–20) describes as evil where performers believe that their evil actions can be justified because they are done for higher good. This can be seen throughout the novel mainly in the case of the whole struggle between the New gods and the Old gods. Wednesday describes it as follows:

> *"There's never been a true war that wasn't fought between two sets of people who were certain they were in the right. The really dangerous people believe they are doing whatever they are doing solely and only because it is without question the right thing to do. And that is what makes them dangerous."* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 251)

That is why Idealistic evil fits this concept the most. Their belief that they were in the right leads them to justify the evil acts they had done. However, Svendsen's other types are present in the book as well. For example, Wednesday himself is an excellent example of Demonic evil, because he and Loki plotted the whole god war only for their selfish reasons and for satisfying their own needs as described in previous parts of this thesis.

Another philosophical division is the one by Paulson (2007, pp. 2–3). He describes two participants in such evil actions. Firstly, there are those who suffer evil. In *American Gods,* the representation of this is mainly Shadow. Almost all the evil in the book revolves around him as we explained in the previous chapter (See subchapter 4.3.2., pp. 37–38). Secondly, others are doing evil, for example Wednesday, or other deities, both old and new.

Moving on to the theological approach to evil, there are three main approaches to evil, all originating in the Antiquity. As we mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, the first one is the evil imagined in the Jewish and later Judaeo-Christian cultures, secondly there is the evil of polytheistic cultures (ancient Rome and Greece), and the last approach to evil has its roots in Asia. In *American Gods,* the whole story is connected to polytheistic religions with Gaiman's inspiration in mythology. Because these religions do not have any supremely evil force or figure, individual gods and other characters bear both good and bad qualities.

Lastly, when discussing different approaches to evil, we described the psychological one. It focuses on the inner part of human beings and what causes a person to become evil. On page 3 we mentioned Staub (2003, pp. 4–51) and his theory in which he described the most important elements of evil. The first one is *extreme pain*. In the novel, there is a lot of harm being caused mainly by the existence of the upcoming war. This pain we can see through Shadow, for example when he is tortured by the New Gods:

> *Wood was keeping his hands away from Shadow's face. No marks. Nothing permanent: just fists and feet on his torso and knees. It hurt, and Shadow clutched the Liberty dollar tight in the palm of his hand, and waited for it to be over.* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 161)

Actions like this reappear throughout the whole novel which proves another of Staub's (2003, p. 48) points, *repetition of greatly harmful acts*. The last element of evil is a *provocation* which is represented mainly by the New Gods. They are trying to provoke Shadow and the Old Gods by constant kidnappings and threats. This climaxes with the murder of Wednesday which they broadcast via the television:

> *There was a bang, muted by the television speakers, and the side of Wednesday's head exploded. His body tumbled backward.*
>
> *Mr World stood up, his back still to the camera, and walked out of shot.*
>
> *"Let's see that again, in slow motion this time," said the announcer's voice reassuringly* (Gaiman, 2013, p. 439).

This constant showing off is what makes the evil act even more evil. The fact that the novel bears all mentioned elements means that the actions happening throughout the plot are in fact evil.

We also mentioned Baumeister & Vohs' (2004, pp. 90–98) root causes of why some people do evil things. An important one is, for example, the one which says that there is an evil which can be employed as *a means to an end*. Its definition corresponds with Svendsen's Demonic evil which we connected with Wednesday on the previous page of this chapter. It is that kind of evil that is caused by the craving for a material gain. Another important cause of evil is *a misguided effort to do good* which is similar to Svendsen's Idealistic evil. It means evil is considered to be necessary to accomplish something good and positive. Like we said, this type is the most frequent in the book, because it covers the intentions behind the whole struggle between the New Gods and Old Gods. Lastly, there is a type of evil performed to *gain sadistic pleasure*. This is most apparent in the case of Czernobog in *American Gods*. We described him in the previous chapters and we mentioned that in Slavic mythology he is the representation of evil (See subchapter 2.2.1.3., p. 21), in the novel it was him who betted against Shadow: "*If I win, I get to knock your brains out. With the sledgehammer. First, you go down on your knees. Then I hit you a blow with it, so you don't get up again*" (Gaiman, 2013, p. 91). In these lines, his evil sadistic qualities are most prominent, because he is describing a murder of a human being in a very calm, enjoying and a pitiless tone.

American Gods is a book in which the concept of evil is very apparent yet not straightforward. The whole story is underlined with themes connected to evil (such as storm, shadows and nightmares). However individual characters of the novel are not as black and white. Those who are associated with good can also surprise by not being so positive after all. That is why the novel is so complex and it is not very easy for its reader to determine which characters are positive and which are negative. Most of the types of evil which we defined in the first chapter of this thesis can be applied and used as an example of the ways the evil is approached in *American Gods*. Whether it is the point of view of religion, philosophy, or psychology; they are all important and represented in this literary piece, for example through the great variety of deities, people and motifs that this book contains.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to analyse Neil Gaiman's famous novel *American Gods* with a focus on the motif of evil. To complete this task, we firstly summarized different approaches to the concept of evil, including the philosophical, psychological, and theological point of view. This led to defining different types of evil which were further used as a base to be applied to the analysed literary piece.

The second chapter provided a survey of the literary motif of evil. We mentioned examples of books in which the concept of evil is very prominent, such as Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* or Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. Later, we introduced the genre of fantasy together with its possible definitions and forms. From these forms we highlighted the religious fantasy, since that is the form of *American Gods*. For analysing this novel, it was also important to mention mythology. Different deities from all sorts of mythologies not only appear in the novel, but the main conflict revolves around them as well. As an example, we used those world mythologies and their representatives that can be seen in the novel to make a further comparison possible.

Another chapter, leading to the most important, analytical one, was concerned with the author of the novel, Neil Gaiman. It included a brief summary of his life, mentioning moments which led to him becoming a writer (such as his work as a journalist, or his life-long fascination with books). It also summarized the author's work and mentioned his most famous books. This chapter is significant in emphasising the great variety of Neil Gaiman's writing and how each of his books is very original and different from the others, yet still carrying Gaiman's typical dark undertone.

The last chapter then focused on the literary analysis of the novel *American Gods* itself. Firstly, we introduced the book and mentioned Gaiman's inspiration for writing it, highlighting his fascination with the USA, and writing about it in such way that could be only possible for a non-American person. After a summary of the plot, we connected the novel to both religious fantasy and mythology by providing suitable examples from the text with the motif of the coexistence of people, gods, and other mythological figures being the most important.

In the following part of the last chapter, we specified the ways in which the concept of evil is represented in the novel, starting by naming important themes that correspond with evil. We mention the theme of storm (and the changes in the weather in general), resurrection of the dead, the importance of the World Tree, and dream sequences. This is followed by the analysis of the main conflict of the novel and that is the upcoming war between the two groups of deities,

the New Gods and the Old Gods. While the former correspond with the modern society, they are more deceptive and shadowy, and try to appear as good to the rest of the world, the latter are more old-fashioned. They do not hide their evil side; they use it to frighten their believers into worshipping them. The analysis of these groups of deities has discovered that the main source of evil does not in fact lie among them, but only in their leaders, Wednesday and Mr. World. They came up with the plan to regain their power by creating this chaos. Lastly, we also briefly comment on the main character of the novel, Shadow. All his life, he is just a passive observer of evil deeds happening to him and people around him.

The last part of this thesis then used the characterisation of evil specified in the first chapter and applied it to *American Gods*. It consisted of describing the individual types of evil within philosophy, theology, and psychology, connecting them to the ways evil is represented in the novel. These were introduced in the previous subchapter, thus closing the circle, and connecting all parts of the thesis together.

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Resumé

Cílem této práce je analýza románu *Američtí bohové* s důrazem na pojetí zla. Nejdříve obecně popisujeme koncept zla a zmiňujeme jednotlivé vědecké přístupy k jeho zkoumání – filozofický, teologický a psychologický. Následuje zobrazení zla v literatuře se zaměřením na fantasy a mytologii. V druhé polovině práce se zabýváme románem *Američtí bohové* a jeho autorem, Neilem Gaimanem. V rámci samotné analýzy specifikujeme způsoby, kterými je koncept zla v románu reprezentován, a aplikujeme na ně typy zla, které jsme vymezili v první kapitole této práce.

Annotation

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Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Petr Anténe, M.A., Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2020
Název práce:	Pojetí zla v díle *Američtí bohové* Neila Gaimana
Název v angličtině:	The Motif of Evil in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*
Anotace práce:	Cílem této práce je analýza románu *Američtí bohové* s důrazem na pojetí zla. Nejdříve obecně popisujeme koncept zla a různé vědecké přístupy k jeho zkoumání. Následuje jeho zobrazení v literatuře se zaměřením na fantasy a mytologii. V druhé polovině práce se zabýváme samotným románem a jeho autorem, Neilem Gaimanem. Zde se zaměřujeme převážně na koncept zla v tomto díle a způsob, jakým je v něm zlo vyobrazené.
Klíčová slova:	Neil Gaiman, Američtí bohové, zlo, zlo vs. dobro, literární analýza, fantasy, náboženské fantasy, mytologie, bohové, náboženství
Anotace v angličtině:	The aim of this thesis is the analysis of the novel *American Gods* with the focus on the motif of evil. Firstly, it describes the concept of evil in general and different scientific approaches to it, followed by its representation in literature with a focus on fantasy and mythology. The second half of the thesis is then concerned with the novel itself together with its author, Neil Gaiman. The focus is on the concept of evil in this novel and how the evil is represented.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Neil Gaiman, American Gods, evil, good vs. evil, literature analysis, fantasy, religious fantasy, mythology, gods, religion
Přílohy vázané v práci:	0
Rozsah práce:	50 s.
Jazyk práce:	Anglický