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**Fantasy in postmodern times: an analysis of Neil Gaiman's novel American Gods  
(2001)**

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## Fantasy in postmodern times: an analysis of Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* (2001)

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### Abstract

The presence of fantasy in cultures and world literature is undeniable, traced back from the founding of myths (Kirk, 1975) to being the basis of the first acknowledged literary canon of the English language, the epic *Beowulf*. However, there is an incoherence between the relevance of fantasy and its status in literary studies. As denounced by Hume (2014), fantasy is eclipsed by realism since the 20th century, a phenomenon that disregards literature that is not explicitly related to the concrete reality. Thus, this paper proposes an analysis of the probable causes for the descent of fantasy. This documentary research uses the contemporary fantasy novel *American Gods* (2001), written by Neil Gaiman, to demonstrate how fantasy is crucial for literary studies due to its capability to discuss topics that go beyond the boundaries of realism: the duality of tradition and modernity. The research suggests that fantasy is indispensable for the development of this theme, defying the misguided affirmations that fantasy is not relevant due to its detachment from reality. On the contrary, the study concluded that fantasy pieces have great potential to examine issues from the concrete world, due to its critical review of history through literature and use of symbols.

**Key words:** Fantasy novel; Neil Gaiman; *American Gods*; Literary disregard; Post-modern fiction

### Resumo

Não se pode negar a presença da fantasia nas culturas e literaturas mundiais, desde a fundação de religiões, através da mitologia (Kirk, 1975), até como respaldo das primeiras obras literárias legitimadas, como no caso do épico da literatura inglesa *Beowulf*. Todavia, percebe-se uma incoerência entre a produção de literatura de fantasia e seu *status* nos estudos literários. Como denunciado por Hume (2014), a fantasia é ocultada por obras realistas a partir do século XX, o que diminui o prestígio de obras que fogem do que é explicitamente concreto. Devido a este cenário, esta pesquisa se propõe a analisar as causas do declínio da fantasia, levando em consideração o trabalho de Hume (2014), Jackson (1981) e Swinfen (2020) em um estudo documental. Além disso, utiliza-se como objeto de estudo a obra de Neil Gaiman, *Deuses Americanos* (2001), a qual é analisada em sua relevância e capacidade de demonstrar a importância da utilização da fantasia para levantar discussões pertinentes, como a dualidade da tradição com a modernidade. Logo, a fantasia mostra-se indispensável para o desenvolvimento desse tema, além de ser potencializada pelo uso simultâneo da História e da Literatura feito por Gaiman, ilustrando o conceito de Hutcheon (1989) de metaficção historiográfica, que propõe uma revisitação crítica da História por meio da ficção, característica indispensável da literatura pós-moderna.

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**Palavras chave:** Romance de Fantasia; Literatura Pós-moderna; Deuses Americanos; Neil Gaiman; Desvalorização

## 1 Introduction

“Fiction allows us to slide into these other heads, these other places, and look out through other eyes” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 253)

It is undeniable that fantasy is deeply rooted in the world’s cultural core as it can be traced back to the first religious manifestations, such as ancient mythologies (Kirk, 1975), as well as to the first literary masterpiece of the Anglo-Saxon period, *Beowulf* (Heaney, 1999). The fundamental characteristic of fantasy illustrates how humanity has always sought for something beyond concrete reality. This yearning is satisfied through narratives that do not follow the rules of realism. However, the need to surpass the material world is not the same as denying it, since fantasy is not simply an escape and still represents reality (Jackson, 1981). Regardless, fantasy’s portrayal of the “real world” is not always explicit, leading to a common misconception that it is a limited expression of literature, not worthy of a deep analysis.

Consequently, such misjudgment has not gone unnoticed as it is discussed by Kathryn Hume in her work *Fantasy and mimesis* (2014). The author recognizes that fantasy has been overlooked in literary studies, an issue mainly caused by the Western preference for mimetic fiction. Nevertheless, Hume (2014) points out that fantasy is not deprived of *mimesis*, because all literary pieces need some connection to reality; however, fantasy simply does not deal with the “real world” in an explicit way. Thus, fantasy has been reduced to a peripheral phenomenon, supposedly incapable of unraveling complex discussions and getting less attention from the academy over the past few decades, more specifically, since the middle of the 20th century (Swinfen, 2020). The consequences of disregarding fantasy range from scarce theoretical works to terminological limitations, since scholars focus on creating exclusive definitions that cut down fantasy to a small corpus (Hume, 2014).

Considering the previously mentioned context, this article suggests another look at fantasy in order to determine the causes of its decline. Furthermore, it analyzes how fantasy narratives can deal with real world issues through an investigation of the contemporary novel *American Gods* (2001), by the writer Neil Gaiman. This is done through textual analysis, a method that considers the multiple possibilities of the text, all of which are juxtaposed and assessed against its sources (Belsey, 2013). The research focuses on a theme that is recurrent in the novel: the conflict between tradition and modernity, which was considered the most suitable to illustrate how fantasy engages with reality through its own terms. This topic is

analyzed by considering how fantasy expands this discussion, to then determine if the causes of its negative status are justifiable. Moreover, the analysis also observes how Gaiman critically approaches history in his narrative, a feature that is also worth considering by using Linda Hutcheon's theory of Historiographic Metafiction (1989). Therefore, *American Gods* allows a fresh perspective on the matter, since it overcomes the exhausted discourse of fantasy's lack of connection to reality.

Regarding the object itself, *American Gods* was first published in the United Kingdom and United States of America in 2001, under the authorship of British writer Neil Gaiman. The narrative focuses on the character named Shadow, an ex-convict who is released from jail early due to the death of his wife, Laura. Without any perspectives after his loss, Shadow agrees to work for a mysterious figure named Wednesday and starts to do chores for him across the United States. Through this new partnership, Shadow is presented with an aspect of the world he was not aware of, the existence of gods. Wednesday himself is then exposed as Odin, the god of Germanic paganism, who is brought to America by the flux of colonization and was forced to adapt in a new land. Moreover, Odin explains how he was not the only one, since "Old Gods" from all over the world were brought to the U.S.A., but soon started to be forgotten when their believers took over "New Gods" of progress and technology, thus forgetting their traditions. Soon Shadow finds himself in the middle of a war, where the Gods from the Old World struggle to not become obsolete.

Therefore, a conflict develops between the Gods who constitute traditional religions and the Gods born out of modernity, as both parties try to stay relevant and alive in the memory of the population of the United States. Distributed along four parts (respectively: "Shadows"; "My Ainsel"; "The moment of the storm"; "Something that the dead are keeping back") and a postscript, the narrative demonstrates how the divine is tangled with humanity, since the survival of religions depends on memory and belief. Therefore, the mixture of mythological figures with allegories that symbolize modern times adds considerable value to the novel, since it becomes recognizable through the Old Gods, known for generations across cultures, and the New Gods representing symbols of modernity.

Accordingly, the narrative's revision of the mythological basis of religions and cultures provides another perspective of the past, not only recalling old myths but doing so in a way that their meaning is questioned. This approach is consistent with the thesis of Historiographic Metafiction (1989), in which history and literature work together to critically analyze the past through fiction; in the same work, Linda Hutcheon (1989) also attempts to define the "post-modern", a contradictory phenomenon focused on Europe and America, that

implies the critical rethinking of the past. Although volatile, the term “post-modern” is applied here in agreement with Hutcheon’s approach, which encompasses productions that have a contradictory relationship with dominant cultures. Thus, *American Gods* proves to be a relevant novel, worth being acknowledged when considering the post-modern literary scene, and holds the potential to overcome the decay of fantasy that has been aggravated since the middle of the 20th century (Swinfen, 2020).

## 2 THE DOWNFALL OF FANTASY

Prior to the analysis of the novel, *American Gods*, and the discussion on how it signifies a shift in the role of fantasy during post-modern times, it is important to display why such change is important in the first place. If Neil Gaiman managed to bring the focus back to fantasy, then one must wonder: Why did it ever decay from its primal position in the first place? Hence, the importance of considering the possible reasons for this downfall, to then determine whether they still apply to post-modern literature through the analysis of *American Gods*.

The first, and possibly most relevant, reason appears to be the preference of Western cultures for the explicit use of mimetic features in literature. Dating back to Ancient Greece and under the authorship of Aristotle, *mimesis* transformed into an inclination towards reality, leading to the general distrust of works that do not show an explicit link to the concrete world. However, it is a misconception that fantasy does not feature reality, since all forms of fiction have, to some degree, recognizable aspects from the real world (Hume, 2014). Consequently, fantasy is downgraded to a peripheral phenomenon, a form of literature that is allegedly out of touch with reality, undeserving of more detailed analysis. To this matter, Swinfen (2020) exemplifies the dominance of the realistic novel by describing how fantasy writers from the middle of the 19th century were obliged to publish their works as children’s books. Although Swinfen recognizes that the works of J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973) were crucial to bring back some of the previous respect for these narratives, fantasy continued to be associated with the lack of relevant socio-cultural topics. Therefore, the misguided view that fantasy is limited to escaping reality settled, which led to its decay.

The obvious association between fantasy and the complete lack of reality seems, at first glance, irrefutable, but further analysis shows the complexity of this form of literature. While realism deals with explicit representations of the world and its relations, fantasy uses symbols and unreal forms to display such topics, stimulating readers to see them through new perspectives. Moreover, even though fantasy maintains a link to the concrete world, and is

transformed based on its sociocultural context and historical period (Jackson, 1981), it also displays features that go beyond the concrete, which allows it to handle unexpressed and abstract concepts. In other words, “The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and ‘made absent’ ” (Jackson, 1981, p. 4).

In conclusion, the misunderstanding that fantasy is simply an escape from reality led to skepticism towards its narratives. However, careful consideration shows that the unreal aspects of fantasy are not empty of meaning or arbitrary choices, they address real world issues and go even further by being able to discuss abstract concepts and what is left covered by realism. Finally, fantasy is not the lack of reality, but it lacks complete commitment to it, a feature that grants an extension of the range of literature and more possible ways to address real world problems.

### **3. A WAR AMONG GODS: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY**

Through the analysis of *American Gods*, it is possible to determine its most relevant theme: the conflict between modernity and tradition – the very foundation of the narrative. Set in the United States, Gaiman’s novel unravels due to a war between the Gods from the “Old World” (deities that were brought to the new continent during colonization and represent ancient religions) and the “New Gods” who appeared with modernity and technology:

gods of credit card and freeway, of Internet and telephone, of radio and hospital and television, gods of plastic and of beeper and of neon. Proud gods, fat and foolish creatures, puffed up with their own newness and importance (Gaiman, 2001, p. 107-108).

By considering the narrative’s arrangement, it is evident that the analysis should begin by considering what the gods represent and how their conflict translates into real themes and controversies.

First, the Gods from the Old World are introduced to the main character, Shadow, and consequently to the reader. From the beginning it becomes clear that the old religions have been long forgotten by humanity, since the deities from Nordic religions, Ancient Egypt and pagan cultures need to live as outcasts, grasping the few memories of them that are still alive in modern culture. This condition uncovers the struggle to remember one’s origins but still be able to embrace progress, since it also becomes clear that the same Gods that are being

forgotten are also the foundation of the society that does not remember them. In order to illustrate how the ancient religions were crucial to humanity's survival in the New world, two stories from *American Gods* are worthy of being featured: the story of Essie Tregowan and the lives of the enslaved twins.

Brought to America as a sentenced prisoner, Essie was forced out of her homeland, Cornwall, and had to find means of surviving after being sold as a "wet nurse" and a maid to a tobacco farmer. While also bearing a child of her own, Essie brought up the farmer's children and struggled to live in a foreign land, with little more than her beliefs to keep her sanity. Thus, she raised the children telling them stories from her home,

of the knockers and the blue-caps who live down the mines; of the Bucca, the trickiest spirit of the land, much more dangerous than the redheaded, snub-nosed piskies, for whom the first fish of the catch was always left upon the shingle [...] She told them all these things, and they believed, because she believed (Gaiman, 2001, p. 76-77).

Essie lived until old age due to the beliefs she carried across the seas, since the deities she believed in were not simple stories from her country, told to amuse the children, but her culture and identity. However, throughout the narrative of her life in the United States, it is possible to notice indicators that the gods she believed were not only in her stories, but were in fact with Essie. So, the land where she lived thrived due to her rituals to these gods, who explicitly appear at the end of her life to bring her peace. Therefore, Essie's story introduces the concept of how memory is crucial to survival, not only in the sense of instincts, but due to the need to feel attached to the past, which is personified by the gods and piskies that followed Essie to the United States and helped her journey.

Similar to Essie Tregowan's story is the narrative of the twins, Wututu and Agsu, sold by their uncle to colonizers who brought them to America. Regardless of their young age, the twins were already very aware of the Gods from their culture, which were crucial to their survival while being kept as slaves in the New World. The girl, Wututu, ended up in the United States to work at the plantations and then as a house slave, while her brother was taken to St. Domingue to work on sugar plantations. Despite it being forbidden, the twins never stopped worshiping the gods of their homeland, rituals that kept both their origins alive and their memories of each other after they were separated.

The journey of the twins is arduous, since they both suffered the psychological and physical tools of enslavement. For instance, Wututu had to endure the death of several of her children, most of which she was forced to bear in the first place, while Agsu had a primal role

in the revolution of St. Domingue, leading the other slaves into battle and witnessing friends and loved ones being killed, until he was dead himself. More actively than Essie, Apsu worshiped the deities from his homeland, “He sang to Elegba, to Ogu, Shango, Zaka, and to many others, all the gods the captives had brought with them to the island, brought in their minds and their secret hearts” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 258). In return, the gods helped the captives to earn their freedom, as Apsu himself was possessed by the god Elegba, who “rode” him into battle. This literal possession in Gaiman’s narrative illustrates the power of religions and the yearning for one’s home, the power of their memories, their history and how tradition, in this sense, plays a crucial role in shaping societies and individuals. Considering the strength of tradition represented in the previous fragments, how could such a powerful concept become obsolete, or even be forgotten?

As mentioned at the beginning of this analysis, the gods from the Old World appear as outcasts in Gaiman’s novel, living on scraps of faith and faint memories of their image. One of the most explicit examples of this is Bilquis, known as the Queen of Sheba, a powerful goddess, “who ruled Sheba when Sheba was the richest land there ever was, when its spices and its gems and scented woods were taken by boat and camel-back to the corners of the earth, who was worshiped even when she was alive” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 290). Regardless, the passage of time downgrades Bilquis to a sexworker in Los Angeles, a goddess who now needs to walk the cold streets at 2 a.m. in order to survive, setting the reality that the past is eventually put aside, regardless of its importance.

Her condition is then contrasted with the reality of the New Gods, who are personified as rich and powerful beings that dictate the course of the world. So, gods like the young technoboy, who is the embodiment of digital technology, believe that the past needs to be completely forgotten for modernity to fully flourish. Therefore, the drastic change of reality for Bilquis, as well as the urge of the New gods to erase all traces of the past, illustrate the main theme of the novel: the conflict between tradition and modernity.

This theme is personified in the war between the gods, as well as their story in the United States. As the narrative unravels, this duality becomes even more present, as each god once considered themselves eternal and unforgettable, but eventually faded into a weak memory. Consequently, this endless cycle represents the inevitability of progress, but also raises the question of whether the past really needs to be completely forgotten to evolve. Finally, even though the Old Gods might be weaker, their continuous presence displays the importance of the past and its role in the core of civilizations, which shows that choosing between tradition and modernity is pointless, since they are both needed and, as put by



Shadow Moon, “today’s future is tomorrow’s yesterday” (Gaiman, 2001, p. 341), meaning that the cycle is bound to continue, and all that is new will eventually become old.

In conclusion, it becomes clear that the previously presented approach to the dilemma is possible due to fantasy. Since it is free of limitations and not tethered to reality, fantasy takes the abstract conflict between the old and the new and elevates it to the concrete realm in the form of an actual war. By shaping the impalpable into personified characters, fantasy is not used as a form of escapism, on the contrary, it brings the reader closer to the dilemma, since an abstract concept is now tangible. Therefore, the common perspective that fantasy is simply an escape and that these narratives do not develop real world issues appears to be a misconception, since *American Gods* displays humanity’s struggle to balance its origins with the inevitable changes brought by progress.

#### **4. UNCOVERING THE PAST**

The final analysis of the novel *American Gods* relates to its perspective of history and how it works along with fiction and fantasy in order to create a relevant and critical narrative. This approach is coherent with the work of Linda Hutcheon and her thesis of Historiographic Metafiction (1989), a key concept for post-modern literature. Thus, it is important to, first, pinpoint the most important parts of this theoretical basis, before analysing how it appears in *American Gods*.

Historiographic Metafiction deals with both literature and history, an intertextual approach that is typical of post-modern times and considers how the former has the power to critically analyze the latter. Although it goes against the modernist’s path of working with independent fields, the post-modern perspective still keeps the particularities of both literature and history, with no hierarchical relations between them, while recognizing how they work together. As exemplified by Hutcheon, “Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction” (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 4). Consequently, a critical approach to history is possible through literary texts, which are free to explore the possibilities and implications of “canonical” history, a concept that is also questioned in postmodernity.

By analyzing Gaiman’s novel, the presence of historiographical metafiction became clear, and it is seen through two main forms: the addenda named “Coming to America” in which the colonization period is explored, and through the gods themselves, who reminisce about the times when they were worshipped. In all of these moments it is possible to identify

the use of factual history as it is accepted worldwide, but the development of the novel adds a perspective that questions the past that is so easily accepted as the truth. To illustrate how this is done, this section presents examples of both of these forms of historiographic metafiction in *American Gods*.

First and foremost, the most obvious application of Hutcheon's thesis are the various addenda in the novel, titled "Coming to America", with several stories from the colonial period. In the second one of these sections, their narrator is exposed as Mr. Ibis, or ancient Egyptian god Thoth (God of writing and languages), who appears to be responsible for rectifying aspects of the past that are widely accepted. He starts the second section of "Coming to America" by stating:

The important thing to understand about American history, wrote Mr. Ibis, in his leather-bound journal, is that it is fictional, a charcoal sketched simplicity for the children, or the easily bored. For the most part it is uninspected, unimagined, unthought, a representation of the thing, and not the thing itself. It is a fine fiction (Gaiman, 2001, p. 73).

This introduction exposes the criticism that history is not a fact, but manipulated and "uninspected", which makes it closer to fiction than to the truth. Then, Mr. Ibis goes on to demystify the history beyond the colonization of the United States, a tale that glorifies the pilgrims and their sacrifice to create the land of freedom. When "In truth, the American colonies were as much a dumping ground as an escape, a forgetting place" (Gaiman, 2001, p. 73), where felons could go to serve their indenture, instead of being hanged. However, "You were also free to bribe a sea captain to return you to England before the terms of your transportation were over and done" (Gaiman, 2001, p. 73), exposing all the implications that came with the pilgrimage.

As the section continues, Mr. Ibis describes the life of Essie Tregowan, previously mentioned slave who was sold as a "milk maid" to a tobacco farmer, who serves as an example of the people responsible for colonizing the United States of America. Essie's story is used both to show the importance of memory in one's survival, as was argued before, and to uncover the truth about the process of colonization, depriving it of praise, since Essie only went to the U.S so she would not be hanged for her crimes in Britain. This exposure is the same concept developed by Hutcheon (1989) to describe post-modern literature and the use of historiographic metafiction, which stops romanticizing history and argues that the past is not a reliable truth. Thus, *American Gods* displays this crucial feature of post-modern narratives,

attempting to criticize the past by using fiction to explore other perspectives and question the position of history as an irrefutable truth.

Then, the other aspect that reflects the use of historiographic metafiction in this novel are the Gods themselves. To better understand this proposal, it is crucial to recall that the concept of memory moves the narrative, as the Gods need to be worshiped and remembered by humans to survive, otherwise they will eventually fade. In his agenda to overpower the gods of modernity, Wednesday (Nordic God Odin) recruits the gods from old religions to fight for his cause, which means he seeks out those who are also being forgotten by humanity. To achieve his goal, Wednesday also tries to convince the Goddess Easter, a moment that illustrates how the portrayal of deities in the novel is also an example of historiographic metafiction.

Easter first appears to the reader as the image of abundance, a curvaceous woman who is enjoying a rich picnic at the park. Easter's description leads to the idea of fertility, both physical and of the earth, the richness of a fruitful time. At first glance, the goddess appears to be doing well, with no danger of being forgotten, as the Easter holiday is still widely celebrated all around the world. She says it herself:

On my festival days they still feast on eggs and rabbits, on candy and on flesh, to represent rebirth and copulation. They wear flowers in their bonnets and they give each other flowers. They do it in my name. More and more of them every year (Gaiman, 2001, p. 242).

Nevertheless, Wednesday is not fooled by her appearance and sees the truth about the goddess, she is not worshiped anymore, not truly. Although her name is widely known, the meaning of it is long lost, and Wednesday proves it by asking a random person what is the meaning of Easter, to which they respond: "I think it's like Latin or something for 'Christ has risen,' maybe" (Gaiman, 2001, p. 243). Wednesday pushes it even more with a proposal that questions both the goddess and the reader: "Shall we go out onto the street, Easter my dear, and repeat the exercise? Find out how many passersby know that their Easter festival takes its name from Eostre of the Dawn?" (Gaiman, 2001, p. 244). This proposal exposes her true nature and her origin in Anglo-Saxon mythology, not at all associated with Christianity. Thus, the meaning of the celebration of Easter is altered, and although the symbols of rabbits and eggs are still used, they are no longer related to the goddess.

Consequently, by exposing the origins of the name and the real meaning of the celebration, the text is also exposing how Christianity devoured pagan religions by taking their celebrations and altering their meaning to serve its own agenda. Furthermore, the

exercise of asking people the meaning of Easter shows how history remains “uninspected” and the past is easily rewritten to serve the purpose of a few, which sustains the claim that the past is not a verified and unique truth. By doing so, this approach is not denying that the past existed, but it questions how specific perspectives of history are passed on and considered the truth, as exemplified by the meaning of Easter, which shows that “the loss of the illusion of transparency in historical writing is a step toward intellectual self-awareness that is matched by metafiction's challenges to the presumed transparency of the language of realist texts” (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 10). Therefore, the narrative illustrates how historiographic metafiction deals with history, not as an undeniable truth, but as a story that is disseminated and possibly changed, which means that it should be critically analyzed, a process that is done through fiction works like *American Gods*.

In conclusion, the narrative displays a critical view of the past, making a different approach towards the colonization of the United States and the exposure of the origins of Easter. This perspective is possible due to the nature of post-modern literature, which is embedded in historiographic metafiction and, consequently, questions what is considered the “truth”. Moreover, fantasy also plays an important role, since the situations that illustrate the use of historiographic metafiction happen due to the lack of commitment to the real world. Thus, *American Gods* shows how fantasy is able to manifest what has been made invisible (Jackson, 1981), and by uncovering cultural aspects it questions the nature of history and of the past, which is in itself an expression of historiographic metafiction.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The starting point of this research is that fantasy literature does not get proper academic recognition, a speculation that emerged from observing the scarce theoretical research about this literary genre. Then, it was noticed that fantasy is a primal part of literature and continues to be written and published across the globe throughout different cultures. Hence, the importance of conducting a research to comprehend what could have caused the downfall of fantasy, which was verified through a bibliographical analysis, and whether it still applies to the contemporary studies of literature.

Accordingly, it became clear that an object was necessary, especially to answer whether fantasy really is a peripheral phenomenon. Although fantasy can be traced back to the first literary pieces of different cultures, a post-modern narrative was more suitable since it could demonstrate the potential of other contemporary pieces. Thus, the novel *American Gods*

was singled out as a sample of post-modern fantasy works, due to its use of mythical beings, along with symbols that are personified (such as the Media or the Digital era) through fantasy's detachment from reality. This approach to mythology was a turning point while choosing the object for this research, since the use of old myths allows the reader to recognize cultural features while also questioning their values, as Čipkár (2019) points out:

Neil Gaiman is widely considered as one of the modern mythmakers who, rather than create fantastical worlds from scratch, utilize both Western and Eastern mythologies, adapting them to present-day readers' sensibilities (Čipkár, 2019, p. 100)

Thus, this recognition can be considered one of the ways that *American Gods* does dissociate from reality, since it continuously maintains a connection to several cultures.

Consequently, *American Gods* presented the side of fantasy that is often disregarded: its potential to expand complex discussions by offering different perspectives, such as humanity's difficulty in choosing between its traditions and the need to evolve. This conflict between tradition and modernity becomes tangible through the use of fantasy, which pushes the limits of the real world to reach abstract matters and shine more light into their implications. Hence, the personification of elements of the digital era, in order to demonstrate the shift from worshipping deities like Odin to idolizing the television and the internet in post-modernity. Throughout the novel, it is possible to see the many implications of choosing a side, as the narrative explores the positive and the negative aspects of both tradition and progress.

Finally, its relevance was also proven by contrasting the novel with Linda Hutcheon's theory of Historiographic Metafiction, a significant part of post-modern literary studies. Hutcheon (1989) demonstrates how literature is capable of reviewing history by questioning its "truth" and providing a different perspective on settled matters. As observed in this article, *American Gods* also provides another angle to several discussions that were almost fixed, such as the process of colonization in the United States of America, the nature of the pilgrims, and the presence of different cultures in U.S. territory. Therefore, this research illustrated the worth of fantasy to literary studies, as a form of literature that not only has a connection to reality (as opposed to the general belief) but it is able to explore the untouchable side of humanity, its intricate tribulations and provide a critical overview of what is sometimes considered as the "truth".

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