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PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *NEVERWHERE*,

AMERICAN GODS* AND *CORALINE

MA thesis

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to investigate the depiction of female characters in Neil Gaiman's novels *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Coraline* in order to determine whether they correspond to gender stereotypes or not.

The introduction gives a brief overview of Neil Gaiman's works, including some critical responses to it. It also summarises the three novels analysed in the present thesis.

The first chapter attempts to define fantasy fiction and explores various aspects of it. It continues with the discussion of differences between men and women and of gender stereotypes in general and in literature, with a focus on fantasy fiction. The first chapter also addresses some problems in relation to male authors writing female characters.

The second chapter analyses the main female characters in the three novels, focussing on their appearance, character traits, behaviour, occupation and relation to other characters. In addition, it attempts to determine to what degree these female characters correspond to the feminine gender stereotype. The results of the analysis are presented in the conclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

Neil Gaiman is one of the most prolific authors of fantasy fiction writing today. He has won wide critical and popular acclaim and, being one of the few contemporary writers of fantasy to do so, has aroused academic interest. The various aspects of Gaiman's works that have been analysed include myth and religion (e.g., in *American Gods*), identity (e.g., in *Coraline*) and gender (e.g., in the *Sandman* series). Following from the previous research on gender and in order to contribute to the field, the aim of the present thesis is to investigate the depiction of female characters in Neil Gaiman's novels in order to determine whether they are represented in stereotypical or non-stereotypical roles. The analysis covers three novels, *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Coraline*, which were chosen because they have been recognised as key works in Neil Gaiman's writing career and because they are set in a modern world, which makes it possible to compare female characters of these novels to contemporary gender stereotypes.

1. Neil Gaiman's works

Neil Gaiman, born in 1960 in Portchester, Hampshire, United Kingdom, into an upper middle class family (Brown 2005), began his writing career as a journalist after graduating from school, contributing pieces to magazines and newspapers in London such as *Time Out*, *Sunday Times* and *The Observer*. His career in journalism did not last long, so in 1987, his first graphic novel *Violent Cases* was published, followed by *Black Orchid* in 1987. The first one was relatively brief and dealt with the stories of the gangster Al Capone. The second one, however, featured an independent, well-developed and introspective female heroine, which had been unusual for graphic novels so far (Brown 2005). Since then, many critics have supported Sarah Jaffe's opinion that "Gaiman is far better at writing women and getting into their heads than most other male writers, comic or otherwise" (quoted in Martin 2012: 12).

In 1987, after being approached by DC Comics, Gaiman began writing the ground-breaking *Sandman* series (Brown 2005), which grew into 75 monthly, 24-page instalments, now bound into ten separate books (Neil Gaiman n.d.). The series tells the story of Dream, a god-like creature, and his six siblings, Death, Delirium, Despair, Destruction, Destiny and Desire. Just as Dream is a personification of dreams, his siblings represent various aspects of human existence, as their names imply. *Sandman* tackles several issues in its almost two thousand pages, the most significant of them being familial responsibility, self-identification, and aging (Brisbin, Booth 2013: 20-21). In addition, the fluidity of the notion of gender in the series serves to separate *Sandman* from previous comics and graphic novels. It is as if Gaiman's characters deliberately attempt to undermine gender stereotypes: they are either male or female, but they are all first and foremost people (Brisbin, Booth 2013: 22). It is therefore not surprising that during the years it was published, *Sandman* became one of the most significant and popular comics in history. Moreover, next to collecting nine Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards and three Harvey Awards, *Sandman* became in 1991 the first comic to receive the World Fantasy Award (Neil Gaiman n.d.).

Even though Neil Gaiman became known primarily for his graphic novels, which besides *Sandman* include, for example, *Signal to Noise* (1992) and *Mr. Punch* (1994), he is a prolific author who has written in many genres and for very different audiences (Brown 2005). His first books – a Duran Duran biography and a biography of Douglas Adams – were published already before the *Sandman* series in the 1980s (Neil Gaiman n.d.). In 1990 followed his first novel for adults, *Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch*, written with Terry Pratchett and which tells a humorous tale of the end of the world. In six years time Gaiman novelised *Neverwhere* (1996), his BBC TV series about a magical and fantastic underworld of London. Other adult novels written by Neil Gaiman include *Stardust* (1998), a tale of fairies set in the Victorian era; Hugo and Nebula Award-

winning *American Gods* (2001), in which ancient gods that had come to the United States of America with the first settlers are being replaced with new gods, gods like Media and Technology; and *Anansi Boys* (2003), a story of the two sons of the trickster-god Anansi (Pringle 2006b: 170).

Gaiman's shorter prose works are collected into *Angels and Visitations* (1993), a collection of his essays, journalism and short stories meant to commemorate his tenth year as a prose writer (Brown 2005); *Smoke and Mirrors: Short Fictions and Illusions* (1998), nominated for the UK's MacMillan Silver Pen Awards; and *Fragile Things: Short Fictions and Wonders* (2006) (Neil Gaiman n.d.). Gaiman's first book for children, *The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish*, appeared in print in 1997 and immediately became immensely popular. Other books by Gaiman for younger readers include *Coraline* (2002), the winner of several awards such as The Hugo Award and The Nebula Award; *The Graveyard Book* (2008); and *Instructions* (2010), illustrated by Charles Vess (Neil Gaiman n.d.).

In spite of the fact that Neil Gaiman's fiction targets readers of very different ages and that it is written in various genres and styles, all of his works display those features that make Gaiman's writing so enjoyable. First of all, his books tend to transcend genre lines: in them, horror, fantasy, fairy tales, science fiction and apocalyptic romps are all mixed together into novels, short stories, poems, comics and screenplays (Goodyear 2010). Secondly, Gaiman uses sources, sometimes obscure, that are as eclectic as are his modes of writing. He draws inspiration from mythologies of various countries and civilizations, English folk tales, the Midrash, old children's stories and many other places (Goodyear 2010), weaving this information into stories with "mythic freshness" (Pringle 2006b: 171). More precisely, this freshness is expressed in the way Gaiman's stories make topics such as mythology, spirituality and mortality easily understandable and absorbing. However, this forms only a part of Neil

Gaiman's legacy: since the beginning of his writing career, Gaiman has been working towards making comic books and graphic novels more accessible to a wider public (Brown 2005).

2. *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Coraline*

Neverwhere, as Neil Gaiman himself writes in the introduction to the novel (Gaiman 2013 [1996]) began as a television series written for the BBC, but while the show was being broadcast, Gaiman could not help but feel that even though the series was far from bad, it was not as he had imagined it in his mind. The only solution he could conceive of was to put the show into a novel with all the parts he felt were missing from the TV series, thus creating a book that is most often characterised as an urban fantasy about a semi-magical world beneath London (Pringle 2006b: 170).

The novel's protagonist, Richard Mayhew, leads the most ordinary life: he works as a security analyst, rents an apartment in a respectable part of London and is engaged to be married to the most beautiful, albeit slightly bossy and demanding, woman in the world. His comfortable existence, however, is disrupted one evening, when Lady Door, injured and bleeding, collapses at his feet in the street. Richard decides to help her, neither knowing that Door lives in London Below nor expecting the serious consequences that are to follow his good deed. After Door has left, Richard attempts to resume his normal life, only to discover that nobody seems to recognise him, not his co-workers, not his best friend and not even his fiancée; that his apartment is suddenly rented out to other people; that his things disappear and his bank card stops working. Knowing that all of this has something to do with Lady Door, he enters London Below, the mystical otherworld beneath London, to get his old life back.

Once there, he eventually finds Door, who is a member of a very old and respectable family with magic powers: she and her family can open any door conceivable. However, these powers were not enough to protect them against two expert killers, Mr Croup and Mr

Vandermar, who murdered Door's family and are now after her. Not knowing the reason why the duo is after her, Door herself is on a quest to solving the crime with the help of her companions Marquis de Carabas, who reminds the reader of the Puss in Boots; Hunter, who is as deadly as she is gorgeous; and, against his will, Richard. Together they travel to the Earl's Court in the London Underground; to the Floating Market; to the Black Friars', who are guarding a key they are after; and, finally, to the Angel Islington. Just before arriving there, Door and Richard discover that Hunter has betrayed them to Mr Croup and Mr Vandermar, in exchange of a spear to slay the infamous Beast of London. Yet, she is not the only one pretending to be somebody else: when Richard and Door reach Angel Islington, his true intentions are revealed. He had been imprisoned by other angels and his only desire was to get the key the Black Friars were guarding, so he could be free. In the end, however, his plans fall through and he as well as Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar, who had been doing his bidding all along, are sent someplace far, far away by Door. Door also helps Richard to return to London Above and to get his old life back, only for him to discover that he is unhappy there and consequently to return to London Below.

Neverwhere is not remarkable only for its vivid and engaging albeit slightly bizarre and baroque characters, but for the strong social commentary Gaiman intended his novel to convey. The author states in the introduction that "[he] wanted to talk about the people who fall through the cracks: to talk about the dispossessed, using the mirror of fantasy, which can sometimes show us things we have seen so many times that we never see them at all, for the very first time" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]). Jessica Tiffin (2008: 32), too, observes that by creating a mythological London (i.e., London Below) that exists under the contemporary city (i.e., London Above) and populating it with outcasts, Gaiman explores the cities' tendency "to estrange its citizens, to promise and simultaneously deny an absolute belonging which is impossible because of the city's scale".

If *Neverwhere* is a novel about London, then *American Gods* is "about America, about American myths and the American soul" (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 653), which, it is important to remember, is written from the viewpoint of an Englishman, or an immigrant, as he defines himself, for whom America is so big and contradictory that he was able to only describe a small part of it (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 654). It is thus clear why Gaiman describes *American Gods* in the introduction to the novel as a "big and odd and meandering" book, which, for some reason, became hugely popular (Gaiman 2005 [2001]). Indeed, it has won the Nebula and the Hugo awards for science fiction, the Bram Stoker award for horror and the Locus award for fantasy (*ibid.*). The variety of awards the novel has received also makes it clear that it is quite difficult to classify *American Gods* as far as genre is concerned.

At the beginning of the novel itself, the readers meet Shadow, the protagonist, who is being released from prison a couple of days before the official beginning of his parole since his wife and his best friend had just died in a car crash. On his way home, he meets Wednesday, an old mysterious con artist, who hires him as his bodyguard during his travels across the United States visiting old acquaintances and friends. Being naturally kind and taciturn and having learned to mind his own business in prison, Shadow seems not to be surprised when his dead wife starts walking the earth again or when Wednesday's acquaintances and friends all turn out to be old gods and other mythical creatures. Thus, Shadow among many others meets Odin, the first of the Norse gods who had been brought to America by Viking explorers and who now goes by the name of Wednesday; Mad Sweeney, a brawling Irishman who is revealed to be a leprechaun; Mr Jacquel (Anubis) and Mr Ibis (Thoth), two small-town embalmers; Czernobog, a pagan Slavic god of darkness, who lives with the Zorya sisters, daughters of Dazhbog; Easter; Mr Nancy or Anansi the spider, the West African and Carribean trickster god, now a neatly-dressed old man (Wearring 2009: 244).

The reason for Wednesday's visits to all of these gods of old is his plan to recruit them to fight against the new gods in an upcoming war. These new gods are gods of the Internet, technology, media, credit cards and highway and they seem to have the upper hand: one of the fundamental ideas of *American Gods* appears to be that gods exist only because people believe in them. Therefore, the new gods were created only because the Internet, media, technology and other commodities of modern life play a more important role in people's lives each day. The more time and money are sacrificed to serve these new gods, the more powerful they grow. At the same time, the old gods, who were worshipped anywhere between 14 000 B.C. and the 1700s, are forgotten and diminished, forced to prostitute and beg for worship (Singh 2007: 155). However, as powerful as the new gods are, they lack character, personality and individuality. At the same time, the old gods act as humans with their "personal qualities, their idiosyncrasies, their vanity, their flaws" (Sings 2007: 156). By juxtaposing these two worlds, it quickly becomes clear where Gaiman's own sympathies lie: with the gods of old, who in the end triumph over the new ones.

As was already mentioned above, *American Gods* is Neil Gaiman's attempt to describe and criticise a part of America, which he, an immigrant, is able to fathom. As an outsider, Gaiman is in a position in which it is possible for him to notice features that Americans themselves might miss. Perhaps Shadow was created as an outsider for the same reason: being a son of a communicator in the Foreign Service, Shadow moved around a lot as a child, both in Europe and in the United States, not really settling down anywhere. Even in the present, he is "a newcomer to picturesque Lakeside, an unknown relative to the gods, a tourist to the towns and cities through which Wednesday drags him" (Hill 2005: 21). Yet Shadow, Mark Hill (2005: 22) advocates, embodies such all-American characteristics as strength, nobility, courage and the need for justice, which makes us, the readers, like and respect him.

What is more, both Baba Singh (2007: 159) and Mark Hill (2005: 25-26) suggest that by alienating Shadow from the modern American society and by contrasting the old and the new world, Gaiman points out the flaws in the latter and critiques them. In the contemporary America Gaiman describes, "opiates have become the religion of the masses" (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 237) and television is "the idiot box. [It is] the TV. [It is] the all-seeing eye and the world of the cathode ray. [It is] the boob tube. [It is] the little shrine the family gathers to adore" and to sacrifice their time and sometimes each other (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 189). The new gods of media, technology, the Internet and highways are, consequently, described as shallow, crass, rude, arrogant and foolish, interested only in power, money and the satisfaction of carnal desires. In contrast, the gods of the past are not without their flaws, but are nevertheless seen as energetic, ingenious and brave, valuing justice and freedom above else. Here Gaiman definitely takes a romanticised and nostalgic view of the past, but as Hill (2005: 28-29) points out, *American Gods* does not condemn the modern American society, it rather points out its shortcomings, since they are there, and reminds the readers of the positive American qualities.

The discussion on contemporary concerns related to the loss of connection with gods and to meaningless religions in *American Gods* is also important for Mathilda Slabbert and Leonie Viljoen (2006: 137). They believe that by combining traditional elements of fantasy – characters, symbols and metaphors from various mythologies and religions, for example – with modern divinities – such as gods of technology, freeway and media – and with elements of travel writing, mystery, horror and philosophy, Gaiman has created an unusual sort of fantasy, a postmodern, metamythological mixture of the ancient and the modern (Slabbert and Viljoen 2006: 137-138). This is evidence of Gaiman's ability to weave together different myths and religions in order to comment on universally relevant problems as in *Neverwhere*.

Coraline stands apart from *Neverhwere* and *American Gods* in the sense that it is primarily meant for children, even though it appeals to readers of all ages. Gaiman began writing this novel in the 1990s for his first daughter, Holly, and finished it, as he himself claims, for his other daughter, Maddy (Gaiman 2013 [2002]: xii-xiii). When *Coraline* was finally published in 2002, it was thought to be too frightening for children, since it is written in the style of Gothic horror and old fairy tales (Gaiman n.d.). Yet *Coraline*, as with other Gaiman's works, has won critical acclaim: it has received the British Science Fiction Award, the Hugo, the Nebula, the Bram Stoker and the American Elizabeth Burr/Wozilla award (*ibid.*).

The novel itself begins with the Jones family – a mother, a father and a daughter, Coraline – moving into an old house, which is divided into flats. It is a peculiar old house with even more peculiar inhabitants. Below the Joneses live Miss Spink and Miss Forcible, two old ladies who had once been actresses; and above lives an old man who trains mice for a circus. Coraline is by nature a curious girl and since her parents work most of the time and ignore her, she spends her time exploring the house and the surrounding garden. During her expeditions she finds a door, supposedly leading to another flat, but now sealed with a brick wall. One day, however, the same door opens to a hallway leading to a flat that closely resembles Coraline's home. Once there, Coraline finds a woman that sounds and looks a lot like her mother, only her skin is white, she is taller and thinner and her fingers with curved, dark-red fingernails never stop moving. This woman with large black buttons for eyes is her other mother and she has created a world that closely mirrors the one on the other side of the door: the flat looks almost the same; there is the other father, the other Miss Spink and the other Miss Forcible and the other crazy man upstairs; and there is even a garden surrounding the house.

This other world is designed to satisfy Coraline's every wish and whim. There, her other parents want to spend time with her; her other mother cooks food that is much more delicious than the one she eats in the real world; her bedroom is filled with toys; and she is allowed to freely explore the garden and visit other flats. The aim of other mother, the author of all of this, is to lure Coraline completely to her world and sew black buttons in place of her eyes.

When Coraline returns to her real home after her first visit to the other world, she discovers that the evil spirit that is her other mother has kidnapped her real parents. Getting no help from the police, Coraline decides that she has no choice other than to go to the other world and try to rescue her family. Once facing her other mother, it becomes clear that this is no easy task: the other mother is determined to get Coraline to herself. However, Coraline has the help of a black cat, who is able to speak in the other world and who suggests that the only way to save her parents as well as the souls of the previous children the other mother has stolen is to challenge the other mother. Coraline follows the cat's advice and proposes to the other mother that they play a hide-and-go-seek game: if Coraline finds the souls of her parents and the children, she is free to return to the real world; if not, she has to sew buttons to her eyes.

The other mother agrees to play this game and so Coraline begins exploring the grounds. She is scared, yet brave and with each soul she finds, the other mother becomes angrier, until she resembles the monster she really is more than the loving mother she is supposed to be. Eventually, Coraline finds all the souls and manages to escape into the real world. However, one of the other mother's hands with a mind of its own crosses the boundary between the two world as well, only to be tricked by Coraline yet again.

Coraline clearly is an adventurous, curious, brave and intelligent character, embodying the main idea that Gaiman wished to convey by writing the novel: "that being brave doesn't

mean you aren't scared. Being brave means you are scared, really scared, badly scared, and you do the right thing anyway" (Gaiman 2013 [2002]: xv). Yet David Rudd (2008: 159-160) argues that *Coraline* is concerned with much more than being brave, it explores issues such as identity, sex, death, evil, desire and violence that interest readers of all ages and that are especially important for children to work through at some point in their lives. Rudd (2008: 160) continues by claiming that identity, finding one's place in the world and being acknowledged in one's own right are central themes in *Coraline*. Taking a psychoanalytic approach drawing largely on Freud and Lacan, he points out the subtle ways by which Coraline is negotiating her place between the two worlds, the Symbolic and the Real, and by which she is trying to define her identity and come to terms with the realisation that she has to become independent from her parents (Rudd 2008: 164-165).

Since *Coraline* is classified as domestic fiction, in which home and the family are central throughout the narrative and which attempts to convey a lesson, albeit blended with fantasy, there is another issue that has especially been of interest to feminists, namely, the relationship between Coraline and her mother as well as her other mother (Russell 2012: 162-163). Danielle Russell (2012: 161), similarly to David Rudd, is also interested in female identity, but for her, finding and defining it are related to motherhood. More precisely, Russell (2012: 162-163) sees *Coraline* as a "matrilineal narrative", in which "smother mothers", who would obstruct their daughter's passage to maturation by keeping them in perpetual childhood, are contrasted against "genuine mothers", who empower their daughters to become independent. These "genuine mothers" do not prevent their daughters from growing up, they rather limit and guide them on their way, as Coraline's mother does in the novel.

What is more, Danielle Russell (2012: 163-164) explains that not only has Gaiman created a story that explores the issue of identity from various aspects, but it also comments clearly on gender roles. More precisely, both of Coraline's parents work at home and do

household chores and in that, they seem to be equal partners. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that Coraline's mother has a life beyond being a mother and a wife, a claim evidenced by her lack of skill in cooking, shopping and other domestic affairs and her interest in her work. In opposition to Mrs Jones, Coraline's other mother demonstrates her domestic prowess and her desire to do nothing but take care of Coraline. Even though Coraline is tempted by the other mother's offer of fulfilling her every desire, she nevertheless chooses "her own mother, her real, wonderful, maddening, infuriating, glorious mother" (Gaiman 2013 [2002]: 159) and by doing so, she denounces the traditionally domestic female role model.

With these three novels, Gaiman has proven himself to be an author with endless imagination. His imaginary worlds are populated with gods and other mythical creatures, monsters and ordinary men and women. To investigate more thoroughly the depiction of female characters, the following chapter will examine the nature of fantasy fiction, discuss gender stereotypes and consider a few problems in regard to male authors writing female characters.

CHAPTER 1

1.1 What is Fantasy Fiction?

'Fantasy fiction' or more generally 'fantasy' is a term that cannot be easily defined. As Rosemary Jackson (2002 [1981]: 8) explains, the 'fantastic' is derived from the Latin verb 'phantasticus' meaning 'to make visible or manifest', so that in reality all literature could be labelled 'fantastic'. 'Fantasy', however, has been used as a term within literary criticism to refer to genres ranging from myths, legends and fairy tales to science fiction and horror stories – in other words, to any type of literature that is not primarily realistic. Even though all of these forms share similar features and do represent the fantastic, they are not what might be called pure fantasy or full fantasy (Pringle 2006a: 8). One possible definition, offered in *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (*ibid.*), suggests that fantasy "seems to deal in the fulfilment of desire", meaning that fantasy fiction seeks to satisfy the desire for a "kinder world, a better self, a wholer experience, a sense of truly belonging". In that way, fantasy first and foremost appeals to emotions such as desire, nostalgia, yearning and even laughter, thus setting it apart from science fiction.

Science fiction is as difficult a term to define as fantasy. To some extent, these two genres overlap – for example, both of them evoke a sense of wonder in the reader –, but mostly they are seen as distinct from each other. One possible definition suggested in the Encyclopedia of Fantasy (1997c) states that "the label sf [science fiction] normally designates a text whose story is explicitly or implicitly extrapolated from scientific or historical premises". To put it differently, if a work of science fiction does not seem particularly plausible, it may still be possible or at least arguable. This "thought experiment, the 'what if?'", according to Farah Mendlesohn (2004 [2003]: 4), is a vital element in science fiction, which in turn leads to cognitive estrangement, to use Mendlesohn's (2004 [2003]: 5) term. It refers to the feeling in readers that something in the fictional world in a science fiction text

does not correspond to their known world. In addition, alienation, Mendlesohn (2004 [2003]: 10) continues, next to the sense of wonder and the joy of discovery, is an element frequently found in science fiction stories, usually in the form of an uncaring universe.

Following from this brief definition, fantasy and science fiction share a common feature in that they both attempt to arouse a sense of wonder in the reader; but unlike fantasy fiction, which tends to look to the past (Encyclopedia of Fantasy 1997a), even when the story takes place in the present, and which finds inspiration in various beliefs and religions, in mythologies from those of the ancient Greeks and the Old Norse to those of ancient Mesopotamia and Africa, in folk tales, fairy tales and heroic songs (Pringle 2006a: 9), science fiction relies heavily on science, creating a world that is strange and unknown to readers and which may become true in the future. Consequently, fantasy and science fiction tend to rely on different emotions: the strange future in the latter is apparently related to uncertainty, alienation, doubt, while the elements of a known past and of various beliefs in the former might suggest feelings of nostalgia and desire for a better world.

While emotions and mythic and/or religious elements play an important role in fantasy fiction, it always includes a supernatural element as well. According to Colin N. Manlove (1975: 1), fantasy, therefore, is "*[a] fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of supernatural or impossible worlds, beings or objects with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms*" [italics in original]. Indeed, as already discussed earlier, fantasy seeks to evoke an emotional response like wonder, but it does so by depicting supernatural creatures, beings with magical powers or worlds different from our own. To put it differently, fantasy is a story, which is impossible in this world, but possible in an otherworld, an invented world with different rules (Encyclopedia of Fantasy 1997a).

As such, fantasy, unlike realistic fiction, need not explain changes in characters or twists in plot with logic, if it bothers to do it at all, but may rather resort to magic. Following from this, Richard Mathews (2002 [1997]: 3) suggests that this creates a "tension between form and content in which reader's willing suspension of disbelief can be exercised in surprising ways". Indeed, fantasy is most frequently written as novels or short stories, the two forms that realistic fiction since the 18th century has claimed as its own, but which between that time and the present day have been imbued with myth, religion and magic by authors of fantasy to create a genre that would still be concerned with human experience and life, but which would do it in a more complex manner (Mathews 2002 [1997]: 2). This, consequently, does create the aforementioned tension or "hesitation", to use literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov's term (Mathews 2002 [1997]: 3), in the reader: if the form of a novel or short story would traditionally require a realistic content, then the added magical or impossible elements to the piece of writing at hand stretch the reader's ability of belief beyond its natural limits.

Harold Bloom (2004 [1982]: 240), however, argues against Todorov and claims that instead of hesitation the reader is confronted with "the agonistic encounter of deep, strong reading": fantasy already in itself incorporates elements of the impossible and of the magical into the reader's unconscious, thus avoiding the testing of limits of readers' ability of belief and replacing it with the feeling of losing oneself in reading. So, while structural analysis of fantastic literature emphasises the conflict between form and content, which creates tension or hesitation in the reader, psychoanalytic view of fantasy fiction emphasises the psychological processes that take place in the reader's mind, such as fondness towards the text at hand and the consequent feeling of losing oneself in the text (Bloom 2004 [1982]: 241-242).

Rosemary Jackson (2002 [1981]: 3) lends support to Bloom by stating directly that "[f]antasy in literature deals so blatantly and repeatedly with unconscious material that it seems rather absurd to try to understand its significance without some reference to

psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic readings of texts". More precisely, she argues that fantasy as a literary form helps to uncover those cultural and social norms that are invisible or unseen, instilled deep into people's minds, or rather into their unconscious, since authors of fantasy, like all writers, write in a historical, social, economic and political environment (Jackson 2002 [1981]: 2) and thus, either consciously or unconsciously, incorporate current issues into their works. In that way, fantasy fiction enables authors to comment on significant social, political or cultural matters and at the same time makes it possible for readers and writers alike to work through serious problems.

This feature of fantasy has been noted as one of the most important by other theorists as well. For Deborah O'Keefe (2003: 11-12), for instance, fantasy fiction does either covertly or overtly convey author's views, but since in fantasy everything is seen as magical, mythical or uncanny, then everything is more likely to be subject to examination and interpretation than in realistic fiction, for example. The unreal world of fantasy actually does not require readers to do even that, O'Keefe goes on, it might be there only to be enjoyed; in this way, fantasy is a sort of escapist literature, enabling people to flee from their everyday lives. Indeed, the fuzzy form of fantasy gives its authors the liberty to create alternative worlds in which they are able to freely express their ideas, including writing about some issue close to their heart as Neil Gaiman did in *Neverwhere*, but it also gives readers the freedom to ignore it all and to just lose themselves in deep, strong reading, to use Harold Bloom's term.

However, fantasy fiction does not provide only the means for social commentary or for escaping the everyday world. Deborah O'Keefe (2003: 13, 16-17) states that nowadays, both adults and children are very likely to be reading the same books of fantasy and taking advantage of the opportunity to identify with brave, resourceful characters, which help children in particular in their psychological growth. O'Keefe (2003: 18) reports that Bruno Bettelheim has convincingly argued that reading fairy tales helps children to learn to deal with

difficult situations and complex feelings, thus contributing to their growth into intelligent individuals. A good example to support Bettelheim's claim is the worldwide success of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series: not only has Rowling created characters with whom children and young adults (and even adults) can identify easily, but it is possible through these characters to learn to cope with wishes and fears inside oneself as well as with complicated situations outside (O'Keefe 2003: 18; Black 2003: 238).

1.2 Gender differences between men and women

Even though commentary on and reflection of current social, political and economic matters forms only a part of the significance of fantasy fiction, the authors' participation in and observations of their social and cultural background are the most relevant to the current thesis. To reiterate, when authors write, no matter what they are writing or whether they are male or female, they are subject to various influences: their own past experiences, social and cultural background and conditions; the environment that surrounds them at the time of writing; the books and other pieces of writing they have already read; the authors they love, admire, imitate or know personally. Joanna Russ in *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives* (Comillon 1973: 4) even goes as far as to claim that there are certain storylines or myths, as she calls them, that underlie every piece of fiction ever written and that all authors consciously or unconsciously follow these patterns. It may be said that this is especially true in the case of fantasy fiction, since it depends heavily on the past and its archetypes (Encyclopedia of Fantasy 1997b).

Joanna Russ, however, argues her case further and claims that that authors writing fiction have not treated their female characters kindly, since "[c]ulture is male" (Comillon 1973: 4), meaning that authors living in the Western world live in a patriarchy – a system, such as a family or a society, in which men have all or almost all of the power (Collins

English Dictionary n.d.) – and therefore are influenced by patriarchal views. Here fantasy's reliance on the past becomes particularly relevant, because while fantasy as a genre has been considered to be more generous in the treatment of women than, say, science fiction or romance, then the influence and the imposed limitations of patriarchal bias are frequently obeyed and left unquestioned (Encyclopedia of Fantasy 1997b).

Patriarchy as a system that has dominated the Western world to a greater or lesser extent until the present day, has been under close scrutiny and harsh criticism by the feminist movement already from the end of the nineteenth century. Gerda Lerner (1986: 238-239), one of the most prominent scholars of women's history, defines patriarchy first in a narrow meaning as "a system /.../ in which the male head of the household ha[s] absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members"; and second in a wider sense as "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general", but which does not necessarily imply that women have absolutely no power, rights, influence or resources.

Other scholars, even though their definitions of patriarchy differ, have emphasised, as Mary Murray (2005 [1995]: 8) concludes, the "economic, political and ideological domination of women by men, which may include but is not by no means limited to sexual domination and paternal power". For example, Kate Millett (2000 [1969]: 25) in her *Sexual Politics* claims that "our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy" in which the male domination is twofold: men dominate women and older men dominate younger men. Sylvia Walby (1991 [1990]: 20) defines patriarchy "as a system of social structures and practises in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". Marxist feminists such as Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison (2013 [1978]: 40) maintain "a dual notion of patriarchy as, first, the control of women's fertility and sexuality in monogamous marriage

and, second, the economic subordination of women through the sexual division of labour (and property)".

The above definitions of patriarchy are certainly not exhaustive, but serve to indicate the diversity of opinions and the complexity of the concept. Similarly, there is no consensus among scholars regarding the origin of patriarchy. While Marxist feminists emphasise the material and biological foundations of patriarchy (Murray 2005 [1995]: 9), then other scholars such as Gerda Lerner (1986: 16-17) and Kate Millett (2000 [1969]: 29) believe the biological differences between men and women to be insufficient basis for the creation and perpetuation of patriarchy. Instead, Millet argues that reasons such as ideological, sociological, economic, educational, anthropological and psychological should be considered.

Lerner (1986: 212-214) supports Millett in that patriarchy for her is rooted in various cultural phenomena as well. She importantly states that the creation of patriarchy was a process that lasted nearly 2500 years with the participation of both men and women. For Lerner (1986: 212) and Millet (2000 [1969]: 33) the basic unit of this patriarchal system was the patriarchal family, which served as a model for the society at large. Lerner (1986: 212-213) continues that men soon extended their dominance outside the borders of family as they learned through their role as warriors to control other people, including women. With the development of Western civilisation and the class system, male dominance over women continued. Lerner (1986: 217) points out that this was possible only if women themselves cooperated. This cooperation, as Lerner explains, was secured by a variety of means, which Millett (2000 [1969]: 26, 39-43, 54-57) also lists in her *Sexual Politics*, including "gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; /.../ the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; /.../ by discrimination in access to economic resources and political powers; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women". Sometimes women even internalised patriarchal views

about them, which, combined with their lack of knowledge about their history, contributed to their subordination (Lerner 1986: 218). With that, Lerner gives sufficient reason as to why women have not attempted to create a matriarchy or overthrow the patriarchal system. Only at the end of the eighteenth century with the beginning of the feminist movement did women begin demanding a more equal status with men.

If Lerner, for instance, still in the 1980s quite straightforwardly engaged in a discussion of patriarchy, then later feminist scholars have opted for milder terms such as "oppression of women", "subordination of women" and most recently, "gender hierarchy", "gender inequality" and "gender imbalance" (Bennett 2006: 21). However, despite of changes in terminology, Cecilia L. Ridgeway (2011: 3), Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen S. Silber (2003: xxxvi) agree, gender inequality in the meaning of a hierarchy between men and women in terms of power, resources and status remains in contemporary society in spite of women's greater entrance into the labour market and higher education beginning in the second half of the twentieth century. Ridgeway (2011: 7) proposes that the persistence of inequality between men and women is due to its adaptation to new circumstances – if the social and economic landscape changes, then the nature of gender inequality changes to match it. Indeed, Fisher and Silber (2003: xxxvi), too, claim that even if more women become heads of households or take sole responsibility over their children, then gendered division of labour, incessant worry over body image and unrealistic beauty criteria put limits on what women can do and how they view themselves and their potential.

While it is true that gender inequality persists today to some degree, conscious efforts have been made towards greater equality between genders, which have resulted in gains for women in several societies (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 3, 7) and especially in postindustrial societies, where the process of modernisation has led to women's greater entrance into paid workforce, higher levels of education, lower fertility rates and greater participation in

government. Yet only in the more advanced postindustrial societies have such changes brought about a shift towards gender equality with more women in higher professional positions and with more political influence (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 10-11).

It is clear, then, that in the 150 or so years since the beginning of the feminist movement, the position of women in Western societies has changed radically. Nowadays, more women than ever before in history have received or are receiving education in a wide range of fields, which greatly increases their options in life. Consequently, many women look and apply for a job, not only because their financial situation demands it, but rather as a means of achieving a sense of accomplishment or fulfilment with oneself, of finding one's identity and a place in the world outside the home (Eagly et al 2008: 112). Resent research has even gone so far as to claim that if differences in genitalia and secondary sex characteristics put aside, men and women are actually quite similar as far as their personality, cognitive ability and leadership skills are concerned (American Psychological Association 2005). Psychologist Janet Shibley Hyde conducted an analysis of 46 meta-analyses that were carried out in the last two decades of the 20th century. During her research she found that gender differences seemed to play a very little role in regard to the psychological variables that were examined (American Psychological Association 2005).

That similarity becomes even more pronounced in postindustrial societies. Alice H. Eagly, Wendy Wood and Mary C. Johannesen-Schmidt suggest that there are two main reasons for the division of men and women into distinctive if complementary croups, reasons that lose their validity for the most part in postindustrial societies. Firstly, they believe that women's ability to bear children and give birth determines that women and not men are forced to choose occupations that accommodate having and raising children (Eagly et al 2008: 271-272). This, however, becomes less important in societies where the birth rate is low, where

babies can be fed in other ways than nursing or where other people can take care of children –
in other words, in Western or postindustrial societies (Eagly et al 2008: 272).

Secondly, Eagly and her colleagues propose that men's larger frame and greater
physical strength and speed direct them towards roles and occupations that require exactly
these characteristics (Eagly et al 2008: 272). In societies where, for example, agriculture or
hunting are central to economy, this would certainly be true: jobs that demand strength and
speed would definitely be done by men, whereas women would perform tasks more
appropriate to their physical abilities, like cleaning, cooking and doing the laundry. Yet in
postindustrial societies, where technology is advanced enough to be used to make difficult
jobs easier and where services, information and research are more important than, say,
manufacture or agriculture, there are few tasks that require great strength to be fulfilled (Eagly
et al 2008: 272).

Eagly, Wood and Johannesen-Schmidt do make a convincing and logical case: in
Western, i.e. postindustrial societies, there are several benefits provided by the society itself
that make it easier for women to plan ahead in terms of family and to choose whatever career
path they prefer. What is more, men, especially fathers are encouraged to stay at home and
take care of their children or household (Kite 2001: 215). The requirement of great strength
and speed in performing certain tasks appears to be disappearing as well since the
development of technology has made quite a number of jobs less physically demanding
(Correll 2004: 93). In addition, it seems that, based on Janet Shibley Hyde's research, men and
women are psychologically not that different either. However, instead of claiming that gender
inequality does not exist in the 21st century Western world, Hyde as well as Eagly and her
colleagues stress that even though gender differences might be instable and thus subject to
change over time, they are still present in contemporary society: the manifestation of gender
differences depends much on the context in which they appear – in other words, whether

gender is a relevant characteristic in a given situation or not – as well as on other factors such as occupation, race, level of education and nationality, which will not be discussed in great detail in this paper (American Psychological Association 2005; Eagly et al 2008: 225; 274-275).

The use of the terms 'sex' and 'gender' is often a problematic one and usually a definition is called for to explain the author's understanding of them. In this thesis, 'gender' refers "to the socially constructed attributes and 'performed' roles that are mapped on to biologically sexed bodies in historically and culturally specific ways" (Merrick 2004 [2003]: 241). Following from this, 'sex' denotes biological sex, i.e. the anatomy, including internal and external reproductive organs, hormones and chromosomes of a person that make it possible to classify them as male, female or intersex (American Psychological Association 2011).

The reason why gender may be regarded as the most important in the previous list of factors is that the sex of a person is in most cases one of the first things that is noticed about them and the basis for their automatic and unconscious categorisation as man or woman (Eagly et al 2008: 224). This, of course, is a simplified view of the matter, since it is possible to define many more 'genders' between or rather in addition to man and woman, such as transgender, transvestite, transsexual, hermaphrodite, trans man and trans woman (Eagly et al 2008: 207), but due to the limited scope of this thesis, the dual distinction between man and woman will suffice. Even so, defining people according to their gender is always culturally meaningful and in most cases determines what is expected of people, how they are treated and influences the general course of their lives (Eagly et al 2008: 1-2).

Dividing people into men and women has, then, a profound influence on every aspect of their lives. Mary E. Kite in her essay *Changing Times, Changing Gender Roles: Who Do We Want Women and Men to Be?* (2001: 215) suggests that this is due to the power of our

beliefs and opinions what men and women should be like and what characteristics exactly define femininity and masculinity. These societal expectations form the basis of gender roles and gender stereotypes as well as facilitate the identification of those who transgress those roles.

1.3 Gender roles and gender stereotypes

Although gender roles and gender stereotypes are two closely related concepts, they cannot be used interchangeably. A gender role consists of the behaviours considered appropriate for men and women. A gender stereotype, on the other hand, is composed of the assumptions about what traits men and women should possess as well as how they ought to behave (Brannon 2004: 160). For instance, stereotypical men should be independent and assertive and stereotypical women should be considerate towards others. The highly prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes is one of their most striking features, but as all other social norms, they also include descriptive content, meaning that they reflect the traits men and women demonstrate in reality (Prentice, Carranza 2004: 260). To reiterate, gender stereotypes describe both the attributes men and women are likely to have as well as those they are supposed to demonstrate. Prentice and Carranza's (2004: 260) examples illustrate this statement: while women are more likely to be warm and caring, they are also supposed to be so; and while men are more likely to be strong and ambitious, they are also supposed to manifest these traits.

While it is certainly true that in the last 150 years Western societies have undergone great changes, then Prentice and Carranza (2004: 261) argue, relying on studies published as recently as in the year 2000, that gender stereotypes have remained relatively stable. They call this phenomenon the conservative lag – the "tendency for cultural beliefs to lag behind social change" (Prentice, Carranza 2004: 265). Their own research also supports this claim. To be

more precise, Prentice and Carranza (2002: 271) carried out a study with 208 participants (104 men and 104 women) in order to identify traits that men and women should and should not possess in the American society. They asked the participants to rate a list of 100 characteristics (75 positive and 25 negative) based on their desirability in society in general. The results of Prentice and Carranza's study are "consistent with numerous demonstrations of the persistence of traditional prescriptive gender stereotypes" (Prentice, Carranza 2002: 275) in that the characteristics that were rated highest in the desirability for women were connected with interpersonal sensitivity, niceness, modesty and sociability, while those traits deemed most desirable for men were related to strength, drive, assertiveness and self-reliance.

When discussing traditional gender stereotypes it has to be kept in mind that they do not apply to all women. Diana Burgess and Eugene Borgida (1999: 671) state that, for instance, the female stereotype can be classified into various subgroups such as the traditional woman (e.g., a mother or a housewife), the sexy woman and the nontraditional, masculine woman (e.g., a career woman). They also maintain that the global female stereotype is more similar to the traditional woman than to the masculine woman. The current thesis is limited to the global female stereotype, which refers to traditional women who are white and middle-class.

The pervasiveness of the global female as well as male gender stereotype is evidenced by the ease with which people are able to identify those traits that in their mind characterise men and women (Kite et al 2008: 206). Moreover, they tend to associate those attributes only with either men or women, thus probably overlooking any individual variations or exceptions (Kite 2001: 215). On the one hand it is logical to assume that what is masculine is not feminine and vice versa, or that feminine characteristics exist in contrast to masculine ones, but then on the other, this sort of overgeneralisation leads to the situation in which women who can be said to be equal to men in their physical constitution, i.e. as big and strong as men

and without children in their care, their psychological equality being granted, are still thought of in the same terms as all other women (Eagly et al 2008: 222). In other words, this means that popular notions in regard to men and women are applied to social categories, not individuals.

The power of gender stereotypes should not be underestimated, as Linda Brannon (2004: 160) argues. According to her, gender stereotypes determine our ways of perceiving men and women and even when our beliefs and opinions differ from reality, gender stereotypes can nevertheless be those yardsticks against which we measure ourselves and others. For the most part, since it is expected of them by society and because it seems to be more beneficial to have a sort of division of labour between men and women, people at least partially tend to conform to gender stereotypes (Eagly et al 2008: 277-279). What is more, in evaluating oneself and others, both men and women are likely to view behaviour that deviates from the norm negatively (Kite 2001: 221; Eagly et al 2008: 278), but the severity of this violation depends largely on which and how many characteristics are overstepped. For instance, violators exhibiting character traits usually associated with the opposite sex are deemed less likeable than those who possess traits from both sexes (Kite 2001: 221).

In addition to the nature and number of characteristics violated, the sex of the violator is also of significance: women who transgress their traditional gender roles are viewed in a more positive light than men (Kite 2001: 224). What is more, Kay Bussey and Albert Bandura (Eagly et al 2008: 106) cite several studies which report that parents, too, make this distinction in raising their children. According to them, parents deem the activities and toys usually considered appropriate for little girls to be more gender-specific than those generally associated with boys; in other words, it is less likely for a little girl to be reprimanded for playing with toy cars or climbing a tree than for a boy for playing with dolls.

Due to their subtle and intricate nature as well as their influence, gender stereotypes have been the focus of research for decades. Based on the studies carried out so far, gender stereotypes as well as gender roles can be analysed and viewed on three different levels: first, character traits commonly associated with men and women; secondly, the physical appearance of men and women; and thirdly, the societal roles appropriate for men and women (Kite 2001: 216).

To begin with the personality traits traditionally associated with either men or women, it still has to be kept in mind that gender roles and gender stereotypes and thus gender-related character traits are fuzzy sets that are not applied to individuals but rather to the general categories of men and women. Alice H. Eagly, Wendy Wood and Mary C. Johannesen-Schmidt (Eagly et al 2008: 274), therefore, suggest that firstly, the cluster of features commonly regarded as feminine is related to the welfare of the whole community. This cluster, labelled by researchers as 'communal' or expressive' (Mary E. Kite 2001: 216), is composed of character traits such as being affectionate, kind, caring, considerate towards others (Eagly et al 2008: 274) and, as Linda Brannon (2004: 162) adds, being passive, dependent, pure, refined and delicate.

Secondly, the qualities usually associated with men are named 'agentive' or 'instrumental' (Mary E. Kite 2001: 216), indicating that men are deemed to be oriented not towards the community but the self instead (Eagly et al 2008: 274). This is expressed by being assertive, self-confident, in control, active, independent and strong (Eagly et al 2008: 274; Brannon 2004: 162). Looking at these two clusters of characteristics it becomes clear that they seem to be on the two opposite ends of a binary scale: if men are active, then women are passive; if men are independent, then women are dependent and so on. The traits stereotypically attributed to both sexes are, therefore, mutually exclusive and complementary, thus confirming the statement that what is perceived feminine is not masculine and vice versa.

These groups of character traits become more strongly associated with each sex the more people believe men and women truly do behave that way (Eagly et al 2008: 275). However, since these are beliefs, they are subject to change over time, as are the opinions concerned with the physical appearance of men and women. Mary E. Kite (2001: 216) proposes that nowadays in Western societies, men are stereotypically thought to be strong, rugged and broad-shouldered, whereas women dainty, pretty and graceful. Mike C. Parent and Bonnie Moradi (2011: 959) add to this list that in the case of women, being thin and investing time into taking care of oneself is, in particular, one aspect against which women are judged. Be that as it may, stereotypical physical attributes, just as character traits, are nevertheless opinions and beliefs that people hold, which means that even though men and women may not fulfil these standards they may strive towards it, but at the same time, may choose not to do so (Eagly et al 2008: 104).

The already mentioned researchers Eagly, Wood and Johannesen-Schmidt (Eagly et al 2008: 275) believe that personality and appearance put aside, the most significant differences between men and women appear in the roles they are expected to play in society. It thus has been and is assumed that men are to become heads of households, who handle all financial matters (Kite 2001: 216). Consequently, work outside the home becomes a major focus of their lives (Parent, Moradi 2009: 176). Women, on the other hand, are to concern themselves with matters of the home, caring for their children and tackling household tasks, including cleaning, cooking and even decorating (Mahalik et al 2005: 424). What is more, the nature of relationships men and women enter as well as the behavioural expectations in them vary between genders. It is acceptable (and even preferred) for men to have multiple sexual relationships and to refrain from committing emotionally to their partners (Parent, Moradi 2009: 176). Women, however, are presumed to form deep, supportive relationships with

others, to invest themselves into a romantic relationship and to be faithful to their partners (Mahalik et al 2005: 424).

Since both men and women are pressured by society to conform to the abovementioned gender role-related standards, it must be noted that doing so can have deleterious effects on both men and women. Consequently, men are faced with psychological and physical issues such as reluctance to seek professional help for health problems, violence and bullying, dissatisfaction in relationships and poor food choices (Parent, Moradi 2009: 175, 177). On the other hand, research has shown that women who conform to feminine norms are less aggressive than those who do not, but at the same time they are more likely to suffer from eating disorders and depression (Parent, Moradi 2011: 959).

The negative influence of cultural beliefs about gender, however, becomes the most evident in relation to work and career. Shelley J. Correll (2004: 93-94) maintains that the differentiation between men and women via cultural beliefs about gender, i.e. gender stereotypes, grants men higher status in society than women and creates a gender-based double standard, which directly biases men and women's own assessment of their abilities in relation to their careers. More precisely, when faced with a career-relevant task, meaning "tasks, activities, decisions, and aspirations that, when performed, enacted, or held, impact the trajectory or path of an individual's job or career history (Correll 2004: 95), and if it is in a field in which men are usually thought to perform better than women, then men will assess their own ability in tackling this task higher than women, even when the actual results between genders are equal (Correll 2004: 108).

Biased assessment of this sort, Correll (2004: 94-95) convincingly argues, leads to gender segregation between occupations and fields, which already begins in high school or in college or university at the latest. For instance, she explains, good mathematical skills are usually associated with masculinity, while good verbal skills are deemed a feminine property,

which in turn encourages men to enter into fields such as science, maths and engineering, but which discourages or prevents women from choosing such occupations in favour of those that are viewed as female-dominated or feminine (Correll 2004: 95). On the one hand, even if it is more difficult for women who are equal in their skills and education to men in the same field to excel in careers traditionally considered as masculine (Eagly et al 2008: 228) and even if they do have to deal with an invisible network of obstacles that prevents them from moving to higher positions (Eagly et al 2008: 112), it nevertheless is possible. Moreover, Cecilia L. Ridgeway and Chris Bourg (Eagly et al 2008: 228) suggest that in female-dominated occupations it might be easier for women to advance than it is for men; but at the same time, these careers are not valued as highly in society as are their masculine counterparts, which means that in spite of the fact that women progress more quickly in their chosen occupation, they do not receive as much social recognition or respect as men do.

On the one hand, then, it can be said that even though notions about gender have changed over time and will continue to do so, men seem to be considered to be more competent and capable than women (Correll 2004: 97). On the other hand, Eagly, Wood and Johannesen-Schmidt (Eagly et al 2008: 275-276) propose that in Western postindustrial societies this may not be true: if men and women are politically and socially equal, then the traditional gender roles may become less traditional and the differentiation based on gender may not be relevant. However, the amount of studies and the number of researchers, demonstrated by the previous discussion, indicates that stereotypical beliefs about gender are embedded deep into our culture and perpetuated through people's own behaviour and images in media (such as newspapers, magazines, films, books). Subsequently, the following subchapter will look at how gender has been treated in one form of literature, namely in fantasy fiction.

1.4 Gender in fantasy fiction

Even though fantasy has become quite a popular literary genre, with examples of contemporary novels such as J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series and George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, not to mention a few older classics like J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea series, there has been little academic interest in the genre (Nestvold, Lake 2008), in spite of the fact that the Internet abounds with informal opinion articles. Moreover, if those opinion articles may be concerned with marginal works of fantasy or science fiction, then the majority of academic articles tend to analyse fantasy fiction that has already been established as literature, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* or, more recently, J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (Nestvold, Lake 2008), thus neglecting not only peripheral works of fantasy, but the novels, short stories and graphic novels of some other popular authors.

According to Peter Hunt, Millicent Lenz and Robin Anne Reid, there are several reasons to literary theorists' and critics' reluctance to analyse fantasy fiction. Reid argues, firstly, that fantasy is deemed both politically conservative, and thus perhaps not of sufficient interest, as well as formulaic and repetitive (Reid 2009: 62). The last characteristic is exemplified by certain elements and motifs that repeatedly occur in fantasy, such as the young hero on a quest, wise advisers and evil monsters (Hunt, Lenz 2003 [2001]: 2) and by the authors' tendency to write series of at least three books, if not more. Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz (2003 [2001]: 2) also agree with Reid in that fantasy indeed tends to resort to certain formulas, as it were, and add that it has also been accused of being childish and escapist (Hunt, Lenz 2003 [2001]: 2). However, as it was previously mentioned, the property of fantasy of providing an escape to another world can be seen as a positive quality rather than a negative one. In regard to fantasy being childish and thus perhaps too simplistic to be analysed on an academic level, then the above discussion proved that most fantasy fiction,

either for children or adults, is a powerful tool for commenting on social issues or for helping to talk about delicate problems; and even if it does only provide simple delight in reading and a sense of wonder while doing it (Hunt, Lenz 2003 [2001]: 5), it is free to do so.

As far as gender is concerned, Hunt and Lenz (2003 [2001]: 3) suggest that the formulaic nature of fantasy may be its greatest weakness. More precisely, in the most common form of fantasy, the tale with the questing hero called heroic fantasy or epic fantasy, women have been primarily marginalised, depicted in stereotypical roles such as mothers or seen as dangerous. Especially in epic fantasy, images of a dangerously erotic woman whose beauty and sexuality sometimes earn her the title of goddess abound (Reid 2009: 34). This kind of visual objectification of women directly carries out the male fantasy – a phenomenon named by Laura Mulvey (2001 [1975]: 397-398) the "male gaze", according to which woman "holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire". In fantasy, particularly in films and comics, the male gaze is expressed by emphasising the curve of the female body or with feminine, sexualised poses, gestures and gazes (Reid 2009: 90-91).

In relation to the formulaic nature of fantasy fiction, Hunt and Lenz also quote Ursula K. Le Guin, one of the most prominent female writers of fantasy and the author of the famous Earthsea series, who ironically has said that "[a]uthority is male. It's a fact. My fantasy dutifully reported the fact. But is that all a fantasy does – report facts?" (quoted in Hunt, Lenz 2003 [2001]: 3), thus admitting that she, too, among other authors, has succumbed to the limitations set by the standard patriarchal views in Western societies. Yet Guin's own fiction exhibits a change over time: if her Earthsea series, beginning with *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) and *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971) did at first portray men and women according to traditional, patriarchal standards, then the later *Tehanu* (1990) already questions several gender-related issues in the earlier books (Reid 2009: 63).

Thus, Le Guin is correct in asking if all fantasy does is report facts, because, after all, the purpose of fantasy since the beginning of the genre has been to oppose the dominant worldview (Mathews 2002 [1997]: 3). In a way it has done so in that fantasy in general can be seen as being more generous in depicting women as, for instance, science fiction or horror (Encyclopedia of Fantasy 1997a), all of which can be classified as speculative fiction, a term denoting a broad literary genre "encompassing any fiction with supernatural, fantastic, or futuristic elements" (Collins English Dictionary n.d.). In fantasy fiction, strong female heroes can already be found in works published at the beginning of the twentieth century, such as the adventurous Dorothy Gale in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) by Frank L. Baum (Reid 2009: 35). The questioning of both male and female stereotypes in literature continued with authors such as John Erskine, George Viereck and Paul Elridge (Reid 2009: 37) until the 1960s and 1970s, when authors of fantasy, women in particular, began using "the mode of fantasy to recuperate female archetypal roles that have fallen into stereotypes; to recover lost matriarchal tradition in myth and history; to deal explicitly with women-centered issues such as rape and gender inequality; and to reenvision traditional fantasy from a feminized perspective of caring and community" (Reid 2009: 62).

Female characters in science fiction, as an example in comparison to fantasy, have mostly been objectified and sexualised, especially during the Golden Age of science fiction from the 1940s until the early 1960s, when most of the authors as well as readers were or were at least assumed to be male (Reid 2009: 170). Only since the 1960s have authors of science fiction began to challenge the stereotypical images of women as damsels in distress, sexual interests, evil witches, wives and mothers (Reid 2009: 173). Although this tendency is not evident in all the works of contemporary authors of science fiction, the number of writers who believe that gender is a social construct rather than a biologically or historically determined notion is growing (Reid 2009: 170-171).

A similar trend of questioning the roles of women that have so far been considered traditional can also be seen in fantasy fiction, especially in the works of female authors, who exploit the fantastic to rewrite history that has not treated women kindly as well as to transgress gender lines and explore different sexual identities (Reid 2009: 71). More generally, Mary J. Du Mont's significant study of 1993, reported thoroughly by Laura Solomon (1998: 6) and Aimee Meuchel (1999: 12-13), which has been taken as basis for later studies of similar nature, showed that the overall position of female characters in fantasy novels is improving. Du Mont selected forty five novels of science fiction and fantasy for young adults published in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, fifteen books per each decade, by both male and female authors, who were almost equal in number. Her main focus was to analyse the images of women found in those books. The results of Du Mont's study revealed that while there were more heroes than heroines, then the number of female protagonists increased remarkably during the time period under observation. In addition, she made a distinction between active and passive characters, showing that if in the 1970s, over half (55%) of the female characters were passive, then already in the 1990s that number had decreased to under a quarter (22%) and the number of active female characters had risen to over three quarters (78%). However, even if Du Mont's study on the whole suggested that female characters in the 1990s were better depicted than in the 1970s, they were still more likely to be placed in stereotypical roles as mothers, wives, nurses, secretaries etc.

Later academic articles tend to concern themselves with specific works of fiction, looking at gender in Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, for example, and studies resembling that of Du Mont are quite difficult to find. Laura Solomon (1998) is one of the few to reduplicate Du Mont's study in her master's thesis, albeit on a smaller scale. She looked at fifteen novels written for children and adults, but concentrated only on fantasy fiction, rather than expanding her research to science fiction as well. Her main aims, similar to those of Du Mont, were to

count the total number of characters, to investigate the ways in which male and female characters are divided into active and passive characters and to determine which roles men and women occupy in those novels (Solomon 1998: 7-8). Solomon's findings, which concentrated much on the personality traits and occupations of characters, in general support the results of Du Mont's article. She found that in those novels she analysed, if female characters were defined by their appearance, they were invariably beautiful. At the same time, male characters were described as being handsome as well, but this was not their primary characteristic; instead, they were depicted as being above all active and/or intelligent (Solomon 1998: 10-12). Following from this and in line with Du Mont's study, there were more active male characters than female ones (Solomon 1998: 17). Solomon's further results indicate that gender stereotypes abound in those fantasy novels she examined. More precisely, physical strength is a traditionally male-related trait and even though fantasy fiction has every possibility to prove otherwise, Solomon found almost no physically strong female characters to balance the number of strong male characters. Instead of physical strength, women displayed emotional strength, a characteristic that men lacked (Solomon 1998: 15-16). Finally, as far as occupations are concerned, there was a great difference between men and women: male rather than female characters were depicted as having an occupation (Solomon 1998: 21).

1.5 Male authors writing female characters

Images of women in fiction and especially stereotypical images of women in writings by men have been the focus of interest of feminist literary critics since the beginning of feminist literary theory, because, as Ruth Robbins (2000: 51) explains, "if the images presented in literary and artistic texts are powerful because of the power accorded to literature, images of women are an obvious starting point to begin a critique of the place of

women in society at large". The early influential feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir and her *The Second Sex*, Mary Ellmann and her *Thinking About Women* and Kate Millett and her *Sexual Politics* all focus primarily on writings by men. All of them criticise the image of woman as it is created by man to embody characteristics such as passivity, helplessness, instability, piety, irrationality, compliancy, to name just a few (Robbins 2000: 59-64).

Even though focus on representations of women in literature has shifted to other forms of media, like television and advertisements which are rich in images (Robbins 2000: 69), some current feminists are still interested in literature and express similar ideas to those of the early thinkers. For example, if it is assumed among some feminist theorists that men's writing differs from that of women's, then Cheryl Lange (2008) goes even as far as to suggest that male authors are unable to properly depict female characters or write from a female point of view. Judith Kegan Gardiner (1981: 348) proposes two main reasons for this: the first and the most common one is that men simply do not share the same experiences as women; and secondly that there exists a "female consciousness" that produces inherently feminine styles and structures that are impossible for men to imitate. The first explanation seems to be valid to some extent, based on the earlier discussion of gender roles and gender stereotypes in Western societies. If men and women are indeed assigned gender-based roles and consequently are seen and treated differently, then it may be more difficult for men to write female characters in non-stereotypical roles.

Gender-based conditioning begins already at a very young age. To make it clearer, babies in cultures similar to ours are already at birth sentenced to become either "proper" men or "proper" women, depending on their biological sex. As they are growing up, they then acquire modes of behaviour that are approved by society. If it is one still saturated with patriarchal views either fully or partially, then it means that most boys are already at a very

young age taught by such social agents as parents, the media, their friends and acquaintances the standards of what it is to be masculine (Mahalik et al 2005: 417). To put it differently, they are taught to become the dominant gender over women, which would entail becoming strong, independent, confident, breadwinners for themselves and their families and successful leaders. Most importantly, according to patriarchal beliefs, men are expected to steer clear of everything feminine, like displays of excessive emotion (Parent, Moradi 2009: 176).

Girls, on the other hand, are to become modest, warm, kind, family-oriented and domestic, embodying the qualities that would best complement those of men. Furthermore, not only are girls expected to direct their lives towards becoming housewives and mothers, they are socially pressured to take care of themselves in order to look pretty (Mahalik et al 2005: 424). Referring back to the previous discussion of gender roles, differences in the experiences of women and men become clearer. More precisely, believing it is true that at least to some extent men are regarded as the dominant group in society, they are expected to provide for themselves and their families and be successful at work. Women, at the same time, are considered to be best adapted to handling household matters and raising children. If women do work outside the home, they are covertly steered towards more feminine fields, while men, who are seen as good at mathematics, are encouraged to choose specialties in science, maths or engineering, for example.

Following from this, it is possible to argue that as men and women do face different expectations, they lead different lives and consequently have different worldviews. Of course, in the case of both boys and girls, it still has to be remembered that even though children are educated within the framework of patriarchy, they have the choice to challenge this system and not to act out the abovementioned gender stereotypes and roles (Eagly et al 2008: 104).

To continue, it is therefore logical for some critics to assume that since men appear to be to a greater or lesser degree alien to the female experience, they are not willing to take on a

female voice or write female characters. Alan Williamson (2001: 1), who has studied male writers and their female protagonists, suggests that there might be another side to this. More specifically, he believes that writing a female character entails identifying with women, which may jeopardise male authors' own gender identity. As a result, it is possible that while these men experience the emotions traditionally labelled as 'feminine', they fail to conform to the gender roles prescribed to them and thus fail to be proper members of their sex.

Williamson (2001: 2-3) goes on to underline an additional aspect that may have been deterring men from writing women. He claims that male writers have been subject to much negative criticism by feminists, who argue that men are not able to know how women think or feel, which in turn leaves only one option to male authors: to write flat, empty and stereotypical characters that serve to perpetuate the patriarchal system. Laura P. Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (1990: 3-4), too, warn us in the introduction of their book *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gendered Criticism* that even if a male writer appears to support feminist ideas in his works, his true agenda may be something different altogether. For Claridge and Langland, the word "feminism" is not simply a political term that denotes the struggle towards the economic, social and political equality between men and women, it also entails a true respect and concern for women's autonomy and independence. So when some male authors are interested in what can be called a feminine mode of expression, they do not necessarily concern themselves with advocating equal rights for women or their independence, but rather they wish to expand their own space of expression and thus escape the constraints of masculinity. In other words, some men adopt a feminine voice in order to extend themselves, because just as women are oppressed by patriarchy, some men feel that the masculine gender norms, which are also created within the patriarchal system and after its laws, restrain them.

At the same time, Williamson (2001: 2), quoting Wendy Lesser from her book *His Other Half*, advocates a more positive opinion by saying that there is more than one way for

men to write their female characters: some of them do write stereotypical women, but others use their art to express a desire to understand women and to be closer to them. Angela Roger and Madonne Miner, for example, support Williamson's opinion. Both of them investigate the portrayal of women in the fiction of two male writers. Roger (1996: 11) analyses the works of Ian McEwan, whose writing largely draws on relationships between men and women. She claims that due to his upbringing in an all-boys school, McEwan's limited knowledge of women led to his depiction of women in his early short stories and novels as objects instead of people. However, there was a noticeable change in McEwan's fiction after he married and became a father. Beginning from his oratorio *Or Shall We Die?*, women portrayed by McEwan become stronger, more powerful and successful (Roger 1996: 20). Yet Roger (1996: 25) nevertheless maintains that if McEwan does comment on the tensions between men and women in society and if women are portrayed in more hospitable terms in his later writings, then the unmistakeably male voice is still noticeable.

Madonne Miner analyses three short stories – "Anna", "Leslie in California" and "Rose" – by Andre Dubus, an American short story writer. While his depictions of men have led critics to suggest that Dubus "merits inclusion in a club of "male writers writing realistically as men" " or that he is "heir to Ernest Hemingway; brother to Richard Ford and Raymond Carver" (Miner 1997: 18), then Miner's (1997: 19) interest lies in the stories that have a female protagonist, as their titles suggest, and which are concerned with women's experience. Her analysis of the three short stories concludes that Dubus's characters are first and foremost human beings: Dubus records human experience and transforms it into portraits of either men or women in his works. Miner goes even as far as to claim that "Dubus seems to be a "man writing as a woman" because he presents characters of both sexes with the same challenge: to live a truly human life, while confronted by chance and the unexpected" (Miner 1997: 30).

Both Roger and Miner consequently make a valid point: if women write male characters well because literature abounds with images of men and because women are conditioned to attend to men (Miner 1997: 30), then in order for a man to write his female characters well a similar practice of observing women and regarding fictional characters as human beings above all should be encouraged. Neil Gaiman, too, who is the focus of current thesis, is of the opinion that in order to write female characters well, one should observe women, as he explains in an interview to Naomi Alderman in a BBC radio programme (BBC 2013). In the same interview, Gaiman also notes that instead of gendered men and women he writes people – people who are interesting and whom he would like to meet.

Taking into account the previous discussion, it is possible to argue that Neil Gaiman, alongside other male authors such as Ian McEwan and Andre Dubus, is a writer worthy of analysis and academic interest for several reasons. Firstly, Gaiman is mostly known as an author of fantasy, which in itself is a genre with ambivalent attitudes towards gender: on the one hand, most fantasy fiction revels in recurring metaphors and elements, thus suggesting reluctance to giving up the traditional depiction of women as wives, mothers, damsels in distress and evil monsters; on the other hand, authors of fantasy have used its defiant nature to challenge the very same stereotypical roles of female characters.

Secondly, Rachel R. Martin (2012: 12) claims that Gaiman himself has been found to be an author who is able to, if he wishes to, create "stories with fully developed female protagonists, and narratives showing those not fitting into a simplified gender binary". In that, Martin agrees with Sarah Jaffe, quoted by Martin in the same text, who believes that Gaiman is better in writing women than many other male authors. Even if gender is not his main concern, Gaiman then either intentionally or not has managed to create characters such as Dream in *Sandman*, who defy labelling according to gender, or Coraline in *Coraline*, who fight evil and save others just as numerous male heroes before them have done.

Taking this into account, the following chapter will then attempt to answer these questions: has Neil Gaiman in his novels *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Coraline* depicted his female characters either stereotypically or not; if not, do these female characters embody any feminist values that might reflect the author's own ideas; and is it possible to detect a temporal development in his portrayal of women based on these three novels?

CHAPTER 2

2.1 Methodology

There were six female characters analysed in *Neverwhere*, ten in *American Gods* and three in *Coraline*. Only the main female characters, i.e. those who contributed to or participated in the plots of their respective novels, were included in the analysis. Characters such as airport workers, waitresses, cashiers, people on the streets and so on were not analysed.

All characters were evaluated according to the evaluation form in Appendix 1, which is borrowed largely from Laura Solomon (1998) (Appendix 2), but modified to fit the demands of the present thesis. The list of stereotypical masculine and feminine features in the evaluation form is compiled based on the discussion of gender stereotypes in section 1.3 in the current thesis.

The questions the analysis seeks to answer are: are the female characters active or passive?; are they central or marginal?; do they have an occupation?; is their appearance described?; what characteristics are used to describe them and what characteristics do they display?; are these characteristics stereotypically feminine or masculine or neither?

2.2 *Neverwhere*

2.2.1 Lady Door

The first female supporting character the readers meet is Door, who at that moment is being chased by Mr Vandemar and Mr Croup, two vicious hitmen. By then she is quite tired and with the last of her strength she opens a door to London Above, only to collapse at the feet of Richard, who takes her to his home and helps her to recover. There, Richard observes that Door is "dressed in a variety of clothes thrown over each other: odd clothes, dirty velvets,

muddy lace, rips and holes through which other layers and styles [can] be seen" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 30); that on top of this medley of clothes and fabrics Door is wearing an old brown leather jacket, which makes her look small and vulnerable and which in its own way acts like an armour; that her hair is "a dark shade of auburn, with copper and bronze highlights" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 54); and that it is difficult to guess her age from her appearance, which might range from fifteen and sixteen to much older.

Richard's verdict after finishing his account of Door in his mind is that she looks like as if "she'd done a midnight raid on the History of Fashion section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and was still wearing everything she'd taken" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 30). Her clothing seems out of the ordinary for a member of London Above, as Richard's observation indicates, which in turn suggests that Door is definitely a member of London Below, one of the people who have fallen through the cracks, to use Gaiman's own definition. Yet there is something vaguely aristocratic about the materials Door is wearing, such as velvet and lace. Her choice to cover herself with a leather jacket is also significant, because by doing so, she is apparently trying to hide her identity as well.

Door's eyes in her pale, elfin face, are her most remarkable feature. When Richard looks into them properly for the first time, he notices that it is almost impossible for him to tell what colour they are: they are not the traditional blues, greens, browns or greys we are used to, but rather they are similar to fire opals of "burning greens and blues and even reds and yellows that [vanish] and [glint] as she move[s]" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 40). Her eyes are so remarkable that the readers are reminded of them on several occasions throughout the book and they are the feature that make Door look beautiful. Here a difference between male and female characters also appears: if the appearance of both male and female characters is described at some point in the novel, either at their introduction or shortly afterwards and with no considerable difference in length or detail, then in the case of female characters, Gaiman

keeps reminding the readers that they have some particular characteristic, such as Door's fire-opal eyes or heart-shaped face.

Already at the beginning of the novel, therefore, Door is described as delicate and vulnerable, in need of assistance and protection. Indeed, she, first, is rescued by Richard, who brings her to his apartment and takes care of her wounds; second, she contacts Marquis de Carabas and asks for his help; and third, she hires a bodyguard, Hunter, to protect her against Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar. To this extent, Door manifests traditionally feminine characteristics as identified by Linda Brannon (2004: 162) and Mary E. Kite (2001: 216): weakness, dependence, beauty, fragility and vulnerability. In fantasy fiction in general as well, beauty is one of the most frequent and prominent characteristics of female characters (Solomon 1998: 10-12).

Even though Door may lack physical strength, she seems to have a fair amount of authority and influence in London Below. More precisely, she is the oldest daughter of Lord Portico of the House of Arch, a very respectable family in London Below. Her aristocratic, for the lack of a better word, descent is revealed when Door and her companions visit Earl's court. There, she is no longer "a ragged street-pixie", but "more like someone used to getting her own way" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 154). What is more, whenever she speaks, the room falls quiet, as if out of respect, and "something more ancient and powerful in those huge opal-coloured eyes in their pale heart-shaped face than her young years would have seemed to allow" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 155) is observed by both the Earl and Richard. In this episode at Earl's court, it can be seen that even though Door is physically weak and vulnerable – she, as explained above, is in need of a bodyguard against Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar, who almost managed to kill her at the beginning of the book – she can be determined and stubborn should the need arise. Namely, when it is revealed that the Marquis is not welcome there, Door confronts the Earl in defence of her companion. She folds her arms, stands taller, raises her

chin and fixes the Earl with her look. Although she is smaller than the Earl, the latter relents and allows the Marquis to leave without harm. Prentice and Carranza (2002: 274) found that having a strong personality, similar to that of Door just described, is seen as a primarily masculine trait, one that men are supposed and encouraged to have.

So, on the one hand, Door is stereotypically vulnerable, which may be both because she is a woman or because she is so young, but on the other, she displays characteristics usually associated with men (Prentice and Carranza 2002: 274; Eagly et al 2008: 274; Brannon 2004: 162): willpower, determination, ambition and the ability to lead. To explain this further, a few examples from the novel need to be considered. First, Door is seemingly on a quest to solve the murder of her family. Although she encounters several obstacles – such as Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar or the test of the Black Friars – she is determined to continue. To fulfil her goal, she employs the help of Hunter, Richard and the Marquis, whom Door is able to successfully lead as it is she who has the power of decision-making and to whom others obey. Door also proves herself to be brave (when facing Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar), intelligent, clever (she solves the riddle the Black Friars present to her and she outwits angel Islington, after he had tried to deceive her) and willing to take risks. Second, after Door has reached the end of her quest, she decides to pursue her father's dream of uniting London Below.

Gaiman has equipped Door with another feature that functions as a leveller between male and female characters in fantasy fiction; namely, Door has the ability to open any door possible and impossible in addition to her remarkable recuperative powers. In the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997b) it is explained that magic is one of the powers that enables female characters to move freely in male-dominated worlds. In *Neverwhere,* Door's magical powers quite literally enable her to move freely in London Above and Below, to enter into locked spaces and to escape from danger. What is more, Door uses her magic to defeat angel

Islington and his employees, Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar. However, Door's magical skills are one of her weaknesses as well: if she opens too many doors in a short period of time, she becomes tired and weaker than usual, needing some time for recovery.

Next to her magical power that quickly drains her energy, Door's family, who were all killed violently by Mr Vandemar and Mr Croup, could be seen as one of her weaknesses. It is the memory of this event that at times overcomes Door and renders her helpless and sobbing. Such displays of emotion are generally considered a feminine characteristic (Parent, Moradi 2009: 176). Other female characters are described as calmer and more composed. Yet these episodes never last long as Door recovers quite quickly. In addition, instead of passively lamenting her family's death, Door decides to find out who committed the murder and have her revenge. Here Gaiman has changed the traditional format of a fantasy story: instead of a questing hero/protagonist, one of the supporting female characters is on a mission, in which the main character, i.e. Richard, only participates.

Overall, it is possible to argue that Door is a quite round and likeable character, since the readers receive information about her past, her motivations and her personality. It is possible to sympathise with her loss and relate to her desire for revenge, because the reasons for it are known. Door is also an active character, perhaps even the most important one in the novel, because without her none of the events in *Neverwhere* would have happened. Similarly to her eyes, which constantly change their colour, Door appears to defy being classified either traditionally feminine or traditionally masculine. On the one hand, she definitely is small, fragile and physically weak, depending on others for help and protection. She also cares for others' well-being, e.g. when she is unable to leave Richard behind to fend for himself in London Below, and at times she is emotional and excessively trusting, which makes it possible for angel Islington to deceive her. At the same time, Door demonstrates that she is

intelligent and clever, able to lead, ambitious and concerned with matters beyond the personal sphere, i.e. the unification of London Below.

2.2.2 Hunter

In creating Hunter, Gaiman has recycled the ancient Greek myth of the Amazons. According to it, the Amazons were a nation composed mainly or exclusively of women who were armed, rode horses, hunted and plundered and thus had no need for men except for reproduction, so that the Amazons would not die out (Blok 1995[1994]: 1). Subsequently, the image of the heroic and independent Amazon has been used and propagated by feminists and feminist writers especially since the second half of the twentieth century (Encyclopedia of Fantasy 1997b).

Hunter in *Neverwhere*, too, displays many of the features that are reminiscent of a true Amazonian warrior. When Richard sees her for the first time, she is described as "a tall woman, with long, tawny hair, and skin the colour of burnt caramel" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 101). Also, Richard finds it difficult to place her accent, but her voice is "rich as cream and honey" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 100), which is emphasised throughout the novel similarly to Door's eyes. Her clothing of dappled leather is in modest shades of grey and brown, completed with a duffel bag, a staff and a knife at her waist. Even though she does not mention her name, it is possible to guess her main profession from her clothes, which clearly are meant for camouflage, and from her accessories, which could be used for travelling and hunting. All in all, Richard concludes his appraisal of Hunter by stating that without a doubt she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. Although Hunter's appearance is not described in detail, the emphasis on her beauty suggests that she is attractive to men or, to borrow from Laura Mulvey (2001 [1975]: 397-298), styled according to male fantasy. In other words she is there to be looked at and enjoyed by men.

Yet Hunter is as dangerous as she is gorgeous. She proves on several occasions that she is both physically strong as well as skilful in handling different weapons, which enable her to fight and defeat male characters, for instance, when auditioning for the position of bodyguard for Door, and consequently protect Door from danger in London Below. As the novel progresses, Gaiman reveals how skilful Hunter really is and how great her passion for hunting has grown over the years: she is able to move without sound and sleep standing up, constantly keeping guard; she fights like "Emma Peel, Bruce Lee and a particularly vicious tornado all rolled into one" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 122); and she has killed many great beasts in her past, so that her reputation precedes her wherever she goes and fills people with awe. Since hunting apparently is Hunter's greatest passion and by implication her main occupation, it is possible to suggest that work (i.e. hunting) holds a very important position in her life.

What is more, in relation to hunting, Hunter reveals herself to be rather self-oriented – insofar as she puts her needs above others' – ambitious, and competitive. Her main goal in *Neverwhere* becomes apparent by the end of the novel: she wishes to slay the Beast of London and to prove that she is the greatest warrior there. The Beast is a formidable and impressive opponent due to its size and its hide which is bristling with arrows, knives and spears, proof of the number of warriors who have attempted to kill it and failed. In order to succeed, Hunter needs a spear, for which she betrays Door. It is her own agenda, her own passion that drives her and she is willing to risk and do anything to achieve her aim.

If by the end of the novel there is little doubt as to Hunter's profession, then at the beginning, she is deliberately vague in describing her occupation, thus confusing Richard and perhaps the reader as well. In other words, when Hunter is asked what she does for a living, she answers that she "sell[s] personal physical services" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 108), which makes Richard think that she might be a prostitute, even if her clothing and equipment might suggest otherwise. However, Richard's is only one possible interpretation – Hunter, after all,

takes the job as Door's bodyguard, which can also be seen as selling her body and skills – but the fact that he directly jumps to this conclusion might refer, first, to the fact that in his (and therefore in men's) mind this may be the most plausible one, because Hunter is such a beautiful woman, whose every aspect from voice (rich and creamy as honey) to smell is appealing to Richard; and second, that Gaiman may be tricking the reader into believing the stereotypical interpretation by making it so obvious.

Yet it is difficult to classify Hunter as traditionally feminine. It is true that she is gorgeous, but she is also physically strong, ambitious, competitive, self- and work-oriented: qualities which are all traditionally regarded as primarily masculine traits (Mary E. Kite 2001: 216; Parent and Moradi 2009: 176). In addition, Hunter refrains from expressing emotion, save for effortless competence and tolerant amusement, and prizes her independence. For example, even though Hunter once was employed by Serpentine, one of the feared Seven Sisters of London Below, with whom she maintains a close relationship, she claims that she "owe[s] no man fealty" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 101), indicating either that she is completely independent and self-reliant or, possibly, that she owes fealty to a woman, such as Serpentine, who strokes her cheek in "a gesture of affection and possession" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 219).

On the one hand, Hunter displays several masculine characteristics such as ambition, physical strength and independence, but on the other hand, she is attributed feminine traits, next to her beautiful appearance, too, namely concern toward others and kindness. For instance, Hunter works for Door, so she is responsible for her safety only, yet she takes care of Richard as well: she saves his life a couple of times (when crossing Knightsbridge and from the Gap at a tube station) and helps him across a plank when he freezes due to a fear of heights.

However, as strong, skilful and efficient as Hunter – the best bodyguard in London Below – is, she is not without her weak points: for some unknown reason, she is unable to go

to London Above, even at the express command from her current employer, Door. Her love for hunting and everlasting desire to find new creatures to chase, too, eventually prove to be her flaws, when the Beast of London defeats her. By that time, she has already betrayed Door and acquired the spear needed for slaying the Beast, her sufficient skill and expertise being granted, but only one slight miscalculation is needed for her to miss her target. Instead of Hunter, it is Richard who kills the Beast and becomes the greatest warrior in London Below.

In general, Hunter is an active and relatively central female character in *Neverwhere*, who is quite well developed with motivations and a past. She is also the only physically strong woman in the novel. Since she lives in London Below, where occupations and professions differ from those of London Above, it can be said that she works as a hunter, which at the same time is her greatest passion. Over the course of the novel, in spite of the fact that she is very beautiful, Hunter expresses mostly stereotypically masculine traits, such as independence, efficiency, self-reliance, ambition, competitiveness and refrain from excessive emotionality, and less feminine characteristics, like concern towards others and kindness.

2.2.3 Jessica

Jessica Bartram is another "beautiful, and often quite funny" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 12) woman in Richards life, namely, his fiancée. Her life is in stark contrast to those that are led in London Below: she works as a marketing executive at a prestigious company; she lives in Kensington Mews and shops at department stores such as Harrods and Harvey Nichols; and she gives to charity and invests ethically. Based on the descriptions of her in the novel, Jessica leaves the impression of a woman having a strong personality and principles which need to be followed. For instance, in Richard, she sees "an enormous amount of potential, which, properly harnessed by the right woman, would [make] him the perfect matrimonial accessory"

(Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 12), so she gives him books to read, chooses which clothes he ought to wear and precisely a year after their first meeting decides that it is time for them to start looking for an engagement ring. In regard to Richard, she has established clear boundaries as well: no nicknames are allowed and she does not go into his apartment, because it makes her feel "uncomfortably female" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 20). Taking this into account, Jessica does seem principled and controlling, enough to make Richard's co-worker Gary compare her to the Creature from the Black Lagoon, a terrifying and vicious creature from the 1954 film of the same name (IMDb n.d.). Indeed, Prentice and Carranza (2002: 273) found that being controlling is seen as a negative quality in women.

Jessica's strong personality also extends to her job, which seems to be important to her. She is determined to advance in her career and in order to do so she, for example, arranges a dinner with Mr Stockton, her boss, and, later, an exhibition of Mr Stockton's vast collection of angels in the British Museum. At the exhibition, Gaiman underlines Jessica's controlling manner once more by comparing her to a general in command of her troops composed of a head waiter, serving staff, caterers, a string quarter and her assistant.

Even though Jessica apparently is focused on her career and is independent and self-sufficient in that she manages well on her own, she nevertheless values and yearns for personal, romantic relationships. While being work-oriented is a traditionally masculine trait, then Mahalik and colleagues (2005: 424) have claimed that forming deep as well as romantic relationships is usually associated with women. In the case of Jessica, this is evidenced already at the beginning of the novel by her and Richard's relationship and subsequent engagement, but is reiterated later, when she and Richard have separated. More precisely, at the aforementioned exhibition, Jessica tries to concentrate on matters at hand, but cannot help but think that "it *would* be nice [to have a boyfriend] /.../: someone to go to galleries with on the weekends. Someone to ..." (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 183) (italics in original).

Similarly to Door, Jessica expresses her emotions as well, a feminine rather than masculine quality, but at the same time she is able to control herself. For instance, she feels worried, nervous and jittery at the exhibition, since she is under a lot of pressure, but she still maintains her professional manner and focuses on her work; and after Door collapses in the street before Richard's feet and he decides to take her to his apartment instead of following Jessica to dinner with Mr Stockton, she flings her handbag to the ground out of anger and frustration, spilling its contents over the pavement, but she quickly recovers herself, collects her things and proceeds to the restaurant as if nothing out of the ordinary happened.

The previously described episodes suggest that Jessica possesses emotional strength, values deep, personal relationships and enjoys being in control. Because being controlling is considered a negative feminine character trait, Jessica as a character might not be regarded as likeable as, for example, Door or Hunter, but she nevertheless is an active, if peripheral, one. What is more, next to feminine characteristics such as emotional strength and desire for romantic relationships, Jessica displays several traits that Linda Brannon (2004: 162), Alice H. Eagly, Wendy Wood and Mary C. Johannesen-Schmidt (Eagly et al 2008: 274) consider stereotypically masculine: she is oriented towards advancing her career, which is central to her life; she likes to be in control (perhaps too much so); and she is quite self-sufficient and independent in that she is able to manage on her own rather well.

2.2.4 Anaesthesia, Serpentine and Lamia

Anaesthesia is a passive, peripheral female character in *Neverwhere* and the only one who seems to exhibit solely stereotypically feminine characteristics such as weakness, fragility and shyness. First of all, when Richard meets Anaesthesia for the first time, just after he enters London Below, she looks to him a small, thin girl in her late teens with "a large, water-stained red button pinned to her ragged clothes, of the sort that comes attached to

birthday cards" and which says "in yellow letters, *I am 11*" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 77). Already by appearance alone, Anaesthesia definitely belongs to London Below. The red button is a reference to a later episode, in which she tells Richard how she was born in London Above, but escaped on her (perhaps 11th) birthday from her abusive aunt and her boyfriend.

In London Below, Anaesthesia is one of the rat-speakers, a community who communicates with rats. Her ability to do so can be defined as a magical power, one that people living in London Above lack, yet differently from Door, Anaesthesia nevertheless resembles a weak, child-like girl. Her delicate nature is further enhanced later, when she admits to Richard on their way to the Floating Market that some parts of London Below still scare her, even though she has been living there for years and her knowledge of it ought to, by assumption, grant her a certain sense of security and freedom of movement. However, her fear is so genuine that Richard has to resist the urge to put a protective arm around her.

Their journey to the Market reveals more about Anaesthesia. It becomes clear that she is shy and modest: she begins telling the story of her past with words "'[y]ou don't want to hear about me'" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 86) and only continues after Richard insists and encourages her. However, despite being small, fragile and shy, Anaesthesia proves herself capable of temporary bravery, which is a masculine rather than feminine trait (Eagly et al 2008: 274; Brannon 2004: 162; Prentice, Carranza 2002; 274). More precisely, just before Knightsbridge, which is on the way to the Floating Market, Richard and Anaesthesia are confronted with a violent gang, whom Anaesthesia opposes apparently without fear. Yet after the gang leaves, she "look[s] down, shyly" and says "'I'm not really brave /.../ I'm still scared of the bridge'" (Gaiman 2013 [1996]: 100), which reinforces the impression of Anaesthesia as being a primarily weak, delicate, yielding – insofar as she agreed to take Richard to the Floating Market as Lord Rat-Speaker ordered, in spite of her fear of Knightsbridge – and shy.

If Anaesthesia is a delicate, fragile character, then Serpentine and Lamia certainly are not. Serpentine, the former mistress of Hunter and, but for Olympia, the oldest of the feared Seven Sisters of London Below, looks impressive and beautiful as well as frightening already upon her introduction, even if she is a peripheral and passive character in the novel. When Richard and Door first see her, she is wearing "a white leather corset, and high white leather boots, and the remains of what looked like it had once, long ago, been a silk-and-lace confection of a white wedding dress, now shredded and dirt-stained and torn" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 218). Her ragged and dirty clothing resembles that of other inhabitants of London Below: Door, for example, is also wearing a medley of clothes with rips and holes in them, which, by looking so peculiar, clearly exclude her from London Above.

Serpetine's style – leather corset and leather boots – is mirrored by the members of her household as well. The major-domo, for instance, is "a thin woman with a severe face, and long dark hair, wearing a black dress pinched wasp-thin at the waist" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 219), which she later exchanges for an all-leather outfit, still black. Her black outfit directly contrasts Serpentine's white one. The fact that Serpentine has a major-domo and other servants (all female) is significant in various aspects. First, it indicates that Serpentine is a head of a large and influential household, which is sufficiently affluent to support several people; and second, that Serpentine, at least to some extent, has good leadership abilities, inferred from the fact that other people serve under her.

In addition, the House of Serpentine is known and feared in all of London Below, as indicated by Door's reaction of panic after Hunter brings her and Richard there. For Hunter, it is a safe place, but judging from the way Serpentine looks at Door, the latter's fear is understandable: "[s]he looked at Door as if she took terror as her due; as if she had become so used to fear, that she now expected it, even liked it" (Gaiman 2013[1996]: 218). In other words, Serpentine is a woman of power, both impressive and frightening, an impression

which is supported by her great height and grey hair. Her hair also suggests that she is quite old and therefore wise and intelligent, having ruled over House of Serpentine for a long time.

If Serpentine seems to exhibit primarily masculine characteristics such as leadership ability, independence, assertiveness and being in charge of a household, then she manifests some feminine characteristics as well, such as loyalty in deep relationships. For instance, the bond between Serpentine and Hunter is of special significance. It seems to have been formed a long time ago and grown into a deep, intimate relationship, indicated by Serpentine's gesture of stroking Hunter's cheek as a sign of affection and possession. Moreover, it is Serpentine and her servants who collect Hunter's body after the Beast has killed her.

Lamia is one of the Velvets, creatures who roam London Below looking for people whose warmth they can drink as vampires suck blood. Here again Lamia is defined first and foremost by her appearance: her voice is soft and creamy, the first thing that seduces Richard; she is wearing a long, jet-black dress and silver jewellery; her hair is perfectly done; she smells of honeysuckle and lily of the valley; and she has the most beautiful eyes Richard has ever seen, the colour of foxgloves. It is through Richard's eyes and ears the readers receive information about Lamia's as well as Anaesthesia's and Serpentine's appearance. Richard only registers Lamia's clothing, hair and smell on the second time they meet, having noticed her only briefly on the previous time they met at the Floating Market.

Towards the end of the novel, Lamia's role extends to her acting as a guide to Richard, Door and Hunter, leading them back to angel Islington. For her payment she wants Richard's warmth, his life. In order to get what she wants, she seduces him, so that he would do everything she desires. In the end, Richard manages to escape with the help of the Marquis, leaving Lamia without her cherished warmth. So even though Lamia obviously is a supernatural being, she uses her so-called feminine charms – her good looks, her creamy voice, her lovely smell, into which she has probably put some effort – to get her way.

Moreover, she is depicted as a dangerous if peripheral character, a traditional role for women in fantasy fiction as Hunt and Lenz (2003 [2001]: 2) have claimed.

In Lamia Gaiman has recycled yet another traditional trope, the *femme fatale*. Heather Braun (2012: 2) states that the term usually refers "to manipulative, dangerously attractive women", especially in literature, silent film and *film noir*. These female characters are often unconscious of their beauty or its destructive power. Yet femme fatales are not always oriented towards destruction or willing to acknowledge their charm. Heather Braun (2012: 3) claims that several femme fatales attempt to warn their victims, which only serves to increase the femme fatale's desire. Lamia is a typical example: she is beautiful as well as dangerous and she is willing to use her powers to seduce men in order to get what she needs, but which inevitably would lead to her victim's destruction. However, she does not warn her victim, Richard, against his fate, who is rescued only by Marquis's timely intervention.

All three characters discussed above – Anaesthesia, Serpentine and Lamia – are peripheral characters in *Neverwhere* and only Lamia could be described as an active one. If Anaesthesia manifests several stereotypically feminine characteristics such as weakness, fragility and shyness, then Serpentine is in contrast impressive, independent, assertive and able to lead a large household. Lamia, differently from Anaesthesia and Serpentine, is clearly a magical creature, who is as dangerous as she is beautiful. Her good looks are her most prominent feature, which could be seen as signifying male desire.

2.3 *American Gods*

2.3.1 Laura

Laura is the wife of Shadow, who is the male protagonist of *American Gods*. Of the female characters in the novel, she is the most active and central one. Laura is first mentioned when Shadow thinks of her while he is in prison: he loves her with all his heart and dreams of

how he is going to make love to her as soon as he is released. Much of what the readers learn of Laura, especially at the beginning of the novel, is thought, remembered or seen by Shadow, because first, she seems to be the most important person in his life, the one who saw something more in him than a big dumb guy and the one who frequently occupies his mind throughout the novel; and secondly, being Shadow's wife appears to be one of the most prominent defining features of Laura, in spite of the fact that she has an occupation – she is a travel agent – and apparently a life besides Shadow, which she continues to live while Shadow is in prison.

By having Shadow remember events from his past that are related to Laura, Gaiman tells the readers that Laura is a very beautiful woman with "long, chestnut hair and eyes so blue Shadow mistakenly thought [the first time he saw her] she was wearing tinted contact lenses" (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 18) and that she and Shadow have a relatively happy marriage, until Shadow is imprisoned for assault. The fact that Gaiman gives the readers an account of the appearance of Laura and other female characters, who admittedly are almost invariably beautiful, is not unusual, because the male characters are described in similar manner.

In their marriage, as much as Shadow describes it, Laura appears to play the role of a traditional wife. She cooks well, she likes to dance (meaning that she probably is graceful, since Shadow had enjoyed her dancing) and particularly in comparison to Shadow, who is a large man, she is physically weak and delicate, so that Shadow used to be able to easily pick her up. Later on in the novel, when Laura meets Mr Town, other qualities that Prentice and Carranza (2002: 273) mainly associate with women, such as being flirtatious and shy, are manifested. However, this might signify Laura's conscious effort to seduce Mr Town by appearing stereotypically feminine.

If at the beginning of the novel Laura is presented as a beautiful, loving and traditional wife, then her funeral marks a definite change. The funeral is in several ways an important

event in the novel. Firstly, Shadow drops a magical coin, which had been given to him by the leprechaun Mad Sweeney, into Laura's casket, not knowing that this coin will turn Laura into a living dead and thus give her supernatural powers. Secondly, Audrey, Shadow's best friend Robbie's wife, tells him that Laura and Robbie had been having an affair and that they even had died together in the same car, while Laura was giving Robbie one last farewell present, because they had decided to end their relationship amicably.

Not long after the funeral, the newly deceased Laura visits Shadow in his hotel room. Although a walking and talking corpse ought to frighten him, Shadow is unable to be afraid of her and instead they have a relatively normal conversation as a husband and wife would, which might be an indication of the strength of their relationship. At the end of her visit, Laura promises to take care of Shadow, to protect him to the best of her ability. Here are traditionally feminine characteristics such as affection, kindness and consideration for others emphasised and manifested in Laura. Later on in the novel, she does indeed fulfil her promise by saving or helping Shadow several times. For example, she rescues Shadow from the spooks working for the new gods, who have him locked up in a train carriage. She kills everyone there except for Shadow, whom she equips with a coat, chemical hand- and footwarmers and some food before she helps him escape. On the one hand, she keeps her promise of caring for Shadow, but on the other, she commits several brutal murders. If stereotypical women are pure, refined and delicate, then Laura in the situation just described definitely is not. She explains that it is different for her, now that she is a living dead: " 'It's easier to kill people, when you're dead yourself, /.../ I mean, it's not such a big deal. You're not so prejudiced any more.' " (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 164). For Laura, therefore, being dead is a strong point, since it gives her much more freedom and strength than when she was alive – magical powers in fantasy fiction are used to make female characters more equal to male characters.

It is clear that Laura's transformation into a living dead signifies a great change in the depiction of her. As it was already mentioned, she becomes physically strong and emotionally detached, so that death and killing do not disturb her any more and she is able to think rationally even under severe circumstances. However, she also becomes more independent – she had to be so already during Shadow's imprisonment in order to survive on her own – and active as the novel progresses. For instance, after drinking water from Urd's well, which temporarily reverses her decaying process, Laura meets Mr Town, another spook working for the new gods, who had been sent to retrieve a stick from the tree on which Shadow held his vigil to Wednesday. Mr Town, or Mack, is almost instantaneously attracted to Laura, to her beauty, restored by the magical water, and her perfume, and to him, as they drive for a while, talk and eat together, it feels a lot like love. Although Laura deliberately encourages Mr Town by being flirtatious, she actually has different plans: she kills Mr Town and takes the stick to the battlefield of the gods, to Loki, disguised as Mr World, Mr Town's boss. On the one hand, based on her actions, Laura seems to act on her own initiative and she comes across as an independent individual of considerable physical and emotional strength and intelligence. Even her place in the narrative has shifted by this time: if at the beginning of the novel, she is only mentioned in relation to Shadow, then by the end of it, she has developed her own storyline, relatively separate of that of Shadow.

On the other hand, by introducing herself as Shadow's wife to Mr World, Laura emphasises her relationship to her husband and thus, possibly, suggests that her own definition of herself is primarily in relation to Shadow. Mr World appears to think her beneath him, a mere woman prone to hysterics. However, Laura recognises his "patronising and indefinably male" (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 570) manner and forms her plan accordingly. She waits until he comes close enough to put his hand softly onto her shoulder, thinking at the same time "[g]ood, /.../ [h]e does not want to alarm me, he is scared that I will throw his stick

out into the storm, that it will tumble down the mountainside, and he will lose it" (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 572), only to pierce her own and his body at the same time with the stick, which turns into a spear. Mr World desperately tries to save himself by stabbing Laura with a knife, but she remains calm and emotionless: she is already dead, stab wounds mean nothing to her. Instead she watches Mr World's undignified death with dark amusement. It is significant here that Laura's acknowledgement of the patronizing and patriarchal attitudes toward her as well as her subsequent resistance to them are made obvious, therefore suggesting a possible authorial comment or opinion, which will be more pronounced in *Coraline*.

Judging from the previous analysis, Laura definitely is a multifaceted character. She is not as well-developed as Shadow, but she nevertheless is an active and a relatively central female character. Much of the information about Laura's background the readers are provided with is conveyed through Shadow. Moreover, Shadow and Laura, husband and wife, are, at least at the beginning of the novel, two characters so intertwined that it is difficult to analyse one without the other. Following from this, it is Shadow who describes Laura's physical beauty, looks back to their marital happiness, suffers from Laura's infidelity and so on. It is also Shadow who is responsible for granting Laura the power to walk the earth as a living dead. Her supernatural powers make Laura equal to male characters in *American Gods*, a technique that is at times used in fantasy fiction in order to grant greater freedom to female characters (Encyclopedia of Fantasy 1997b). As the novel progresses, Laura continues to care for Shadow, but at the same time, she no longer is stereotypically refined, weak, pure and delicate. Even her beauty is slowly diminishing as a result of the advancing decaying process. Instead she develops into an independent, strong, intelligent, clever and active character, separate from her husband.

2.3.2 Samantha Black Crow

Samantha Black Crow – or Sam, as she likes to be called – enters into the narrative when she knocks on Shadow's car window to check whether he is still alive or not. It takes a while for Shadow to recognise Sam as a woman: her voice is high-pitched like a woman's or a boy's, so she has to specify that she is girl-Sam, not boy-Sam. In fact, during her appearances in the novel, Sam seems to escape fixed definition as primarily feminine or masculine. The first impression of her suggests that she is a straightforward, unabashed and brave young woman, who is willing to take matters into her own hands. More precisely, since she is currently hitchhiking from Madison to El Paso, Illinois, a trip she has made five times a year for the last three years, she asks Shadow for a lift, joking at the same time that she is a damsel in distress to be rescued by Shadow, a knight in a very dirty car. Whether she actually is a damsel in distress is a matter of debate, but taking into consideration that she has taken the same journey for several times, it seems unlikely.

During the car ride, Shadow has the time to look at Sam properly. He observes that she has short, dark hair and an attractive, slightly mannish face. Later, when they go out to eat, he finds out, or rather, guesses, that Sam studies art history and women's studies at University of Wisconsin, Madison; casts her own bronzes; and works at a coffee shop to pay her rent. Eating in a diner on each side of a table, Sam and Shadow seem to be opposites: if Shadow is quite a big guy, then Sam is in comparison relatively tiny; and if Shadow keeps surprising Sam by going from a big dumb guy to a mind-reader to a lover of Herodotus' *Histories*, then Sam's background is not a mystery to Shadow as he guesses it correctly without knowing anything about her.

Sam is actually quite willing to share information about herself as well, even if it is concerned only with her family history. More precisely, while visiting her sister, Marguerite Olsen, at Lakeside, they ask a neighbour – Mike Ainsel, who is Shadow in hiding – over for

dinner. After a few glasses of wine, Sam explains to him that she and her sister have the same father, but different mothers: their father is Cherokee; Marguerite's mother is of Corsican descent; and Sam's mother is European Jewish, a wild woman "from one of those places that used to be communist and now are just chaos" (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 420).

Her mixed descent already seems to suggest that Sam refuses definite categorisation. Indeed, on the one hand, she is a beautiful young woman, who likes to take matters into her own hands (e.g., when she asked Shadow for a ride or when she suggested Marguerite should ask her neighbour over); who is able to take care of herself; and who is brave enough to hitchhike and to stand up to spooks who come to her home to threaten her. Then again, her confidence seems at times to falter, revealing a fragile and scared girl beneath. For example, after the aforementioned dinner, Sam lets Shadow take her out to the local pub. As soon as they get into the car, she says that she is scared of him, because the spooks had told him that he had killed two men and that he is wanted by federal agents. She goes on saying "[i]f you're going to kill me please don't hurt me. I shouldn't have come here with you. I am so dumb. /.../ I should have run away or called the cops when I first saw you. I can identify you. Jesus. I am so dumb" (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 423). By saying so, she acknowledges the physical power Shadow has over her, since she is delicate and weak in comparison to him. Yet Shadow has no ill motives and succeeds in calming her down.

In Sam, therefore, Gaiman has again created a character who possesses both feminine and masculine characteristics. She is beautiful, weak, delicate and at times prone to emotional outbursts, especially when her self-confidence falters. She also takes time to invest into romantic relationships, which Mahalik and his colleagues (2005: 424) associate primarily with women, as evidenced by the last episode in which she appears in the novel. But then again Sam is independent, brave, able to provide for herself, willing to take risks, self-

confident and relatively active, insofar as she takes matters into her own hands and participates in the storyline.

2.3.3 Marguerite Olsen

As it was already mentioned, Marguerite Olsen is the sister of Samantha Black Crow. She lives in Lakeside, a small and idyllic town in Northern America, and she is the neighbour of Mike Ainsel or Shadow. Similarly to other female characters in the novel, Marguerite, too, is beautiful, with black hair and black eyes. In Lakeside, she works for the Lakeside News as a reporter, having studied journalism previously. Her choice of career corresponds to those traditionally favoured by women: since it is believed that women have better verbal skills, they are more likely to choose careers where good verbal skills are needed, such as journalism, and avoid occupations where good mathematical skills are required, such as engineering (Correll 2004: 94-95).

Shadow and the readers receive a great deal of the information about Marguerite through gossip. At the beginning of Shadow's stay in Lakeside, Missy Gunther, a local, describes Marguerite as a sweet lady, who has had a hard life and who now works for the Lakeside News. Later, Chad Mulligan, the local police officer, offers a more detailed account of Marguerite's past to Shadow: she had been a journalism major when she married Darren Olsen, who was in hotel management. Their marriage was happy for a while, until Darren lost his job and spent all their savings on drinking, gambling and prostitutes. After the divorce, Marguerite got custody of both of their sons, Sandy and Leon, and Darren moved to another town, only to come back every once in a while and make everyone miserable. When he finally stopped coming, Sandy, Marguerite's eldest son, disappeared and has not been seen since.

Based on the previous two accounts, it becomes clear that when Marguerite is described, the focus is on personal relationships. Indeed, when she is mentioned in the novel,

it is nearly always with a reference to the personal sphere, i.e. her family or her past. For example, on several instances she appears to Shadow to be quite cold, irritable and wary, which, as explained by Chad Mulligan, is the direct result of her failed marriage and troubled past. The relationship between Chad and Marguerite becomes a personal one, too, by the end of the novel, when it is revealed that Chad is in love with her. In addition to personal relationships, Marguerite seems to possess significant emotional strength as well. More precisely, Shadow hears her crying through the wall at one time, which indicates that she avoids being overly emotional in public, expressing her emotions only in private.

Marguerite's family, too, seems to play an important part in her life, especially her son and her sister, Sam, who, as previously mentioned, visits her briefly at Lakeside. Two things can be inferred from the fact that Marguerite is living alone with her son, Leon. First, that she at least to some extent is affectionate, kind and caring, because Leon seems to be a happy child; and second, that since there is no other parent or adult in the household, it is Marguerite who is the head of the household as well as the breadwinner, who handles all financial matters, which are stereotypically considered to be masculine tasks.

Taking into account that Marguerite has studied journalism and that she currently is writing for the Lakeside News, she probably is quite an intelligent woman and the times when Gaiman allows her to speak to other characters like Sam and Shadow, she does not prove this statement wrong. Marguerite also appears to be independent and self-sufficient, insofar as she manages to support herself and her son. In addition, for a peripheral and passive character, the readers find out quite a lot about her past. This information, however, concentrates much on personal events such as marriage, divorce and the disappearance of her oldest son, Sandy, which leaves the overall impression of Marguerite as a primarily emotional and a stereotypically feminine character, whose appearances in the novel are dominated by personal

relationships. At the same time, Marguerite is able to manage her emotions in public quite well, even if Shadow does hear her crying through the wall or if she is rather irritable at times.

2.3.4 Audrey Burton

Audrey Burton, Robbie's wife or more correctly widow, makes two brief, yet significant appearances in *American Gods*. The first time is at Laura's funeral, where she appears to Shadow as a small woman in her early thirties with dark red hair. Her small frame indicates that she is physically weak, but it is not explicitly stated whether she is pretty or not. The lack of comment might suggest that she is neither exceptionally beautiful nor ugly. Even so, already at the funeral, Audrey appears as a passionate, emotional woman: she puts flowers into Laura's casket, then spits in her face, because she knew of the affair between her husband and her best friend. What is more, it is also Audrey who mentions the affair for the first time to Shadow, causing great emotional distress to him.

The second time the readers see Audrey is at Lakeside, while she is visiting her distant cousin Chad Mulligan. They are on a date at the local pub, when Shadow and Sam walk in after the dinner at Marguerite's apartment. Suddenly, someone screams. "It was a bad scream, a full throated, seen-a-ghost hysterical scream, which silenced all conversation" (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 427). It is, of course, Audrey, whose voice, "parked on the verge of hysteria" (*ibid.*) tells everybody to arrest Shadow, because she thinks he is a murderer and an escaped convict, having been convinced by a visit from the spooks. Before Chad quietly and calmly asks Shadow to accompany him to the police station to find a sensible and peaceful solution to this situation, Gaiman underlines Audrey's agitation once more by saying that "[s]he was way over the top, her voice trembling with suppressed hysteria, sobbing out her words like a soap actress going for a daytime Emmy" (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 428).

During the two pages describing this scene at the pub, the words 'hysteria' and 'hysterical' are used three times together, all in relation to Audrey, who is clearly screaming and sobbing. Here Gaiman probably wanted to emphasise the scope of Audrey's emotional disturbance. At the same time, he appears to have created a very stereotypical, if peripheral and passive, character. What is more, Audrey causes only problems every time she makes an appearance, in spite of the fact that Mabel, a local at Lakeside, describes her to Shadow as a sweetheart. Additionally, she is very emotional, even prone to hysteria, which is traditionally considered a very feminine characteristic. Prentice and Carranza (2002: 273) identified in their study that character traits such as being gullible, impressionable, melodramatic and emotional, which could be used to describe Audrey, are seen as negative characteristics to be avoided rather than cultivated by women.

2.3.5 Bilquis

Bilquis or "[t]he Queen of Sheba, half-demon, /.../ witch-woman, wise-woman and queen, who ruled Sheba when Sheba was the richest land there ever was, /.../ who was worshiped even when she was alive, worshiped as a living goddess by the wisest of kings" (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 400), is the first woman of the old gods to make an appearance. She is created on the basis of the myth of the Queen of Sheba, the ruler of the kingdom of Saba (or Sheba). The myth appears in several different traditions, including Jewish, Islamic and Christian, and in very different forms. In one of the legends, the Queen of Sheba visits king Solomon, but the nature and purpose of her visit varies: sometimes she arrives with gold, jewels and spices; sometimes her hairy legs attract the king's attention (Encyclopaedia Britannica n.d.).

In *American Gods*, however, nothing is left of the former magnificence of Queen of Sheba, who is now forced to pose as a prostitute soliciting worship from men. She is first

described as "a tall woman dressed cartoonishly in too-tight silk shorts, her breasts pulled up and pushed forwards by the yellow blouse tied beneath them" and whose "black hair is piled high and knotted on top of her head" (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 29). She is wearing clothes that correspond to the rules of the trade, which means that her body is there to be looked at, inspected and enjoyed by men or as Laura Mulvey (2001 [1975]: 397-398) put it, Bilquis represents and carries out male desire. She herself makes a "gesture of presentation, as if /.../ demonstrating a new product" (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 29) to a customer in her room by running her hand from her thigh to her breast, thus underlining the commodification of her body. According to Reid (2009: 90-91) such gestures in fantasy are used to express the male gaze as well.

Since her appearance is important in her line of work, Bilquis seems to spend a great deal of time taking care of herself. For example, she thinks to herself that she always seems to be shaving her legs. Being beautiful and well-groomed has been identified by Parent and Moradi (2011: 959) as one of the most important stereotypically feminine traits. At the same time, the impression of Bilquis is "cartoonish", later enhanced by the comparison of her as she is walking on the street to a "slutty plastic bride on a black and neon wedding cake" (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 400). This appears only to highlight the loss of her former glory.

Yet Bilquis seems to have adapted, either by necessity or by choice, to her current situation quite well. In order to survive in the modern world, she has begun to leave advertisements on adult websites, because soliciting on the streets is not always possible (due to bad weather, for instance) or profitable, even though she has avoided leaving any trace of her for a thousand years, preferring to approach her tributes personally. When she watches the other prostitutes, Bilquis is proud of herself of not having the same problems as they do: she is completely independent, she has no children, she does not have to pay anything to anybody.

She is relatively active, insofar as she is constantly searching for new opportunities for obtaining worship, and self-oriented as well, which are both primarily masculine traits.

However, Bilquis is not as independent or in control of her life as she would probably prefer. Namely, she, as she herself realises, "has a habit as bad as that of the smack whores and the crack whores" (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 401), because she cannot be without worship, she is constantly seeking it, sometimes even desperately so. Since there are not many worshippers any more, Bilquis's power is consequently diminishing, so she uses it only to stay alive. "[F]or everything else that's not simply living she uses her sharp eyes and her mind, her height and her presence" (Gaiman 2005 [2001]: 405). Her lack of great power becomes especially evident as Bilquis is faced with the new god of technology, a young, rich and confident boy. Bilquis's magic is not strong enough to make her equal to the new god, who brutally kills her.

As a character, Bilquis does not play a big role in the novel, but she can nevertheless be described as an active rather than a passive character, insofar as she is constantly seeking worship. Her manner of obtaining it resembles Wednesday's, who is one of the most prominent male characters in *American Gods*, appetite for women. He, in order to retain his youthfulness and vitality, seduces young girls and robs them of their virginity, while Bilquis seduces men, lures them to her room and persuades them to worship her, until she is ready to devour them. Sex is especially notable in relation to these two characters, but it is mentioned or hinted at in relation to other characters as well, such as Easter, goddess of media and Mr Town, who fantasises about having sex with his partner's widow. Following from this, if sex is mentioned in *American Gods*, it is in connection with male and female characters equally.

By implication, Bilquis is a beautiful woman, even if cartoonish and slutty, but differently from stereotypical women, she is concerned only with herself, trying to stay alive and fulfil her needs. She is even proud of herself for being so independent and self-reliant.

What is more, she is a goddess and consequently has supernatural powers, which should make her equal to other gods and goddesses, but as it was already stated, her power is diminishing due to the decline in the number of her worshippers.

2.3.6 The Zorya sisters

Zorya Utrennyaya, Zorya Vechernyaya and Zorya Polunochnyaya are three sisters living with Czernobog, the pagan Slavic god of darkness. The sisters, too, belong to Slavic mythology. Namely, they are the daughters of Dazhbog, who each day rides with the sun in the sky. Zorya Utrennyaya is the goddess of dawn and she is responsible for opening the gates of her father's palace every morning. Zorya Vechernyaya is the goddess of dusk and she closes the gates after her father returns home. The third sister, Zorya Polunochnyaya, the goddess of midnight, guards the night (Dixon-Kennedy 1998: 321). The Zorya Polunochnyaya in *Amercan Gods* explains the task trusted to the three sisters in greater detail. Namely, where they come from, people used to believe that there is great evil imprisoned in the stars and in order to prevent it from getting out, it has to be guarded by the sisters at all times.

Zorya Vechernyaya, the first of the three sisters who Shadow and Wednesday meet, is described as a gaunt, old woman with grey hair and a thick Eastern European accent. She is wearing an old red coat and a green velvet hat and in her hand she is carrying a string shopping bag. According to Zorya Vechernyaya, the sisters now work as fortune-tellers, but that it is only her who earns money, because she tells people what they want to hear. In *American Gods*, however, she is more occupied with shopping for groceries, cooking dinner and cleaning than fortune-telling. In other words, Zorya Vechernyaya comes across as a practical and pragmatic woman, who evidently is now concerned mostly with domestic matters. However, in the opinion of Czernobog who does not seem to take any interest in

household matters, instead letting the sisters wait on her, Zorya Vechernyaya fails to excel as a housewife, because in his mind, she is a bad cook and a harpy.

Zorya Utrennyaya, too, is old, but she is described as smaller and frailer than Zorya Vechernyaya and her long hair is still golden. What is more, it seems that she invests more time into taking care of her appearance, too, since she likes to wear make-up. Similarly to her sister, Zorya Utrennyaya appears in the novel as only doing household chores such as cleaning, cooking or bringing in coffee and cookies for guests. Differently from Zorya Vechernyaya, however, Zorya Utrennyaya is praised by Czernobog, possibly because of her calmer and fairer constitution or because of her doll-like, beautiful appearance. Either way, it can be argued, since she does not challenge any of the male characters in any way and since she acts in quite a stereotypical way, this might contribute to Czernobog's idea of her as a good woman.

Zorya Polunochnaya is the most mysterious of the three sisters and the only one who overtly displays any kind of supernatural powers. She appears in the novel only twice: at the time of Shadow's first visit to Czernobog's apartment and later during his vigil. To Shadow, as he watches her as they are talking in the cold night on the rooftop, she looks rather striking as well as beautiful: her hair, pale and colourless in the moonlight, reaches down to her waist; her thin white cotton nightgown with a high neck sweeps the ground; her skin is ageless; and her eyes are dark with long eyelashes. Despite the thin nightgown, she does not mind the cold, because she belongs to the night, and when she talks to Shadow, she does so with only a soft accent, her English is much better than that of her sisters. Shadow also smells her sweet breath and becomes uncomfortably aware when a gust of wind flattens the nightgown against Zorya Polunochnyaya's body that there is nothing underneath.

Yet their encounter is nothing sexual, the aim of Zorya Polunochnyaya is to give Shadow protection to replace the one he had given away to Laura. So by allowing him to take

the moon from the sky, which forms into a silver Liberty dollar in Shadow's hand, she displays her magical powers and leaves the impression, unlike her sisters, of being a true goddess, but at the same time, she can also be seen as kind and caring insofar as she is willing to take care of Shadow, in the same way as Laura promised to protect Shadow. Zorya Polunochnyaya is depicted later on in the novel once more as a mythical creature and a helper of Shadow: she guides his passage on his journey as Shadow is walking through the dreamworld during his vigil.

In general, the Zorya sisters are all peripheral and passive characters. Zorya Vechernyaya and Zorya Utrennyaya are both concerned primarily with domestic issues such as cooking and cleaning, tasks that have been traditionally associated with women. Of the two, the latter is described as beautiful, while the former not so much so. Zorya Polunochnyaya, too, is striking and beautiful, but unlike her sisters, she appears as first and foremost a mythical being and therefore for the most part escapes stereotypical categorization, apart from being kind and caring.

2.3.7 Easter

Easter is the last of the female gods of old to be discussed in this paper. If Bilquis is struggling to survive and if the Zorya sisters live in a small apartment in relative obscurity, Easter is rather successful: she is rich and happy, because people all over the world celebrate the holiday dedicated to her. When Shadow sees Easter for the first time, he finds no other word to describe her than 'curvaceous', yet she is not fat. What is more, her hair is platinum blonde, her eyes are green as the spring and there is a tattoo of blue forget-me-nots around her left wrist. She is a gorgeous woman, emitting a pleasant smell of jasmine, honeysuckle, sweet milk and female skin, which combined with Easter's self-confidence, flirtatious manner and vitality make Shadow feel like a deer caught in headlights, he is almost instantly charmed.

The description of Easter, especially the emphasis on her voluptuous figure, again plays to and expresses the male desire and fantasy (Reid 2009: 90-91). In other words, she is created to look appealing to men.

The way Easter is talking and behaving suggests that she thoroughly believes in her power and that she is a woman comfortable in expressing her sexuality and in that, she resembles Wednesday: both of them view men or women without romantic affection, as prey or entertainment. For example, as Easter is looking at Shadow's naked body upon the tree while he is holding vigil for Wednesday, she says that "[t]hey [i.e. men] just aren't as interesting naked, /.../ [i]t's the unwrapping that's half the fun" (Gaiman 2005[2001]: 558). She is looking at him dispassionately, as if his body his something she has seen several times before. There is something slightly masculine about her attitude, because it suggests multiple partners. Yet, when Shadow is brought back to life, Easter suddenly becomes aware of his nakedness, she blushes and looks away, as if reminded of her femininity, of her supposed purity and delicacy.

However, Easter is not only a beautiful and confident woman basking in the annual worship of thousands of people, she proves that she still is a powerful goddess, on the par with other gods. Namely, she has the power to give life to living organisms, such as flowers that spring from the ground at the mere touch of her hand or feet. It is also Easter, who, after Shadow's vigil is completed, takes him down from the tree, breathes life back into him and helps him travel to the battlefield of the gods. At the same time, powerful and confident as Easter is, she nevertheless is stereotypically emotional. For example, when Wednesday demonstrates that the worship she annually receives is actually hollow as people really do not know what or who they celebrate, Easter's eyes well up with tears. This moment reveals her to be emotionally vulnerable and slightly emotional.

In *American Gods*, Easter is a peripheral and passive character, but similarly to several other female characters, she, too, defies stereotypical categorisation. More precisely, if Easter is definitely beautiful, flirtatious, emotional, kind and caring – she does resurrect Shadow –, then she is also independent, successful and self-confident. Moreover, she seems to refrain from committing to long-lasting romantic relationships, instead preferring multiple (sexual) relationships, which appears to be a characteristic the old gods share.

2.3.8 Media

The goddess of television, Media, is the only one of the new gods mentioned in the novel who is a woman. Unlike the old gods, she does not have to worry about being worshipped, since in the contemporary world there are plenty of people who are willing to sacrifice their time to the television and to the goddess behind it. In *American Gods*, if she is not possessing an actress's body in a television show, Media appears as a perfectly made-up and coiffed woman, which indicates that she invests time into taking care of her appearance, which is seen as a traditionally feminine trait (Parent and Moradi 2011: 959).

The readers as well as Shadow first meet Media when she takes over the character of Lucille Ball in the television show *I Love Lucy* in order to communicate with Shadow. Her aim is to persuade Shadow to join the new gods and her arguments seem convincing: she begins by stating that they are by now much more powerful than the old gods and that they would pay him as much as he wants, double, treble or even hundred times more than he is earning now. She then adds that they can also give him much more and starts suggestively unbuttoning her blouse. Even though she has enough power and bargaining tools, she still, similarly to Bilquis, resorts to using her body as an instrument in either seducing or persuading Shadow.

In comparison to other new gods, all male, the goddess of television plays a relatively small part. If the spooks and the god of technology are active decision-makers, who drive their plan forward, then Media seems to be rather passive, in spite of the relatively great amount of worship she receives. She is also a peripheral character, whose distinguishing features are her groomed appearance and her promiscuity, the latter of which is not seen as a positive quality neither in men nor women (Prentice, Carranza 2002: 273-274).

2.4 *Coraline*

2.4.1 Coraline

Differently from *Neverwhere* and *American Gods*, the eponymous protagonist of *Coraline* is a young girl. The description of her appearance is limited to the clothes she wears, such as her pyjamas or black jeans, grey sweater and bright orange boots, and to the fact that she is small for her age. Yet Coraline is the most active and central character in the novel. From the beginning of the book, when she and her parents, Mr and Mrs Jones, move into a new flat, which is in an old house with an attic, cellar and an overgrown garden, she is constantly exploring, either the other flats and their peculiar inhabitants, the garden, the dangerous well nearby or her own flat. Danielle Russell (2012: 164) argues that Coraline does so in order to make sense of the world she is living in. It is a world, which, at a first glance, makes Coraline feel bored and ignored: her new neighbours, Miss Spink, Miss Forcible and the crazy man upstairs, keep getting her name wrong by calling her Caroline instead of Coraline; her mother and father are always working in their offices, not spending time with their daughter, even when she is bored of all of her toys and bad weather prevents her from going out; and at times Coraline's parents act slightly neglectfully towards her, such as when Mr Jones prepares dinner that he knows his daughter will not like or when Mrs Jones goes

shopping with Coraline and forgets about her while choosing the best pullover for Coraline with the help of the shop assistant.

The other mother, the creature who creates the other world behind the brick wall, cleverly and expertly uses Coraline's curiosity and adventurousness and her dissatisfaction with her parents to tempt her into permanently coming to her world by sewing black buttons to her eyes. For example, the simple lunch of chicken, fried potatoes and green peas the other mother prepares, tastes to Coraline better than any chicken she has ever had; Coraline's other bedroom, filled with all sorts of remarkable things and toys, is much more interesting than her bedroom in the real world; she meets singing rats and talking dogs; and visits the other Miss Forcible and Miss Spink's show. The other mother even kidnaps Coraline's parents and attempts to persuade her that her parents left because they had become bored of her by showing Coraline an image in a mirror of her parents returning from holiday and rejoicing in the absence of their daughter.

However, Coraline is not an ordinary girl: she likes to explore rather than play with dolls; anything dangerous signifies to her new adventures not reasons to run away; and she is clever, smart and mature for her age. Coraline, therefore, rejects the other mother's offer by saying that "[she doesn't] want whatever [she] want[s]. Nobody does. Not really. What kind of fun would it be if [she] just got everything [she] ever wanted?" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 143). Not only is Coraline here choosing her real parents, who do not give her everything she wants, but who care for her nevertheless, over the other mother, but she is also demonstrating her intelligence and ability for rational, mature thought.

What is more, Coraline decides to rescue her parents as well as the souls of the children the other mother has trapped, because she has "tried running away and it didn't work" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 102). Here Coraline is acting decisively and independently, even though she is a child and thus clearly dependent on her parents to some extent. With the help

of a black cat, who is able to speak in the other world, Coraline realises that the only way to defeat the other mother is to challenge her. So she proposes a game of hide-and-seek: if Coraline finds the souls of her parents and the children, they can all return to their old worlds; but if she fails, she sews black buttons to her eyes and joins the other mother forever. Intrigued, the other mother agrees and their game begins.

Using common sense and logic, Coraline one by one finds all of the souls she is looking for and even manages to escape back to the real world. During the game, Coraline constantly reminds herself that she is brave and that she is not frightened, until she knows that it is true: "[t]here [is] nothing here [in the other world] that frighten[s] her. These things /.../ [are] illusions, things made by the other mother in a ghastly parody of the real people and real things on the other end of the corridor" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 141). Knowing that, Coraline, who seems to be afraid of only spiders, is not frightened even when the other mother's hand follows her to the real world. Instead, Coraline forms a plan using her dolls as protective coloration (an expression she herself uses) to trap the hand in the old well.

Using only her intelligence and wit, Coraline, therefore, defeats an extremely dangerous and powerful magical being. If in fantasy fiction in general, magic is seen as a tool that gives greater power to female characters, among other things, then in *Coraline*, it is clear that individual positive characteristics are depicted as more valuable than magic. Consequently, not only wisdom, but also bravery and courage are both embodied by Coraline and cherished in the novel. Moreover, Coraline, the most active and central character in the novel, appears to be rational, decisive, self-reliant and independent instead of being passive and yielding. If at times she feels a sob welling up, she stops it, or when she feels frightened, she reminds herself that she is brave, until she truly believes it. Even though Coraline is a young girl, she embodies several positive characteristics traditionally considered masculine

and thus she can be seen as a role model, who, according to Gaiman, lends support to women in real life who face a difficult time in their lives (Gaiman 2013[2002]: xv).

2.4.2 Mrs Jones

Coraline's mother and father are both nearly always busy, constantly working on their computers in their separate studies. As characters in the novel, they are passive and in the background. The short appearances they make, such as the previously mentioned episode of Coraline and her mother shopping or either of the parents working in their offices and telling Coraline to play on her own, leave the impression that for the most time Mr and Mrs Jones ignore Coraline or leave her to her own devices. However, this sort of arrangement is quite significant. First of all, as Danielle Russell (2012: 162-163) puts it, Mrs Jones "defies traditional expectations", because she is in an apparently egalitarian relationship with her husband: both of them work at home and share household duties. For example, in several instances it is Mr Jones who cooks dinner, something like "leek and potato stew, with a tarragon garnish and melted Gruyére cheese" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 10), which Coraline labels as "recipes" and refuses to eat. Of the two, it is definitely Mr Jones who seems to be a better cook with Mrs Jones making, for instance, chicken that is always dry and which does not taste of anything.

Secondly, work is quite important for Mrs Jones, which in turn indicates that she has a life beyond home and family. Danielle Russell (2012: 163) also foregrounds the relationship between Mrs Jones and her daughter. It is true that Mrs Jones, similarly to Mr Jones, seems to pay little attention to Coraline and allows her to do whatever she wants "as long as [she doesn't] make a mess" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 7). By doing so, it is possible to claim she teaches and encourages Coraline to think for herself and to be independent, although she does limit and curb Coraline's actions by reminding her to dress appropriately or to be home in

time for lunch. These little statements, in addition to Mrs Jones calling Coraline 'darling' or hugging her tightly, also reveal that Coraline's mother does actually care for her daughter.

Overall, both Mrs and Mr Jones are passive, peripheral characters. Importantly, they have invested in a relationship in which they share household duties as well as the management of financial matters. Since the majority of their time seems to be devoted to work, they leave the impression of ignoring their daughter, but this can be interpreted as giving Coraline enough freedom to learn to be independent and self-reliant. Coraline, too, comes to this conclusion after she realises how much she misses her parents and their comforting presence, even if it is only in the background, after the other mother has kidnapped them. What is more, at the end of the novel, Coraline significantly refuses the idyllic life the other mother is offering to her and chooses "her own mother, her real, wonderful, maddening, infuriating, glorious mother" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 159). This choice is meaningful in another way as well. Coraline is presented with two female role models: one, the other mother, a domestic female stereotype; the other, Mrs Jones, a woman defying traditional expectations. By opting for the latter, Danielle Russell (2012: 164) underlines, Coraline determines that she, too, does not and will not conform to stereotypes.

2.4.3 The other mother

Coraline sees the other mother for the first time when she discovers that the brick wall behind the door that is supposed to lead to another flat has disappeared and that she is able to walk through it, into the other world, which greatly resembles the one she has just left. Once there, Coraline hears somebody calling for her from the kitchen and she follows the voice, which sounds a lot like her mother's. In the kitchen she finds a woman that looks similar to her mother, only her skin is white as paper, she is taller and thinner, she has black hair that drifts around her head, fingers with long dark nails that are constantly moving and, most

importantly, black buttons for eyes. The appearance of Coraline's real mother is not described in the novel, so that of the other mother is largely left to the imagination as well. However, the features of the other mother just listed are important to the story, because firstly, they leave the impression of her being a terrifying and dangerous creature, suitable for a gothic horror story, as well as marking her as the villain of the novel; secondly, her appearance is used to directly reflect her mood. For example, when the other mother is pleased, her cheeks become blushed, her hair moves about her head lazily and her black button eyes shine as if they have been polished; but when she is angry, she becomes paler, "the colour of a spider's belly", her hair starts to writhe and twine and her sharp teeth are exposed (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 155).

At the very first meeting between her and Coraline, the other mother is confident and relaxed and according to Coraline's observation, looks a little like her real mother. However, already the fact the other mother meets Coraline in a kitchen (in fact, they meet there more than once during the novel) indicates how different the two mothers actually are. If Mrs Jones seems to lead a life in which work plays an important role next to her family and home, then the other mother with the other father are there "ready to love [Coraline] and play with [her] and feed [her] and make [her] life interesting" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 71). By creating a world in line with Coraline's wishes and by trying to please her by cooking a delicious dinner and promising to play with her, the other mother is trying to persuade Coraline to become hers, but at the same time, she is conveying the message that family comes first, nothing outside it is important to her.

Although the other mother can be seen as a stereotypically domestic female, who is kind and caring and who concerns herself primarily with household tasks, she does possess some masculine traits, too, as well as magical powers to make her equal with male characters. To begin with, she is a magical being, a beldam as she is called in the story, who has created a whole world – as much as a house and its surrounding garden can be called a world – and

everything in it, from the flat to the other Miss Spink and Miss Forcible. The use of the verb 'create' in the previous sentence is only for the matter of convenience, since the beldam cannot actually create, but only transform, twist and change. Be that as it may, she does have magical powers that give her an advantage over the other characters in the novel.

To continue, in her own world, except for Coraline, the other mother is in control of the appearance of things and the behaviour of different creatures. Even the other father is utterly under her command. For example, when the other mother is not present, the other father does nothing except for sitting in the dark and waiting for the other mother's return, he is even not allowed to talk to Coraline; and when the other mother is angry, he suffers her wrath. If the stereotypical man is independent, confident and in control (Eagly et al 2008: 274; Brannon 2004: 162), then the other father is completely the opposite: he is dependent on the other mother and does her bidding. The other mother's domineering manner extends to Coraline as well. She expects her to be "a good child who loves her mother", who is "compliant and fair-spoken" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 108). In other words, the other mother wants to control and possess Coraline as she does with everything else in the other world. This is in direct opposition to the behaviour of Coraline's real mother, who guides her towards greater independence.

The other mother, since she loves challenges and accepts the game Coraline proposes, can also be seen as competitive and self-confident. Yet by the end of the story, Coraline sees through her plan. Coraline does believe her words that she loves her, but the other mother's love is similar to the way "a miser loves money, or a dragon loves its gold. In the other mother's button eyes, Coraline [knows] that she [is] a possession, nothing more" (Gaiman 2013[2002]: 126). The knowledge of this and the fact that everything the beldam has promised or shown her, enables Coraline to resist and defeat her.

The other mother, similarly to Coraline, is an active and central character. She is created, as Danielle Russell (2012: 164) suggests, to represent the traditionally domestic female, who excels at domestic tasks and whose life is devoted to her family and home. However, the other mother deviates from the stereotype in several ways. First, she does not place the needs of her family or Coraline before her own, she is clearly driven by her own agenda; and secondly, she is the head of her household in the other world, having created it and being in control of everything, from the other father to the crazy man upstairs. The other mother wishes to extend her control over Coraline as well, but Coraline chooses her real mother, who encourages her to be self-reliant and to take initiative, over the perfect life the other mother is offering her.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the present thesis was to investigate the portrayal of female characters in the fantasy fiction of Neil Gaiman, more precisely in the novels *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Coraline*. The results of the analysis support the claim that Neil Gaiman, if he wishes to, is capable of depicting women in an egalitarian manner. Even though there were more passive than active female characters, most of the women in these three novels were depicted as having non-stereotypical characteristics. This was especially evident in *Coraline*, the only novel of the three which has a female protagonist and which apparently values equality between men and women.

Fantasy fiction in general has been seen as being kinder towards women than, for example, science fiction or horror, but since it finds inspiration in the past, in various mythologies, religions, beliefs, folk tales and fairy tales, fantasy can be described as formulaic, which has led to the marginalisation of women and to their depiction in stereotypical roles. Only in the second half of the twentieth century have authors of fantasy, especially female writers, began to question the notions of gender and sexual identity. However, although the number of female protagonists and active female characters has increased, women in fantasy fiction are still largely represented in stereotypical roles, which means they are passive, pretty, kind, caring, faithful, delicate, concerned with matters of the home or family and oriented towards the wellbeing of others, whereas men are most often seen as in control, independent, physically strong, confident, active, employed and concerned with the self over others.

The analysis of Neil Gaiman's novels *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Coraline* revealed that almost all of the main female characters were beautiful or striking in appearance, but only in *Neverwhere* was this a trait that was emphasised throughout the novel and only in relation to women. Both male and female characters in all three novels were described when

they first entered into the narrative or shortly afterwards. The length of and amount of detail in the descriptions was equal between men and women as well as between women themselves. In *Coraline*, however, the appearance of the main characters was not revealed, except for some features of the other mother and the other father, such as their button eyes.

Beauty is not the primary defining trait of any of the female characters analysed, but some of them use their good looks to their advantage. For example, Lamia in *Neverwhere* seduces men in order to get their warmth; Bilquis, the former queen of Sheba, in *American Gods* solicits worship from men by working as a prostitute; and the goddess of media in the same novel uses her feminine charms to convince Shadow to change his loyalties. In addition to beauty, several women have been equipped with magical powers, which are seen in fantasy fiction as levellers between men and women, to grant them more independence and freedom among men. More precisely, in *Neverwhere*, Lady Door has the ability to open any door possible or impossible, which, for instance, helps her to escape from Mr Vandemar and Mr Croup, two vicious criminals. In *American Gods*, more than half of the female characters who were discussed possess some supernatural power. Yet their power does not always match that of the male characters. If Laura, who becomes a living dead, does succeed in protecting Shadow and killing several men, and if Easter does enjoy the worship of thousands of human beings, then Bilquis has trouble meeting her needs and finally is killed by the god of technology, the Zorya sisters live in relative obscurity and the goddess of media, even though she, too, is worshipped widely, plays a minor role next to the male gods. The other mother in *Coraline*, is also a supernatural being and seemingly a very powerful one, but she is defeated in the end by Coraline.

Putting beauty and magical powers aside, examples of women who are independent, active, intelligent and well-rounded can be found in all three novels, but even though they possess non-stereotypical traits, they nevertheless display some feminine characteristics as

well. In *Neverwhere*, Lady Door, for example, is an active and developed character who is as important to the narrative as is the protagonist, Richard Mayhew. Over the course of the novel she proves herself to be intelligent, brave and determined. However, she still is fragile and delicate, so she needs the protection of a bodyguard, and at times prone to emotional outbursts. In that, Door is similar to Sam, a character in *American Gods*. Sam, too, first seems to be brave, straightforward and unabashed, but when she is reminded of her relative weakness in comparison to men, she panics.

Laura in *American Gods* and Hunter in *Neverwhere* are two characters whose physical strength is comparable to that of men. Hunter in particular is described as being very strong and skilled in handling different weapons. What is more, she proves in the novel that she is more capable and powerful than several male characters by fighting and defeating them. Laura, too, taking advantage of her supernatural form, murders or outsmarts several men. Yet neither of them are represented as merely warriors, both of them are active, intelligent and independent women, with motivations and a past.

To contrast primarily non-stereotypical female characters, some can be defined as mostly conforming to gender stereotypes, such as Anaesthesia in *Neverwhere*, Marguerite Olsen, Audrey Burton, Zorya Vechernyaya and Zorya Utrennyaya in *American Gods* and the other mother in *Coraline*. They are emotional (Marguerite, Audrey), delicate (Anaesthesia) and domestic (the Zorya sisters, the other mother). What is more, all, except for the other mother, are peripheral characters in their respective novels alongside Jessica, Serpentine and Lamia in *Neverwhere*; Bilquis, Easter, the third Zorya sister and the goddess of media in *American Gods*; and Mr and Mrs Jones and the other father in *Coraline*. Overall, the number of peripheral female characters in these three novels is clearly larger than the number of women who play an important part in the novel, even if they are supporting characters.

Of all the three novels analysed, *Coraline* stands apart because it openly comments on gender roles and gender stereotypes. The protagonist, a young girl called Coraline, possesses none of the traits stereotypically associated with women. Instead, she is adventurous, brave and intelligent, even surprisingly so for her age. What is more, her mother, Mrs Jones, does not conform to the traditional image of a woman as well: she seems to be in an egalitarian relationship with her husband, so that they share household duties; and she has a job, which means that she has a life beyond her home and family. The other mother, in contrast to Mrs Jones, embodies many characteristics of a domestic woman. For instance, she cooks perfectly and her only desire is to take care of Coraline. However, at the end of the novel, Coraline defeats the other mother and chooses her own, in spite of the fact that she sometimes feels neglected by her parents. This is significant, because she openly rejects a stereotypical role model in favour of one that symbolises equality between men and women.

To conclude, the analysis of Neil Gaiman's novels *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Coraline* proved that Neil Gaiman indeed is a writer who is capable of writing his female characters well. On the one hand, there are stereotypical and peripheral characters in these three novels, but on the other, there are also characters who are active, intelligent, independent, determined and strong. This is most evident in *Coraline*, which can be read as a novel promoting gender equality. In addition, based on the analysis of these three novels, it is possible to suggest that the female characters that Neil Gaiman creates, especially those that are central to the plot, have become less stereotypical over time.

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Appendix 1 Character evaluation form

Book Title _____

Author _____

Character's name: _____
Is the character: a) male   b) female
Occupation:_____
Is he/she most often characterised as: a) passive   b) active

What qualities are the most often used to describe the character?

a) Physical beauty

b) Intelligence

c) Wit

d) Strength (physical)

e) Strength (emotional)

f) Athletic ability

g) Intuitive abilities/supernatural powers

h) Other (specify)

What other characteristics are used to describe this character?

Do they display any of the following stereotypically masculine and feminine features?

Stereotypically feminine traits:

1. oriented towards the welfare of the community
2. affectionate
3. kind
4. caring
5. considerate towards others
6. passive
7. dependent
8. pure
9. refined
10. delicate
11. dainty
12. pretty
13. graceful
14. thin
15. invest time into taking care of oneself
16. do household tasks
17. form deep, supportive relationships
18. invest into a romantic relationship
19. faithful
20. good verbal skills

Stereotypically masculine traits:

1. oriented towards the self
2. assertive
3. self-confident
4. in control
5. active
6. independent
7. strong
8. rugged
9. broad-shouldered
10. heads of households
11. handle financial matters
12. work is important
13. have multiple sexual relationships
14. refrain from committing to their partners
15. good mathematical skills

Comments about this character:

Appendix 2 Laura Solomon's character evaluation form

Book Title _____

Author _____

Publisher: _____

Date of Publication: _____

Character's name: _____

Is the character: a) male   b) female

Occupation: _____

Is he/she most often characterised as: a) passive   b) active

What qualities are the most often used to describe the character?

a) Physical beauty   e) Strength (emotional)

b) Intelligence   f) Athletic ability

c) Wit   g) Intuitive abilities/supernatural powers

d) Strength (physical)   h) Other (specify)

Characterise each female character in one category:

I. Peripheral/nonexistent   V. Sex object / love interest (as main

II. Passive victim/ child needing protection   function)

III. Mythic woman / goddess figure   VI. Unstable / emotional – liable to panic

IV. Woman as purity   VII. Independent individual

                                       VIII. Other (specify)

Comments about this character: **Book annotation:**

RESÜMEE

TARTU ÜLIKOOL
INGLISE FILOLOOGIA OSAKOND

Teele Kesküla
Portrayal of Women in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, *American Gods* and *Coraline*
(Naistegelaste kujutamine Neil Gaimani romaanides "Neverwhere", "Ameerika jumalad" ja "Coraline")
Magistritöö
2014
Lehekülgede arv: 101

Annotatsioon:
Käesoleva magistritöö eesmärgiks on uurida põhiliste naistegelaste kujutamist fantaasiakirjaniku Neil Gaimani romaanides "Neverwhere", "Ameerika jumalad" ja "Coraline". Kuna fantaasiakirjanduses on naistegelasi tavaliselt kujutatud stereotüüpsetes rollides, keskendub töö soostereotüüpide esinemisele antud romaanides.

Töös antakse kõigepealt lühike ülevaade Neil Gaimani loomingust, sealhulgas ka selle kriitikast, millele järgneb töös analüüsitavate romaanide kokkuvõte.

Esimene peatükk defineerib fantaasiakirjanduse mõiste ja uurib lähemalt selle peamisi omadusi. Vaatluse alla tulevad ka sugudevahelised erinevused ja soostereotüübid, mille põhjal jaotatakse mehed ja naised kahte kategooriasse. Stereotüüpide kohaselt on mehed näiteks aktiivsed, iseseisvad, tugevad ja heade matemaatiliste oskustega, naised aga ilusad, õrnad, passiivsed, sõltuvad ja heade verbaalsete oskustega. Kui meestele on töö olulisel kohal, siis naistele on kodu ja perekond. Samas peatükis uuritakse säärase stereotüüpide avaldumist fantaasiakirjanduses ja naistegelaste kujutamist meeskirjanike poolt.

Teine peatükk keskendub antud kolme romaani analüüsile. Analüüsi tulemused näitavad, et nii passiivseid kui ka marginaalseid naistegelasi on kokku rohkem kui aktiivseid ja keskseid. Samas pole kõiki naistegelasi kujutatud stereotüüpsetes rollides. Paljusid neist võib iseloomustada ka traditsiooniliselt mehelike tunnustega naiselike tunnuste kõrval. Selle poolest erineb teistest romaanidest eriti "Coraline", mis selgelt kritiseerib soostereotüüpilisi rolle. See toetab väidet, et Neil Gaiman on autor, kes oskab naistegelasi hästi kirjutada. Samas annab see ka põhjust oletada, et kui võrrelda antud kolme romaani, võib märgata Neil Gaimani poolt loodud kesksete naistegelaste puhul aja jooksul vähem soostereotüüpilisi tunnuseid.

Märksõnad: inglise kirjandus, Neil Gaiman, soostereotüübid

Lihtlitsents lõputöö reprodutseerimiseks ja lõputöö üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks

Mina _____Teele Kesküla_____
(*autori nimi*)
(isikukood: _____48907230256_____)

1. annanTartu Ülikoolile tasuta loa (lihtlitsentsi) enda loodud teose
Portrayal of women in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere, American Gods* and
*Coraline*_____
_____,
(*lõputöö pealkiri*)

mille juhendaja on_____Ene-Reet Soovik_____,
(*juhendaja nimi*)

1.1.reprodutseerimiseks säilitamise ja üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemise eesmärgil, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace-is lisamise eesmärgil kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse tähtaja lõppemiseni;
1.2.üldsusele kättesaadavaks tegemiseks ülikooli veebikeskkonna kaudu, sealhulgas digitaalarhiivi DSpace´i kaudu kuni autoriõiguse kehtivuse tähtaja lõppemiseni.

2. olen teadlik, et punktis 1 nimetatud õigused jäävad alles ka autorile.

3. kinnitan, et lihtlitsentsi andmisega ei rikuta teiste isikute intellektuaalomandi ega isikuandmete kaitse seadusest tulenevaid õigusi.

Tartus__12.05.2014_____ (*kuupäev*)

_____
(*allkiri*)