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Devilish Whispers: Milton's Influence on Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*

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Abstract

This article analyses how in Neil Gaiman's comic series entitled *The Sandman*, there is a great influence from the figure of Lucifer, the character at the core of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Furthermore, the article aims to engage with and portray a deeper understanding of how Milton's epic poem echoes in Gaiman's comic series, and especially how the characters of Morpheus and Lucifer are totally based on Milton's models. Yet, Gaiman is adapting the Miltonian narrative for newer audiences in a reinvention of one of the classics of English literature. Using Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* and the main ideas of inter and transmediality, this paper will try to build a bridge between Milton and Gaiman to analyse the correlations between the two. *Paradise Lost* greatly influences *The Sandman*, especially in the description of its characters, the conceptualisation of Hell and the concept of storytelling. By analysing their similarities and differences, readers will understand Gaiman's reinvention of the Miltonian Satan to illustrate how the frontier between good and evil might be blurrier than humanity tends to think.

Keywords: *Paradise Lost*; *The Sandman*; Adaptation; Transmediality; Intermediality.

Introduction

E. M. Foster once said "What is wonderful about great literature is that it transforms the man who reads it towards the condition of the man who wrote, and brings to birth in us also the creative impulse."[1] Most of us are inevitably drawn towards the morally-gray figures of literature, to those villains who are not only the dark side of heroes but encompass so much more. Definitely, that is the case for both John Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* and Lucifer Morningstar or Morpheus in Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*. From the critical perspective of intermediality, the aim of this article is to discern whether Neil Gaiman was just adapting the Miltonian narrative to a new medium, that of comics, or if, perhaps, he was going further, and was transfiguring it for the expectations of late-20th-century readers.

Adaptations –of films, novels, folktales, or theatre plays– are a crucial part of nowadays society as we are constantly bombarded with new film adaptations or novels made into video games. Sometimes, we even realise we have seen an adapted film just after seeing it. In other words, in the 21st century, we are surrounded by adaptations –some more easily spotted than others. Nevertheless, socially speaking,

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adaptations have been considered less valuable or of less quality than the original works.[2] A ground-breaking work for the study of adaptation was *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), by Linda Hutcheon – a literary theorist and Postmodern critic– who tried to shed light and take up the cudgels for adaptations. As she argues, "adaptations as adaptations" are similar to palimpsests (Hutcheon 2006, 8), since the two texts are interspersed in the same work. A palimpsest refers to a manuscript in which the original words have been erased and another text has been inscribed superimposing the original. Therefore, behind the new inscription, the original text can be read as well. She also states that "for the reader, spectator, or listener, adaptation as adaptation is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text" (Hutcheon 2006, 21). Therefore, when approaching a series of comics such as *The Sandman*, readers acquainted with John Milton's *Paradise Lost* will be more than familiar with the text. Likewise, an adapter –according to Hutcheon– is both an interpreter and a creator. She explains that, in order to adapt a given work, an author first approaches the to-be-adapted work and makes it their own to, later on, present it to the general public. Hence, adaptation should not be considered low-brow culture, but rather another interpretation of a text. Hence, *The Sandman* could be analysed as Neil Gaiman's revisit to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, especially the figure of Satan, who will appear in *The Sandman*, both the comics and its TV adaptation.

Additionally, there might be different reasons why adapters choose a given story to make it their own. The most obvious one seems to have to do with an economic aim so as to benefit from the original and then supersede it. However, that is not what Gaiman is trying to do with *The Sandman* as I see it. One of the arguments underlying this article will be how Neil Gaiman is using *The Sandman* to "contest the aesthetic or political values of the adapted texts to pay homage" (Hutcheon 2006, 20) to Milton's masterpiece. In fact, in Hutcheon's words, "whatever the motive, from the adapter's perspective, adaptation is an act of appropriating or salvaging, and this is always a double process of interpreting and then creating something new" (Hutcheon 2006, 20).

As a result, when we read *The Sandman* or watch its homonymous TV series adaptation, any viewer who is already acquainted with *Paradise Lost* will enjoy the work in a double process: as a new work of art and as an adaptation of Milton's work. This is enhanced by the ideas of Hutcheon, who states the pleasure in adaptation is enhanced when the audience realises the interconnection between the source and the adapted texts.

> This is the intertextual pleasure in adaptation that some call elitist and other call enriching. Like classical imitation, adaptation appeals to the intellectual and aesthetic pleasure of understanding the interplay between works, of opening up a text's possible meaning to the intertextual echoing. The adaptation and the adapted work merge in the audience's understanding of their complex interrelations (Hutcheon 2006, 117).

In the end, as Linda Hutcheon herself said, "we have always retold stories" (Hutcheon 2011, 0:42'-1:09'). As humans, we find pleasure in repeating stories, in knowing what will happen next. Adaptation goes

from one medium to another in which "different things get adapted in different ways" (Hutcheon 2006, 12).

Hutcheon would pave the work for the transmedia and intermediality studies which would appear both in academic journals and as monographs. One of the most relevant authors in that field is Lars Elleström (2018, 21), who argues in his work *Transmedial Narration. Narratives and Stories in Different Media* that "narration does not exist by itself; it happens when we communicate with each other. Consequently, narratives and stories are not something that we find floating around independently but something that is communicated by minds". Frank Eric Pointner and Sandra Eva Bochenhoff, in their article "Classic Emulated: Comic Adaptations of Literary Texts" (2010, 88) argue that "comics incorporate written language that exists on a page and have to be read one after another" (88) and they explain that "comics tell stories differently than prose texts" and that "there are aspects to the act of storytelling that comics are better equipped for than prose, and it thus seems reasonable to address the gulf that separates written language and pictures in storytelling" (2010, 89). In the case of *The Sandman*, Gaiman tells his story in pictures inspired by an epic poem rather than by a prose work, but that statement is still valid. In fact, following Pointner and Bochenhoff's assertion that "images have an advantage over prose texts in the depiction of space, […] Consequently, there are hardly any better renderings than comics based on literary sources" (2010, 92), and considering their study of "comic adaptations of literary texts that are based on the three foremost narrative genres: short story, novel, and narrative poetry" (92), I am going to offer my analysis from that third approach, that of the study of a comic adaptation (Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*), a literary text based on the genre of narrative poetry (John Milton's *Paradise Lost*), to show the means Gaiman employs to make Milton's 17th-century epic poem more attractive to contemporary young readers. Therefore, Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* serves as a theoretical framework in order to analyse how Milton's *Paradise Lost* echoes in Gaiman's *The Sandman* and its main characters, themes and arguments.

Milton's approach to Satan

The lure of the dark side has always been one of the *leitmotivs* of mankind's history and that can be traced back to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, especially to the character of Satan. Whether it is Lucifer tempting Eve or fan letters coming into the mailbox of Ted Bundy,[3] we –as humans– seem to be attracted by figures who lie in the shades of grey, rather than sticking to simple black or white. Modern villains are clever, witty and have astoundingly rhetorical speech. These are just some of the characteristics of Milton's Satan.

Before converting into a fallen angel, Satan was an archangel called Lucifer (literally meaning 'the one who carries the light'. *Lat. lux* meaning 'light' and *ferre* meaning 'to carry'). He was a pure, perfect, and divine angel whose only flaw was his immense pride, which led him to his fall. Thus, turning into a sombre, resentful, frustrated –and we could even argue 'human'– being. Therefore, "His jealousy makes him ugly in a very human way … his very human jealousy, envy, and desire demonstrate that the temper, despite his animal disguises and actions, has very human failings" (Dohal 2022, 999). Satan had never been the narrator of his own story until Milton's work: he had always been regarded as the evil antagonist

of God, the devil lurking in the shadows of the Christian tradition. Nevertheless, by making Satan not only the narrator but also the main character of *Paradise Lost*, Milton humanizes his figure by describing his ambitions, internal frustration, and failures. Nevertheless, this only makes him more appealing to the readers, becoming one of the most interesting characters in the epic poem. As Szu-Han Wang claims in her analysis of Milton's poem, "*Paradise Lost* becomes Milton's dreamland to politically voice the forbidden in real life, and to carry out his aspiration with reference to democracy and liberty to console his indignation and suffering" (Wang 2018, 1169).

Throughout the story, readers see how his unwillingness to be subjugated turns into a double-edged sword, as it is both the reason we admire him and the cause for his fall, whilst he continues his internal struggle with his own limitations and all the forces that seem to oppose him since the very beginning. Thus, he becomes the epitome of the tragic hero, tormented by a sempiternal split between his tragic and evil sides, by a nature he cannot escape. Moreover, within Satan, there is a permanent dichotomy between good and evil, which puts him in complete contraposition to Adam and Eve. While they are allowed to fall and then repent to earn their Father's forgiveness, Satan is permitted to fall, but because of his thirst for power, he cannot bring himself to plead forgiveness[4] but "though fallen he is still worth of admiration" (Angulo 2022, 24).

Probably, one of the most famous and interesting monologues of Satan is the one he delivers while on Mount Niphates (Book IV, lines 1-113). It is during this monologue that Satan himself admits he has chosen the path of evil and tries to explain the reasons why he did so. He overtly confesses that what he is doing is a perversion of what God does and realises that he would have acted in the same way even if he decided to plead for God's forgiveness. If he would repeat the same actions, then why repent in vain? Satan even states that he would have been tempted by power or he would have joined the rebellion if another of his comrades had started it. At this point, one questions himself: did Satan have any chance of altering his destiny at all? Is everything really a part of God's plan, then? Therefore, "Satan reigns superior in Milton's depiction of Pandemonium, garnering respect for his vision of overthrowing the kingdom of God on Earth and in Heaven" (Reeves 2018, 62).

He completely blames God for his fall.[5] One of the arguments the devil develops is that it was God's fault to make him rank so higher in the angel's hierarchy. Had Satan been created lower in the hierarchy of God's love, then he would have not been tempted by the thirst for power. The problem with power is that there is never an end humans can put to it since, when talking about ambition, obstacles are necessary for the consecution of the goals the individual has set. Therefore, following this idea, Satan would have never been able to stop. After overthrowing God, would that have been the end for him? No, because his thirst for power is limitless.

> For never can true reconcilement grow
> Where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep –
> Which would but lead me to a worse relapse
> And a heavier fall: so should I purchase dear
> Short intermission, bought with double smart.

> This knows my punisher – therefore as far
> From granting he as I from begging peace;
> (Book IV, lines 98-104)

Even when his torture ends, Satan knows that he will never be happy, since he has trapped himself in his own Hell. What God has done to him is bad, but what he is doing to himself is even worse. Satan feels unable to repent and ask for God's forgiveness, then he must find a solution. He starts to explore his possibilities of recovering God's trust and comes up with a brilliant idea: lying, something we –as readers– know he is a master of. He considers the possibility of meeting with God and telling him how he is feeling, trying to gain his respect showing his "remorse". Nevertheless, "this knows my punisher", he knows God will never trust him again. This demonstrates how the Almighty is the creator of the all-powerful plan that is the story of the Fall. If he cannot lie to God, then Satan is hopeless.

He realises he is immersed in his own trap. Hence, he must abandon all hope and become Hell incarnate. Satan's final resolution becomes clearer than ever. He must abandon himself to evilness to stop shifting from one nature to another. All throughout *Paradise Lost*, readers have seen how Satan's former glory goes back and forth. This is especially the case when he shows he is capable of loving Adam and Eve when he first sees them in the Garden of Eden (Micallef 2013). Therefore, as he knows he will never be as good as God, he decides to be the worst of his enemies, his complete opposite, but the immediate consequence of that is the fact that his fall becomes permanent. As he himself becomes Hell, the conversion to Satan is complete but Hell becomes, for him, a place in which he can be falling and falling endlessly. Therefore, he has to create a delusion of grandeur in order to survive and move on.

Paradise Lost is sometimes analysed as a tragedy rather than an epic poem. According to Aristotle, for a tragedy to be successful, it has to provoke a catharsis in the audience: the main character has to make the public feel sorry for them. Not only this, but they will also need to feel afraid for themselves, as they will believe the story and fear that this situation may end up happening to them. Aristotle proposes two terms that become highly relevant in Satan's monologue on Mount Niphates: *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*. Peripeteia refers to the moment in which the story turns tragic, the turning point in the plot in which the destiny of the hero completely changes (Aristotle 1997). In Satan's case, we can see how it is during this monologue that he realises he cannot go back and get God's forgiveness. Not because he is unable to do so, but because he does not want to. The moment in which he recognises this to himself marks his eternal fall, the peripeteia. On the contrary, the anagnorisis alludes to the crucial moment in which the tragic hero becomes aware of a capital truth that they have been blind to until that moment (Aristotle 1997). In *Paradise Lost*, Satan's anagnorisis also comes in Book IV, when the vision of the sun makes him remember his past glory. He used to be perfect before the Fall, and he now knows he will never be able to go back to that former state. Likewise, there is a play on words with the use of *Sun*, which clearly takes us back to *Son*. This shows how Satan will forever be jealous of his brother, Adam, who –he thinks– has usurped his place.

Sigmund Freud is regarded as the Father of Psychoanalysis and a very interesting approach to *Paradise Lost* can be through the German author. He defined the concept of "the uncanny" ('unheimlich') as what we feel alien to ourselves (Freud 2003). If we take this into account when we analyse the figure

of Satan, for him, the uncanny is his former nature as an angel, which he now feels completely alien to himself. His goodness has become his terror (his evil), which also links with Freud's *unheimlich*, since there is always an emphasis put on the fear towards the unknown.

Furthermore, in one of his most famous works, *The Ego and the Id*, the German psychoanalyst suggested that there were three selves living inside each one of us: the Id, the Ego and the Superego. The Id is driven by our animal instinct and it corresponds to our drive for pleasure and irrepressible desires. The Ego always strives to be as good as the Superego and tries to balance between the Id and the Superego figures. Lastly, the Superego itself is an "energetic reaction-formation against the Id" (Micallef 2013, 16), it is what a person should be like and, thus, becomes a role model for the attitude you should have. In terms of morality, the Id is completely unmoral, the Ego tries to be moral, and the Superego is *supermoral*. Therefore, in Milton's narrative, we can identify Adam and Eve with the Ego: as the creation of God's plan, they seek to be as perfect as their Father. On the other hand, God will be the representation of the Superego, since he is the one who makes all the rules and is the epitome of perfection –at least at first glance. Satan will, then, be the Id: completely unmoral and driven by pleasure and desire. What is more, "while he pretends to be an angel, he is clearly fallen, and he cannot conceal his real appearance any more than he can conceal his true inner self" (Micallef 2013, 42).

Nonetheless, the Superego –Freud tells us– is the only part of our conscience that can become as cruel as only the Id can be. Therefore, now readers may wonder who the Superego is then: Is it God or Satan? God, when he was challenged by the fallen as they rebelled, decided to doom them to a life of perpetual despair and torment. Satan's pride mirrors God's pride as they both are capable of performing the evilest deeds when they feel their position in power is contested. Consequently, Satan might appear to be the devil at first glance, but maybe he is more than what we can see on the surface. Even though goodness has become his major weakness and he has decided to relinquish it to hug evilness, Satan will forever be fated to the misery that the remembrance of his former status as an angel creates.

When readers first encounter the Garden of Eden, they do so through Satan's eyes. In that way, Milton is portraying the consequences of siding with the Prince of Hell, yet we do not clearly seem to care anymore whether we enter Paradise or not. Satan has progressively won our trust and has become a figure we are now acquainted with; we feel sorry for him. In other words, we have been seduced by his lies only to suffer Milton's rebuke later on. Satan becomes the example Milton uses in order to show his readers that they should not surrender to temptation if they want to get into Paradise and reunite with God. Satan might have fallen, but that only makes him more complex and humane because "he is ultimately real while the inhabitants of Heaven are remote and strange" (Uddin 2019, 648). Maybe it is time to go deep into the dark and see what lies beyond.

Neil Gaiman's approach to Satan in his comic adaptation

Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* has been sometimes labelled as Gothic fantasy, horror or even, as Nathan Teft stated "a madman's phantasmagoria" (Theft 2019, 13). It is true that the argument underlying the narration of *The Sandman* can become truly appealing, but if I were to highlight a figure inside it, that

would be the representation of Satan. Even though, at first glance, it would be fairly easy to correlate the Satanic figure with the character of Lucifer Morningstar in *The Sandman* series, I will argue that a character such as Dream can also be taken as a Luciferian symbol.

Lucifer Morningstar

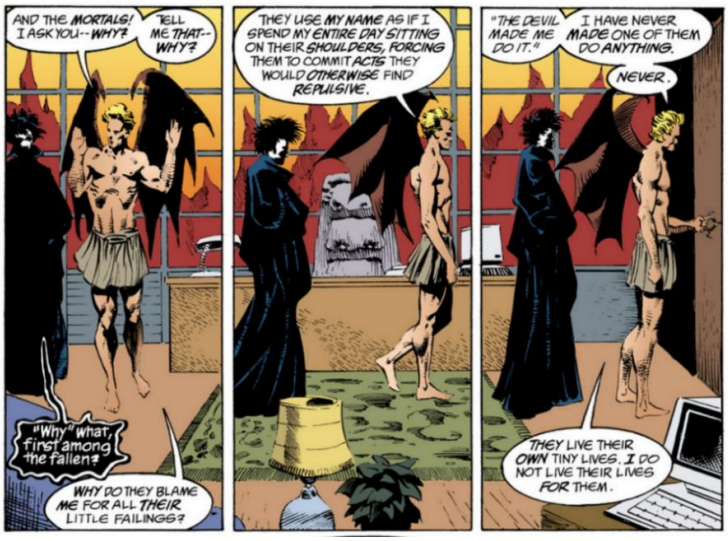
The Sandman is divided into 10 different volumes, but Lucifer takes the centre of the stage during the one volume called *Season of Mists* (which corresponds to volume 4), where Morpheus descends into the pits of Hell to free his former lover Nada. No sooner does Dream arrive in Hell, than he finds Lucifer Morningstar –the king of this realm– closing it down. He has decided he will no longer be the monarch of Hell because he has grown tired of the responsibility that comes with this abyss of doom. What is interesting about this volume is the way Neil Gaiman portrays not only Lucifer's figure but also the nature of Hell, free will and change.

Lucifer's abdication of his throne gives him the power of choosing, allowing him to decide on his destiny for the first time –or at least, what it seems to be his first time. As Souza e Paula argues "the fallen angel, is aware of possible alternatives and chooses among them, first rebelling and second abdicating; with both acts, Lucifer achieves changes" (L. S. Souza e Paula 2014, 2). Nonetheless, after giving Dream the keys to the gates of Hell, he wonders how much this was –or still is– part of God's omnipotent plan while his eyes remain covered in shadows. This allows the readers to envision a Lucifer who is deeply preoccupied with the nature of his own being: why is he doing what he is doing? Does he have any free will at all? That reminds us of Satan's introspection in *Paradise Lost*:

> Hadst thou the same free Will and Power to stand?
> Thou hadst: whom hast thou then or what to accuse,
> But Heav'ns free Love dealt equally to all?
> Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate,
> To me alike, it deals eternal woe.
> (Book IV, lines 66-70)

In the end, he is tired of being a representation of everything the population fears, he just wants to be freed from the damnation that being the incarnation of doom is. Therefore, he decides to quit his obligations and make Morpheus inherit Hell. This very act of emancipation can be understood as Gaiman's means to make Lucifer completely destroy the binary of good and evil as well as the humanisation of this particular character that comes as a result of this. Readers are now aware that the former king of Hell is capable of reflection and they are left with the doubt of whether he is the one to blame for his own fall. Likewise, if that is the case and he proves to be just another piece in God's huge chessboard, then he cannot be inherently evil. Morality is, then, deconstructed only to be seen as the many shades of grey in between the extreme black or white that it previously was made of.

Therefore, identity in *The Sandman* is constructed through the power and ability to change a character's present or past. That is the path chosen by Lucifer, who decides to open a late-night club in LA. The devil himself explains to Dream how he has become tired of humans blaming him for all their desperation.



The Sandman, Chapter 2, #23, 1989: 18.

With this panel, we are reaffirmed in our idea that Lucifer is not as evil as many may think. As he says, he is not the one deciding on our own wrongdoing, he is just the one we blame so as to have an excuse for our actions. In the end, we are the creators of our own hell for it is more a state of mind than a concrete place. Moreover, in *The Sandman*, there is that underlying Miltonian belief that Hell is a state of mind and not a particular location we should go to repent our sins, but that would be explained further later in the article.

As hell is not his own creation but our own, Lucifer is not guilty, but rather humanised as a character who had no choice in the past, and, thus, he has decided to change his *status quo* and quit his responsibilities. He is tired of fighting and does not want the role of prince of hell anymore, thus becoming "a postmodern mythic being: a creature of myth who laughs at his own paradoxes and rejects his own mythology" (Lau 2015, 36). Therefore, in order to change his own story, he has to build a new one for himself by closing Hell and relinquishing his role to Dream. His new existence is one governed by free will, change and adaptation, escaping from the patterns that had encapsulated him in the past.

The Sandman: Morpheus, the Dream Lord as a Satanic figure

As mentioned at the start of this section, Lucifer Morningstar may not only be the only Satanic figure in *The Sandman*, for Dream himself might be considered to be a devilish being, an atypical representation of Lucifer up to some point. Morpheus is the main protagonist of Neil Gaiman's comic series and he is mainly labelled as the Dream Lord. Dream is an abstract personification of a truly ambiguous function such as dreams and nightmares. He is, in himself, a representative of the unconscious thoughts that come to us as humans at night. Dream is neither entirely good nor inherently bad, he is both nightmares and dreams, both lights and shadows, and that is one of the characteristics of Lucifer: he is the rebelious angel who decided to fight God's supreme rule but was punished to the abyss of Hell as a result of his betrayal.

Hence, Morpheus proves to be a round and three-dimensional character who has to go on a quest to complete his duties, whilst embarking on a self-discovery of his own humanity that will only lead to his ultimate destruction. Dream is a seemingly invincible being on a path to becoming human. He is mainly driven by his obligations both inside the Dreaming and out of his realm and, despite not always being the main character in *The Sandman*'s individual stories, he is always lurking in the shadow since "where there are stories, there is lord Morpheus" (Reilly 2011, 25). Therefore, we can understand Dream as a representation of the Byronic or Romantic antihero, from his physical appearance –tall, pale, fully dressed in black and gaunt– to his temper, for he is presented as a silent, mysterious, and detached character who deeply hates his own existence. Interestingly enough, Milton's Satan and the figure of the first Fallen was one of the main characters the Romantics were focused on and interested in.[6]

By the same token, even though he is presented as such at first, he is humanized as the story progresses. This is clearly seen in how his friendship with Hob Gadling develops: something that started as a mere wager between a human and one of the Endless, finished with a strong and everlasting friendship between two beings who lost everything because of the passing of time. Nonetheless, the Dream Lord saw himself as alienated from the world surrounding him even until his own death. He compared himself to an island, where nobody could free him from his responsibilities and, if we deepen in the metaphor, to a place nobody could reach. This is truly reinforced when the readers realise that dreams are ultimately what remains throughout time, they do not change (Yee 2018). Dreams and nightmares may evolve in one way or another, but the source will always be the same and it will remain still in time forever. And that is one of Morpheus's main sources of pain. He cannot bring himself to do what Lucifer did, since he is not able to give up on his obligations and leave the Dreaming behind.

The Sandman, The Tempest, #75, 1989: 38.

Dream refers to himself as the prince of stories and the king of dreams. Metaphorically speaking, this reinforces the aimlessness of Dream since humans are the real kings and queens of the stories he is just the prince of[7]. This perfectly aligns with Jørgen Bruhn (2016)'s understanding of media production: "All texts, including literary texts, inevitably reflect a mixed constellation" (3). Morpheus is a constellation of human dreams and nightmares. The latter will ultimately be the reason why dreams even

exist in the first place. If there were no people dreaming, then Dream himself would not be needed. This is the same issue that Morpheus presents when he verbally fights the demon who had stolen his helmet. The one thing that is crucial –even in hell– is hope, for this is what allows us to dream of a better life. "What power would HELL have if those here [referring to Hell] imprisoned were NOT able to DREAM of HEAVEN?" (issue #4, p. 23).

The Sandman, A Hope in Hell, #4, 1989: 23.

On the other hand and continuing with the representation of Dream as a Luciferian symbol, Dream is a prison in his own story. This is clearly portrayed in how Morpheus is contraposed to his brother Destiny in *Season of Mists*. Whilst Dream serves as a representative of the Romantic fantasy, Destiny is a representation of Victorian Realism (Jódar 2007). The eldest of the Endless is the personification of order –represented by straight lines and the eternal knowledge of the future that is to come, portrayed at the same time with a book, the traditional source of academic knowledge– while Dream is characterised by curves and the abstraction of the Dreaming with its fantastical creatures and "fairytalesque" locations. Nevertheless, Dream is encapsulated by tradition, he is still in time and duty and cannot adapt to the rapid development of the world which surrounds him. Somehow, he is even encaged in the actual vignettes of the comic itself.

The Sandman, Chapter 9, #49, 1989: 7.

In this example at the end of *Brief Lives* (vol. 7, issue #49), the lines separating the different panels make up a prison for the Sandman, encapsulating the character in his own narrative, making him unable to go forward and progress, turning him into a slave of the story. Thus, Dream becomes his own nemesis.

In light of the aforesaid, then, Neil Gaiman's approach to Satan is a very complex issue when it comes to the characters of *The Sandman*. As I have been examining in this section of the article, both Lucifer Morningstar and Morpheus can be labelled as Satanic symbols for different and varied reasons. In Neil Gaiman's comics, each human creates a different version of reality that can be read and seen through their eyes. Each one of them envisions Morpheus in a different way, thus creating a distinct universe of their own, where they are the main protagonists. Whether readers want Lucifer or Morpheus to be Satan is up to them. Nonetheless, I personally believe both have characteristics that make them attractive as Satanic anti-heroes. Both Dream and Lucifer prove to be the manifestation of the uncertainty of existence, making them both human in one way or another. Neil Gaiman subtly provokes the readers to reject complete absolutes and embrace the shades of grey between black and white, between good and evil. And, sometimes, the truly Luciferian characters are the ones found in those grey areas where both dreams and nightmares find one another in one of the Dreaming's Soft Places –where reality and dreams meet.

The comparison of John Milton's Satan and Neil Gaiman's comic

In this particular section, I shall offer a comparison between Neil Gaiman's comic series *The Sandman* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In this case, I will tackle this comparison by drawing upon Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation*. As I will try to explain in this particular section, *Paradise Lost* greatly influences *The Sandman* series, particularly in the description of the main characters, the representation and conception of Hell in contraposition with heaven and the way Gaiman draws upon storytelling.

Linda Hutcheon sees adaptation as both a process and a product. Therefore, adaptations are a process of interpreting and creating something new: by transposing the medium or changing the mode of portrayal

of the work of art, Hutcheon argues that new audiences get accustomed to the classics while envisioning a new perspective on the former. In the case of *Paradise Lost*, Neil Gaiman uses this epic poem as a source of inspiration but also transposes it. Through the use of comics, *The Sandman* is a revisitation of Milton's narrative for younger and modern audiences to approach *Paradise Lost* in a subtle way. What is more, Gaiman acknowledges his using of Milton's representation of Hell and the influence Milton had on its comic (Bender 109).

This also raises questions of authorship, since Gaiman relies on a myriad of stories and myths to construct *The Sandman*. Therefore, is he truly original or just copying the classics? Humans are storytellers by nature and this is just another example of how creativity has always been an element of adaptation. Consequently, *The Sandman* essentially relies on a compound of reference works, but stays original in the portrayal of the characters and their evolution throughout the plot, thus creating a space for the author –in this case, Neil Gaiman– to honour those works he is influenced by. In the crafting of *The Sandman*, Gaiman is not only adapting previous works, but he is accommodating them for new audiences of the 21st century to enjoy them. According to Tim Evans: "Universals, for Gaiman, do not reside exclusively in literary or fine art canons or in folklore, but must be pursued, and re-created from, elements throughout the world's cultures, genres and art forms" (Teft 2019, 23). Therefore, Neil Gaiman uses The Sandman to recreate characters that young audiences may not be familiar with in an attempt to revise their story, enhancing some of their features and imbuing them with new meanings that resonate with contemporary readers.

Both Lucifer Morningstar and Satan in *Paradise Lost* are transgressors in Heaven and in Hell. They rebelled against the Creator in order to free themselves from the situation that was trapping them. They both fall because they did not conform themselves with the idea of being submissive even if they were meant to be gentle and humble angels deserving the grace of the almighty. On the contrary, Lucifer and Satan are conscious of their choices and decide to choose freedom over duty. Therefore, "Gaiman's Lucifer appears to adopt the same characteristics that some critics ascribe to Milton's Satan, whom they believe to be portrayed as a tragic anti-hero deployed into fulfilling the Creator's predestined plan" (Lau 2015, 20).

They know they can change their current reality and decide to do so. Nevertheless, in *Paradise Lost*, readers are told about how the fallen angel changes his name when his fall is deemed to be permanent, converting into Satan –the ruler of Hell. Nonetheless, in *The Sandman*, contemporary readers are presented with a Lucifer who is already fallen and king of a realm he thinks worthless to fight for, but his name has not changed, he is still the "light bearer" even though he clearly does not seem to be ashamed of his actions. Thus, Lucifer seems to be a creature that, even when he is not entirely good, still is not related to sin, suffering or pain. One similarity that, again, links these two figures is their questioning of whether everything that has happened –including their rebellion and the consequent fall– was another part of God's overbearing plan. Therefore, "the episode involving Lucifer's abdication resignifies Satan's conduct in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (Souza e Paula 2014, 2). Nevertheless, the figure of Lucifer is not the only influence from Milton's *Paradise Lost* that can be seen in Gaiman's comic series.

In *Season of Mists*, some of the main themes that are portrayed and debated are free will, change or death, and it is no coincidence that these are also some of the main tenets of *Paradise Lost*. It is during the fourth volume of *The Sandman* when Gaiman directly references Milton (Chapter 1, #22) and his Paradise through the character of Lucifer.

The Sandman, Chapter 1, #22, 1989: 21.

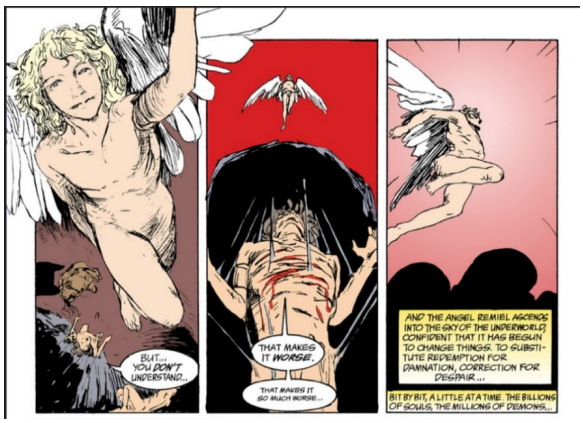
In this vignette, Lucifer is in a metatextual dialogue with Milton's Satan (Jahlmar 2015). He is reflecting on his own nature as the Devil and his free will. When he utters these words, Cain thinks they are his, that he is not quoting Milton's Satan. And that is what readers think at first too: why wouldn't Lucifer say something like that? He is an evil creature, unable to change his own reality. Nonetheless, "Milton was blind", Morningstar states. Cain's and our conception of the Fallen is wrong, he is indeed capable of changing his own reality, since his decision to close up Hell and leave his throne proves him right. However, while Lucifer utters these words, his eyes remain hidden in shadows. Does he really think that this is possible? Do we, as readers, believe he is able to change? There is a change from Milton's portrayal of Satan in Gaiman's Lucifer. With this quote, Gaiman is stating how Milton's devil is trapped in his own story and completely unable to change his situation. On the other hand, his Lucifer is freer and has the ability to change the *status quo* as he wishes. Whereas the first is static and perpetually damned to be a snake, the other has the possibility of changing and becoming free (Jahlmar 2015). This quote could also be understood as a reference to John Milton, the poet. While he was writing *Paradise Lost*, Milton was almost blind. Therefore, Morningstar's words hint at the polysemic nature of blindness, telling the readers that Milton not only was wrong but also physically blind.

By the same token, Remiel is one of the most interesting side characters in *Season of Mists*. Despite his loyalty towards God, he is split between his desire to rebel against the injustice of his and Duma's duty to be the new monarchs of Hell and his fear of the punishment if he does rebel. He proves to be unable to follow Lucifer's footprints, which makes him one of the most pitiable characters in this story arc. In order to redeem Hell and its damned souls, he decides that hurting demons is the better way for them to achieve salvation. But he does not take into account what the cursed actually feel and Remiel

does not even consider the possibility of the doomed souls wanting to be punished. Therefore, and during the whole volume, we see Remiel's progressive transition from a position of purity towards a rebellious state in which he does not want to contradict God's plan because he is afraid of his own Fall. Nevertheless, we could argue that he has already fallen with the mere thinking of betraying God. This obviously resembles the moment in which Milton's Satan considers the possibility of lying to God and its potential consequences. Moreover, Remiel's face remains in shadows while these thoughts run through his mind, pointing back to Lucifer's vignette.

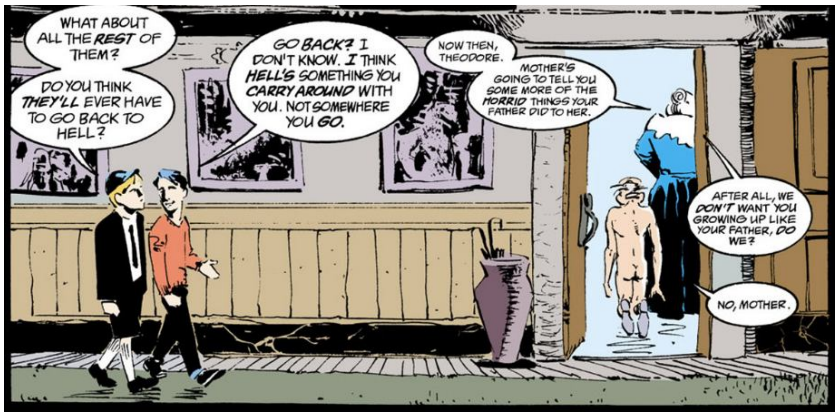
The Sandman, Chapter 6, #27, 1989: 13.

Another aspect in which *The Sandman* builds upon *Paradise Lost* is in the symbiotic relationship between Heaven and Hell and the conception of the latter. As I have stated before, Milton's Satan understands Hell as a state of mind and a place he will never be able to flee from, try as he might. Nevertheless, in Gaiman's narrative, Hell seems also to be a mental place, but one which humans decide to delve into in order to get rid of their sins. In the end, according to Gaiman, hell is a choice the damned decide to choose. In *Season of Mists*, we see how hell is symbolically left behind by Lucifer and we could even argue that it is transformed into a kind of Heaven (Cruz 2014), but the damned souls do not want to get rid of their punishments.



The Sandman, Epilogue, #28, 1989: 23.

Hell is the other side of the coin that is Heaven. It is a necessary stage for those who have sinned to be punished and eventually get the path towards salvation. This echoes Milton's conception of Hell as mirroring Heaven. This can also be connected with a dialogue between two students on issue #28. Here readers see how the metaphysical debate over what to call Hell is the core of the fourth volume of *The Sandman.* In this case, one of the boys reminds the reader about how Satan proclaims, in *Paradise Lost,* that he himself is hell, coming to the bitter realization that Hell is a state of mind he himself anthropologically embodies. Therefore, he will never be able to abandon it.



The Sandman, Chapter 4, #25, 1989:24.

In addition to all of this, storytelling is at the core of *The Sandman*. Gaiman's narrative story arcs in this comic series take its readers to otherworldly realms. However, we are always reminded that the Dreaming is placed as a different perspective of reality, as a kingdom that we can only enter when dreaming, when the unconscious arises. This subtle otherness reminds us of Freud's *unheimlich*. The uncanny refers to those unknown places which we are allured by even if they are too dark for our eyes to see or too obscure for our minds not to fear. Furthermore, both Milton's Hell and the Dreaming do not apply to the rules of Earth nor do they follow the rules of the Creator, since they are both presented as a transcendence of the norms. In doing this, "Gaiman searches out elements in a story that would not work with today's context anymore and adapts or replaces them so that they fit in with the readers' expectations again." (Lauwers 2016, 15). This resembles Hutcheon's idea of transposing the medium when adaptations are concerned. In order for the new audiences to understand Milton's *Paradise Lost,* Neil Gaiman borrows some of its ideas in order to make them more appealing to new audiences. What is more, the readers of *The Sandman* will surely understand Morpheus's story if they are acquainted with Satan's. Gaiman completely changes Satan's context and depicts the opposition of Hell and Heaven as something that is not static but malleable. Instead of showcasing a Lucifer that is static, he decides his own Morningstar will rebel not against God but his own mobility. Instead, the one character that appears as unable to move forward is Morpheus, the Dream Lord, encapsulated in his own narrative.

Therefore, Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation* helps us understand the many ways in which Neil Gaiman is delving into John Milton's narrative in *Paradise Lost*, not only to reenact some of its main ideas, but also to renovate them –thus highlighting their importance. In the end, even though *The*

Sandman and *Paradise Lost* do not seem to be related at first glance except for Lucifer's quoting Milton, they do have more in common if we read between the lines. Both Satan and Lucifer are rebellious creatures that appeal to the reader, and Morpheus is also one of those characters that is trapped by his own responsibilities and, in the end, by his own narrative. That obviously resembles Milton's Satan acknowledging himself as the personification of hell itself.

Even though Hutcheon's insights on adaptation theory serve as the perfect framework for the analysis of Gaiman and Milton's work, these can also be analysed through the concepts of intermediality and transmediality. In the 1960s, Marshall McLuhan famously proclaimed that "the medium is the message", thus implying that every aspect of human communication may be influenced by external factors such as ideology, history or culture as a whole. Using the white pebbles that can be found in any beach, McLuhan offers a very enlightening example: these rocks are not normally taken as a medium. Yet, in the Brothers Grimm's Hansel and Gretel, the white pebbles serve as the perfect example of a medium since they are telling a message. By laying white pebbles on the ground, Hansel is leaving a reminder of the path that leads them towards their worst nightmare. Therefore, acting in the same way as Hansel's white pebbles, Gaiman is leaving hints in his narrative for avid readers who are acquainted with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. One of these is the direct reference to Milton that is to be found in *The Sandman*'s storyline, for instance. Hence, this aligns with McLuhan idea of media as the "invisible but crucial basis of human communication" (Bruhn and Schirrmacher 2021, 10).

Thus, transmedial and intermedial studies help readers acquire a deeper understanding of the narratives they are taking part of since, more often than not, these are influenced by other types of media such as in the case of Gaiman's *The Sandman*. Moreover, adaptation in itself is sometimes understood as transmedial process because it entails the transferring of information from one medium to another. As Manheim (2014) cleverly explains in his work,

> Adaptation in a s transmedial context is less concerned with offering new interpretations of original world or stories. Moe often than not, the form adapted texts take crucially depends on their specific functions in the whole multitexts: they provide the recipients with complementary experiences, offer new information, perspectives, modes of perceiving and feeling, they broaden and deepen fascinating worlds, complete stories, impart knowledge, allow for practical application, open up ways of creative collaboration or allocate cultural capital (14).

Humans are a conundrum of stories. As Neil Gaiman himself said, "We who make stories know that we tell lies for a living. But they are good lies that say true things, and we owe it to our reader to build them as best as we can" (Gaiman 2016, 31).

In constructing his Sandman, Gaiman reconstructed Milton to create a world in which the reader can get lost into. As dreams themselves, *The Sandman* is a series of narratives tied together which do not seem to have much in common but for the presence –sometimes weak– of its main character, Morpheus. Nonetheless, they prove how important stories and adaptations are while reinforcing Hutcheon's thoughts on them as palimpsests. A common reader might enjoy *The Sandman*, but a reader who is already

familiarised with *Paradise Lost* will luxuriate in the number of references to it that can be found in Gaiman's work. Sometimes, we only need a light in the midst of darkness to clear our path and Milton's work proves to be one of the many flashlights that Gaiman gives his readers to find their path towards salvation –or maybe towards Hell.

4. Conclusion

As I have explained in the previous pages, the difference between light and darkness or between good and evil is very subtle. Heroes might also find obstacles in their journey which they may try to overcome in villainous ways. Thus, villains might be depicted as the darkest side of these heroic characters. Nonetheless, once readers or viewers start delving into their particular stories and try to understand the reasons behind their actions, everything begins to change. Once we know why Satan blames himself for his own Fall or we learn how his thoughts consume him, we end up sympathising with him. Not only that, but we may even try to put ourselves in his shoes, comparing our situation with his. That is the moment in which the narrative achieves its goal: the reader is allured by Satan and makes an effort to understand his motives and, perhaps, tries to excuse them even if they seem morally questionable.

The same happens with Lucifer and Morpheus in *The Sandman*. Readers are instantly mesmerised by Gaiman's narrative and storytelling: how he develops the worldbuilding, how interesting the magic system is and how relatable his characters are. Therefore, readers find themselves trying to do the same with Morpheus and Lucifer as they did with Satan: they are trying to understand what happened to these characters for them to be as they are now. In the end, there is no complete good whose mirrored image is extreme evil. As both *Paradise Lost* and *The Sandman* make clear, in all light there is darkness, and all darkness needs light. Every Creator needs its Lucifer, every Morpheus needs its death, and for light to be visible, there needs to be darkness before. Maybe, in the end, the mind is indeed its own place and, in itself, can make a Heaven of Hell and a Hell of Heaven[8] and we are too afraid to visit the dark side to find out. Maybe Hell is just a state of mind humans decide to delve into to redeem themselves.

Pointner and Bochenhoff's perspective has been a perfect framework for my study, since it has allowed me to explore the ways in which Neil Gaiman approached John Milton's epic poem, both borrowing some of his main ideas and also adapting them to contemporary reader's tastes, renovating them and even, taking them a step further: Milton's Satan and Gaiman's Lucifer are both rebellious and appealing characters; the latter actually manages to challenge his own nature and fate, leaving hell to live his own life. And then, Morpheus will take up the Miltonian role of Satan: trapped by his own responsibilities and narrative, he will finally acknowledge himself as the personification of hell.

همسات شيطانيّة: تأثير جون ميلتون على سلسلة قصص رجل الرمل - فيرتيقو *(رجل الرمل)*، لنيل جيمان

أليسيا فرنانديز فينيا
باحثة مستقلة، أليسيا فرنانديز فينيا، إسبانيا

تتناول هذه الورقة البحثيّة بالتحليل التأثير الكبير لشخصية (لوسيفر)الشخصية الرئيسة في الملحمة الشعرية لـ جون ميلتون *(الفردوس المفقود)* في سلسلة القصص المصورة المقترحة *(رجل الرمل)*، لنيل جيمان، وتهدف الورقة كذلك إلى تناول ووصف فهم أعمق لكيف أن صدى ملحمة ميلتون في سلسلة جيمان المصورة، وبخاصة شخصيات مورفيوس ولوسيفر، يعتمد اعتماداً كاملاً على نماذج ميلتون، ومع ذلك، يُكيِّف جيمان السرد الميلتوني ليجعله مناسبًا لجماهير جديدة في إعادة اختراع لواحدة من كلاسيكيات الأدب الإنجليزي. وبالاستعانة بكتاب *(نظرية التكيف)* لـ ليندا هاتشيون ومن خلال الأفكار الرئيسة للوسائط البينيّة والعابرة، تحاول هذه الورقة بناء جسر بين ميلتون وجيمان لتحليل العلاقات المترابطة بين الاثنين، تؤثر ملحمة *(الفردوس المفقود)* اللغات المقترحة كثيراً على سلسلة قصص، وبخاصة في وصف شخصياته وتصور مفهوم "النار" ومفهوم رواية القصص. ومن خلال تحليل أوجه التشابه والاختلاف بينهما، سوف يفهم القراء فكرة إعادة جيمان لاختراع الشيطان الميلتوني لتوضيح كيف قد تكون الحدود بين الخير والشر أكثر ضبابيّة مما يعتقده البشر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفردوس المفقود; رجل الرمل – فيرتيقو; التكيف; ترانسميديالِيتي; الوسيطة.

Endnotes

[1] Forster, Edward Morgan. "Anonymity: An Enquiry", *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951).

[2] For further information on the inferiority of adaptations, see Naremore, James, ed. 2000a. *Film Adaptation*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

[3] Robert Bundy (1946-1989) was an American serial killer known for kidnapping, raping, and killing numerous young women and girls in the 1970s. He finally confessed to 30 murders committed in seven states between 1974 and 1978 after more than a decade of denial. In order to catch women's attention in public places, he would either pretend to be physically impared (Satan appears before Eve as a Serpent, the basest of animals, because it can only move by crawling) or impersonate an authority figure.

[4] John Milton probably found inspiration for his Satan in Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (1592), whose main character's thirst for knowledge also prevented him from asking for forgiveness, although in Act V, when he realized his end was near, he did ask Christ for mercy (Marlowe V.ii.156-158). It is also worth pointing out that *Paradise Lost* is written in blank verse, the same as Marlowe's and Shakespeare's plays.

[5] In this, Satan differs from Dr Faustus, since the latter ends up admitting that he himself and Lucifer are the only ones to blame for the terrible fate that he is irremediably led to (V.ii.191-192).

[6] See William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), John Keats's annotated edition of *Paradise Lost* (1807), Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), *The Defence of Poetry* (1819), Lord Byron's *Manfred* (1816-17).

[7] For more information on Morpheus as a prince of stories and his role below -and not above- humans see Sara Reilly's *Old Made New: Neil Gaiman's storytelling in The Sandman.*

[8] Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*, Book I, lines 254-255.

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