

**“Think of us as symbols”: Embodied Gods and Material Worship
in Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods***

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MA Thesis

English, Language Specialist Path

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University of Turku

March 2020

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UNIVERSITY OF TURKU

School of Languages and Translation Studies/ Faculty of Humanities

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MA Thesis, 78 pp., appendices 7 pp.

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This thesis analyzes the connection between beliefs and their material representation in Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* (2001). The aim is to show how ideas and matter converge in the creation of gods and the material ways to worship them. Each god originates from nature or man-made innovations, and their embodiment represents the material origin of the belief. Believers then worship these gods, forming a bodily and emotional connection. The analysis demonstrates how technology and science are religious belief systems that resemble traditional religions and mythologies, in addition to how the deities that represent technoscience and contemporary innovations are comparable to traditional gods. Additionally, this thesis speculates what the prevailing paradigms and their gods are in the present-day America.

The two primary frameworks this thesis utilizes are Pascal Boyer's (2001) and Stewart Guthrie's (1993) cognitive theories and a material theory of religion proposed by David Morgan (2010). The cognitive theories demonstrate how ideas of gods stem from nature by interpreting and discovering humanlike agencies, and the material theory of religion conceptualizes how religion's material practices can be analyzed by focusing on body, feeling, and performance. An additional theme to consider is space which, together with Charles Taylor's (2007) notion of immanence, finalizes the analysis of material practices. The understanding of religion is first built on William James's (1902) division of personal and collective religion and, later on, how technoscience as a belief system resembles a religion.

Keywords: material religion, agency, animism, anthropomorphism, technoscience, religious practices, immanence, paradigm shift

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1 Introduction

Have you thought about what it means to be a god? [...] It means you give up your mortal existence to become a meme: something that lives forever in people's minds, like the tune of a nursery rhyme. It means that everyone gets to recreate you in their own minds. You barely have your own identity any more. Instead, you're a thousand aspects of what people need you to be. And everyone wants something different from you. Nothing is fixed, nothing is stable. (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 504)

This quotation is from a character in Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* (2001) who knows firsthand how it feels to be exploited by humans to suit their needs. The speaker is Jesus. In a conversation with the novel's protagonist Shadow, Jesus discusses what a deity is, stating that to satisfy the need for something divine, human minds create gods by modifying already existing versions of them. Gods exist in plurality, in numerous versions, and even this version of Jesus is Gaiman's modification of the son of God. Humans have the ability to alter gods, and for many, this might be a blasphemous idea, but it certainly invites to think about the nature of divinity. It matters little whether one believes in gods because it is evident that they do exist – at least as ideas and characterizations. To better conceptualize gods, there are some questions to consider: are gods transcendent beings beyond human's reach, are they mortal beings who possess superpowers, or do they exist solely as ideas and stories because humans created them? Certainly, whatever gods are, their divinity is hardly omnipotent. Based on the quote, one can easily interpret gods as 'mortal' tools, i.e. temporary instruments, whose lifespan can be extended by reinventing their identities. People have a role in creating, maintaining, and changing gods, but to what extent?

This ambivalence encapsulates the problem of godhood. Many mythologies have divine beings that control nature and animals, so are gods then inherently nature-related? How about gods of war, theater, chastity, or archery? The essence of these gods is quite elusive, but there still seems to be a connection to physical bodies and materiality, which is the case with most gods. Could one therefore argue that other material entities, e.g. ATMs, guns, or airplanes, have the potential to be gods? I would happily say so and state without hesitation that modern medicine, social media, and technology are new religions with gods such as insulin, Snapchat, and smartphones. This spectrum of gods and religions is my starting point, and I wish to examine how it is presented in Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods* (2001). As its name implies, gods are present in the novel: they are American, foreign, old, new, traditional, and modern. This diverse godhood provides a fruitful source for analyzing what the nature of gods

is and what constitutes as one. The gods come from all parts of the world, but the novel specifically asks: what does it take to be an American god? In this thesis, I will provide one answer to this.

The search for academic papers and analyses written about *American Gods* yields only few results. In 2017, the number of search results spiked because the novel was announced to have a TV adaptation by Starz, also called *American Gods*, and since then, analyses of the show have outnumbered those of the novel. Quite possibly, the series will increase the popularity of the novel, but as of now, there are clear gaps in the novel's research possibilities. Mythology and identity are central themes in the novel, which makes them frequent research topics as well. Mathilda Slabbert's and Leonie Viljoen's (2006) analysis of *American Gods* explores the shamanic elements in Shadow's story and portrays the novel from a mythical perspective, and Rut Blomqvist (2012) places similar emphasis on myths, connecting them to identity building and the construction of cultural meanings in the novel. Another obvious theme is American religiosity. Considering how the new gods embody science and technology, these need to be included in religion, and over the course of this thesis, I will analyze the formation of godhood. My aim is to show how all the American gods comprise a dichotomy of human ideas and materiality that stems from nature and man-made innovations, turning them into materialized ideas. Robert William Jones (2015) has also approached Gaiman's novel from a material viewpoint, but his exploration of body and space aims to understand how the concept of home is constructed, whereas my analysis of bodies and space is connected to a larger discussion on material religious practices. One final theme to consider is postmodernism, and Irina Rata (2015, 111) and Siobhan Carroll (2012, 324) suggest that it could be linked to the novel through intertextuality, lost identities, and the lack of harmony in the novel's society. However, my reading presents a different conclusion. Change in postmodernism often lacks structure, but in my discussion of paradigm shifts, I emphasize an organized change: gods might die and fight against each other, but this is a pattern and the survival of beliefs is a matter of controlled change.

My theoretical framework is a combination of religion's cognitive theory and materialist theory. By connecting William James's (1902) notions of collective and personal religion to Pascal Boyer's (2001; 2005) cognitive theory of religion, two significant themes emerge: first, religion stems from mental processes and personal interpretation, and second, it is a collectively shared idea. Boyer explicates how people interpret their surroundings and discover humanlike agencies, which is also what Stewart Guthrie (1993; 2001) states in his

discussion on animating and anthropomorphizing the surroundings, i.e. making it alive with humanlike characteristics. In literature, this is called personification, and Boyer associates it with metamorphosis, the mixing of ontological categories. The application of metamorphosis to *American Gods* enables an analysis of how the gods are embodied, and overall, Boyer and Guthrie steer my approach to the materialist theory of religion. Here I will discuss, specifically from the perspective of David Morgan (2010), how the material practice of beliefs revolves around feeling, embodiment, and space, making the bodily involvement in a ritual or worship a religious performance. In a separate section about sacred spaces in the novel, I employ Charles Taylor's (2007) discussion on immanence to explore the connection religious beliefs have with the immanent, i.e. something within the limits of the material world. With the material and cognitive theories, I am able to identify the similarities between the traditional and modern gods and to analyze them as a combination of ideas and matter. My argument of why the new gods are religious beliefs is based on John Caiazza's (2002) discussion on techno-secularism and Edmund Griffiths (2014, 3) understanding of belief systems as a collection of beliefs one finds true and meaningful.

The purpose of chapter two is to establish an initial understanding of religion by reviewing first some misconceptions of its origins and then how the immigrant stories in *American Gods* exemplify forms of institutional and personal religion. My definition of religion relies on recognizing its nature as an umbrella term that encompasses a plethora of beliefs, some of which belong to the scope of technoscience, and chapter three concentrates on identifying these connection points between religion and technoscience. I will introduce the concept of conflict thesis and the way the gods in *American gods* are constructed as opposing forces, but towards the end of the third chapter, the point of my argument is to demonstrate how similar technoscientific and religious beliefs are and, consequently, how much technoscience resembles a religious belief system. Having done so, I deepen the connection between the gods in chapter four and analyze specific gods and the materiality associated with them, first by explaining how agency is tied to the material world and then by focusing on how people practice their beliefs with material rituals, objects, their bodies, and sensations. Additionally, the new gods have their own separate section 4.2.1, the purpose of which is to show how they are worshiped as both objects and active subjects that, in turn, act on their believers. The fourth chapter ends with a discussion on immanent space, and this section concludes my analysis on both religion's material practices and how ideas are tied together with matter. In chapter five, my focus is on paradigm shifts and how the gods are reinvented, modified, and changed to

survive competition against other beliefs. To conclude my thesis, I ponder what the new gods could be if *American Gods* was published in 2020 instead of 2001.

1.1 Contextualizing *American Gods*

There's a storm coming. Shadow, the protagonist whose real name is never revealed, is freed from prison a few days early due to a death in the family. His wife Laura Moon has died in a car crash with his best friend Robbie, and on his way to her funeral, Shadow meets an eccentric old man who makes him a job offer as the man's bodyguard. Wednesday, i.e. Odin from the Norse mythology, needs Shadow to protect and accompany him to meet other old gods – such as Slavic, Nigerian, Egyptian, German, Indian, and Celtic deities – as he attempts to convince them to fight alongside him in a battle against the new gods. These modern deities are gods of media, computer, credit card, globalization, and neon, to list a few, and they have marginalized the old gods to “exist in the cracks at the edges of society” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 150). The new gods hope for a paradigm shift that would cast aside the old gods because all deities need believers, but the people of America cannot sustain them all. All gods “feed on belief, on prayers, on love”, so the conflict between the gods boils down to believers and their devotion (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 309). On societal level, this is a struggle of religious beliefs and technoscientific inventions, whether science dethrones religion, and how the beliefs remain relevant. The paradigm shift culminates in a physical battle on Lookout Mountain, which is a powerful place and a trophy for the winners, but it ceases when Shadow interrupts the gods. He reveals the war was never real and is, instead, an elaborate con run by two gods, Wednesday and Mr. World, or more specifically, Odin and Loki. The gods create the war to feed on the chaos and death it induces, but Shadow's interruption destroys their plan.

The author of *American Gods* is Neil Gaiman, a British writer known for his fantasy novels *Stardust*, *Coraline*, *Good Omens*, and the comic book series *The Sandman*. His work is known worldwide and has inspired several screen adaptations, Amazon Studios' and BBC Studios' *Good Omens* television series from 2019 being the latest one. *American Gods* is one of Gaiman's most popular novels, and it has won the Nebula, Hugo, Bram Stoker, Locus, and SFX awards, according to the cover of my copy that is a reissue of *American Gods*. This new edition contains an introduction in which Gaiman tells the new text, “The Author's Preferred Text”, is longer and slightly different than the original, and there are additional materials e.g. an interview, an essay titled “How Dare You?” and a novella *The Monarch of the Glen*. The main character of *American Gods*, Shadow, appears in the novella as well, but I have chosen to

exclude it from my analysis in addition to *Anansi Boys*, Gaiman's other novel that contains the African spider god Mr. Nancy. However, the essay provides an interesting viewpoint to interpreting *American Gods* that I wish to mention. In "How Dare You?", Neil Gaiman explains how he, a British immigrant in America, dares to write about American gods and religiosity. He talks about "the immigrant experience" and how America seems almost messy and contradictory in comparison to the image immigrants have from popular culture. The America he presents in the novel is a fictional one, but it is a justifiable representation because the story is about the immigrant experience, one that Gaiman has as well. The novel's gods are immigrants, but they represent the mythical side of America, which was Gaiman's purpose for writing the book. His intention was to give America a mythical essence and, with the novel, he ended up creating a pantheon of American gods.

To understand how *American Gods* dips into America's mythical essence, I wish to discuss two famous literary theorists and their works: Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957) and Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (1957). Roland Barthes ([1957] 1991, 113) conceptualizes a myth as a communicative device that "is a *second-order semiological system*". He builds on Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism and study of signification, by using the concept of signifier/signified to create the first level of a myth, language. A myth uses language to build its own system, which makes it a second-order system and a metalanguage (Barthes [1957] 1991, 114). Essentially, a myth is a system of meanings layered with language and representation that attempts to communicate something with its form. This sounds quite a lot like my understanding of Gaiman's gods as embodied beliefs. Northrop Frye in turn ([1957] 2015, 136) sees a myth as "an art of implicit metaphorical identity" and a narrative that contains "imagery with conceptual implications". A myth takes place in the human world but diverges from the realm of realism with gods and other mythical beings that belong to the metaphorical imagery Frye associates with myths, which shares a resemblance with Barthes's notion of myths as communicative devices. Essentially, myths are "abstract fictional designs in which gods and other such beings do whatever they like, which in practice means whatever the story-teller likes" (Frye [1957] 2015, 135). The story-teller in this case is Neil Gaiman. Slabbert and Viljoen (2006, 137) call *American Gods* a mythical novel because Gaiman takes gods and symbols from different mythologies and creates his own metamythology which articulates meanings found in the contemporary society. By looking at *American Gods* as a myth, it is possible to take the narrative apart and find meanings interwoven in the representations.

As I mentioned earlier, the three key themes in the novel are mythology, identity, and American religiosity, and when *American Gods* is portrayed as a mythical narrative, these themes transform into myths of national mythology and American identity. The novel can be read as Shadow's epic journey to find himself and establish what he believes in. Carroll (2012, 318) notes that the premise of the novel resembles a myth as Wednesday, an old man, takes Shadow as his protegee and guides him on his journey. Shadow encounters various gods while traveling across the country, he spends time working for the Egyptian gods in their funeral parlor, and he hides from the new gods in Lakeside, Minnesota under a different identity. After Wednesday's death, Shadow holds his vigil for nine days and nights and experiences a spiritual rebirth, leaving his old life behind and finding his true identity. In the end, Shadow realizes divinity is not so glorious and humans "don't need anyone to believe in [them]. [They] just keep going anyhow." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 584). He discovers his own beliefs and learns that it is all there, if you just look close enough. With all the gods to believe in, American pantheon emerges. However, Carroll (2012, 322) states that not only does the novel construct a national mythology, but it also builds a national identity. The gods exemplify the immigrant experience and how the beliefs arrived and settled into the country: a kobold Hinzemann lives in Minnesota where German immigrants settled, the Egyptian gods Thoth and Anubis were brought to the Mississippi river by traders from the Nile, and the Slavic gods Czernobog and the three sisters arrived in New York and later travelled to Chicago with their believers. Therefore, the novel represents national mythology, immigrant experiences, and how the American identity is constructed, making *American Gods* a mythical novel that describes what is significant in America.

2 Exploring the Many Faces of Religion

The world's religiosity is a constantly shifting landscape that reflects population movements and societal changes. The age of Internet and globalization have made it effortless to share religious ideas worldwide. Missionaries seem to be long forgotten when one can livestream a mass, read religious publications online, or browse e-Bible with mobile phones. In 2015, Christianity was the biggest religion in the world with over 2 billion Christians, whereas 1.8 billion people followed the second biggest religion, Islam (Pew Research 2017). The number of *nones*, i.e. unaffiliated people, has increased, and decreasing religiosity can be detected among younger generations who are less likely to showcase religious affiliation in comparison to older generations (Pew Research 2018). Atheism and agnosticism are on the rise, and secularization has taken root in modern times, but the ever-growing population ensures the growth of religions. By 2035, there will be more Muslims born than Christians, even though Christianity and other religions, e.g. Hinduism and folk religions, keep growing, and the number of religiously unaffiliated is decreasing as more of them die than are being born (Pew Research 2017). What the future of religions looks like cannot be predicted indisputably, but arguably, the world is not becoming less religious – the landscape is simply changing.

In this chapter, I will define what religion is by introducing some of the common explanations for religion's origins and functions. This is not an easy task because there has never been nor will there ever be a complete definition of religion that covers all of its aspects, and I am not going to try to provide one. Instead, I will navigate the field of religion by concentrating on some of the most common conceptions about religion and formulating a preliminary understanding that will take its final shape in the following chapters as I consider how science/technology and materiality relate to it. For now, a basic understanding of religious beliefs will do, as I will be focusing on the more customary forms of religion that can be found in *American Gods*. By introducing the primary religions and mythologies present in the novel, I wish to illuminate how American pluralistic religiosity can be viewed through narratives of immigrants. The four coming to America stories of a Cornish woman, African twins, Vikings, and ancient nomads, as well as the accounts of other characters, e.g. Nancy, Czernobog, and Jinn, exemplify how various beliefs have arrived, settled, and shifted throughout the times.

2.1 From Misconceptions to Collective and Personal Religions

The word ‘religion’ is laden with meanings, doctrines, emotions, and beliefs, carrying a history that reaches back thousands of years. It encompasses the Abrahamic religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, East Asian religions of Taoism and Confucianism, and Indian religions of Buddhism and Sikhism, to name but a few. In addition to these old religions, there are the ancient religions of different ethnic groups as well as newer religions, for example Wicca, Rastafari, and Jediism, a religious philosophy based on *Star Wars*. By looking at these examples, it is apparent that the word ‘religion’ is used rather extensively to refer to a diverse set of beliefs. Already over a hundred years ago, William James stated that defining religion is challenging because it does not have a clear essence that could be identified, and religion is best seen as a collective name for various elements (James [1902] 2008, 42). One could therefore say that religion is an umbrella term for numerous beliefs, rituals, doctrines, and other practices, which makes analyzing religion hardly any easier. There is, however, one logical starting point for discussing religion: its existence and function. To tackle these themes, I employ Pascal Boyer’s *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (2001) in which he examines the common misconceptions people have of religions. So, by looking at what religion is not, one can understand what it is.

Religions exist to unravel the mysteries of the world. They are utilized to appease the gods or to connect humankind with nature, and religions create order, as well as give life a purpose. These are common statements about the origin, existence, and function of religions. People want to understand the world they live in, and therefore, providing explanations is generally attributed as one of the key functions a religion has. Considering there exists a vast collection of religions, it is certainly possible to name numeral functions, and explaining the world seems to be a plausible one. According to Boyer, there is a general consensus that religions stem from the need for three things: explanations, comfort, and social order (Boyer 2001, 5). I will consider the need for explanations first. Believers claim that religions provide answers to several matters: natural phenomena, dreams, the origins of everything, and pain and suffering (Boyer 2001, 11–12). For instance, before science shed some light on the natural world, religions provided explanations for phenomena such as aurora borealis, floods, and seismic activity. Similarly, the origins of the world were explained with creation myths and misfortune with e.g. evil spirits. Unknown incidents and phenomena needed explanations, which generated beliefs that began to take the shape of religion, so essentially, the need to

understand the world created religions. At least, this is the common assumption people have. Considering religious explaining in more detail shows that people might, in fact, be wrong.

Boyer gives two reasons why the need for explanations is not the origin of religions: first, only few religions provide general explanations, and second, religious explanations differ fundamentally from commonplace explanations (Boyer 2001, 12). When people assume religions explain the world, they expect religions to provide universal truths and profound explanations. However, only few religions do this, and the need for general explanations is hardly universal, which implies this cannot be the origin of all religions – maybe of some but certainly not of every religion. Boyer corrects the common misconception by stating that in most cases, religion explains only singular matters: for example, religions often approach evil by examining particular occurrences instead of attempting a profound investigation of its essence (Boyer 2001, 12). Naturally, some religions aim for general truths in their theologies, Christianity being a usual example of this, but oftentimes religions provide more specific and particular explanations, e.g. why a tree fell down or why someone gave birth to a sick child. The explanations given to these instances might be complicated and mystified, which takes me to Boyer's second reason. Whereas everyday explanations are based on gathered and processed information, religious ones seem to work on assumptions (Boyer 2001, 14). For instance, some folk religions claim that the sound of thunderstorms is the sound of angry ancestors or gods. This is a problematic claim because it mystifies natural phenomena and creates even more questions, e.g. where the ancestors are and how humans can hear them (Boyer 2001, 13). People want clarification and not obscure answers, and for this reason, non-religious explanations seem to be better at explaining the world than the religious ones. Taking this into account in addition to how rare universal explanations are, the need for explanations is not a very plausible origin for religions.

The second commonly listed origin for religions is comfort. This is rather understandable because fearing death, illnesses and other misfortunes is prevalent around the world, and many religions address these topics. Boyer, however, regards religion's comforting features as a misconception. According to him, the same religious practices that are supposed to bring comfort also, quite easily, strengthen the fear (Boyer 2001, 20). In other words, having some comforting rituals reinforces the negative entities that generate the need for comfort in the first place. For instance, some people might fear evil spirits and ward them off with rituals but simultaneously, the engagement in these rituals causes fear, whereas people who do not practice these rituals or believe in the spirits do not need comfort. Therefore, Boyer (2001, 20)

suggests that not only do religions fail to bring comfort, but their world is actually quite terrifying. Often, religion is associated with promises of a better life and alleviating the anxiety of mortality, but, as was shown with religious explanations, religious comfort is not universal for all religions. Some New-Age religions truly focus on the wellbeing of their members, but so many others attempt to bring comfort in a world they make terrifying. There are mentions of some religions in *American Gods* that practice, for example, human sacrifice, as I will discuss later, and this horrendous form of worship is committed for the benefit of the religious community but might not be as comforting for the sacrificial lamb. Additionally, one can only think about conservative and extreme religions that control their members through strict regulations and fear. Are these religions there to provide comfort? Normalizing fear is a part of control, so people might find comfort in all the prohibitions and punishments, but the emphasis is still on control. Based on this, the claim that religions stem from the need for comfort is quite a stretch.

The third and last misconception is the need for social order. The notion of social order entails the assumption that religion holds societies together like glue and provides moral guidance (Boyer 2001, 5). In this way of thinking, people work together only because they share a religion that provides them the same set of values, beliefs and ethics. Like with the two earlier origins, Boyer identifies issues with this one as well. Moral is not derived from religion because two societies with differing religious beliefs may still share a similar moral code, i.e. killing is not allowed, lying is bad etc. (Boyer 2001, 24). Morality and social order may be tied to some religions, but religion is not a precondition for them. The functionalist idea that social cohesion requires religion and therefore religion exists to fulfill its function is incorrect (Boyer 2001, 25). If social cohesion needs religion, why are there wars and other clashes between people in some very religious societies, or is something else needed? Can one religion truly unify an entire society? *American Gods* is a great example of how opposite beliefs can clash and cause wars, but there is no reason to believe social order would prevail in the novel even if there was only one religion, or that, on the contrary, a secular America would descend into chaos without any religions. Therefore, the argument that the need for social order is the origin of religion appears to be debatable as well.

At this point, the problematic nature of defining religion is obvious. Religion has not stemmed from the need for general explanations and truths, comfort, or social order, and there are too many beliefs that can be called religion. In the beginning of this section, I remarked that William James sees religion as collectiveness, and Pascal Boyer comes to the same

conclusion. To understand religion, one needs to recognize it is a plurality of beliefs and, furthermore, of believers, so the study of religion needs to concentrate on people. Given that Boyer rebuts the common explanations for religion's origins and represents cognitive theory of religion, he, quite naturally, necessitates focusing on people's mental processes: religion is a mental product, an idea that the human mind creates and deletes (Boyer 2001, 33). Regardless of fixed dogmas and shared ideas, individual believers have their own beliefs and interpretations that their mental processes refine constantly. The Western discourse has, for a few hundred years, emphasized religion's mental, cognitive, and spiritual side, but that is not to say that religion exists only in the mind (Hazard 2013, 58). Material practices are crucial to exercising one's beliefs because religions often involve sensations and physical means to express devotion. People have their own ways of worship, but it is necessary to take note that religions often involve a community. Individual believers have their personal interpretations and practices, but when they are transmitted to others, religion becomes a culturally shared idea (Boyer 2001, 47). It seems, therefore, that religion is a mental and material product of both personal and collective nature.

Religion is defined by a double-sided nature. Mental/material is one duality, and another one, which I already touched on, is essentialism/functionality that focuses on identifying religion's salient characteristics, i.e. origins and function (Bergunder 2014, 248). The names of these two -isms are rather self-explanatory, as essentialism concentrates on the essence of religion and functionality on the function. Whereas the dichotomy of essentialism/functionality relies on features, another one could be constructed based on who uses religion, and this adheres to my earlier discussion on collectiveness. William James's idea of religion as an umbrella term can be further divided into two levels: personal and institutional religion (James [1902] 2008, 45–46). Personal religion focuses on individual's own beliefs and rituals, whereas institutional religion is “an external act” of worship, ceremonies, theologies, and concrete places of churches and temples (*ibid.*). In other words, religious ideas and material practices have an institutional (collective) level in which everything is more conventional and fixed, and the personal level includes the individual's interpretation of religion. Sharing many similarities with James's division, Michael Bergunder also categorizes religion into two: “Religion 1”, i.e. the explained, institutionalized version with specific definitions, and “Religion 2”, i.e. the unexplained everyday religion (Bergunder 2014, 252). There is a smaller-scale religion of a more private nature, and a formal version that follows conventions. An interesting example of formality can be found in *American Gods* when the old gods meet the new ones to retrieve Wednesday's body. Despite hailing from different pantheons, they perform

a ritual whose conventions they all know, beginning with Loki's opening words, "[w]e are come together [...] to pass on the body of this individual to those who will dispose of it properly according to the rites. If anyone would like to say something, say it now." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 482). Stating the purpose of the ceremony, formal language, and a reference to known rites are all characteristics of a fixed "external act". The gods might not belong to one religion, but they epitomize how institutionalism works.

By now, a tentative understanding of religion should arise. Taking into account all the countless religions in this world and the common misconceptions people have regarding religion's origins and functions, it becomes clear that defining religion is as problematic as one would think it is, but on the basis of introducing some general aspects, one can develop some insights to religion. In my opinion, to understand religion, one needs to focus on who invented it and uses it – this someone being humans. Consequently, in this thesis, my approach to religion is very human-centered, which will become more apparent from now on. The next chapter centers on science and technology, which are human inventions, and the fourth chapter introduces material practices of religion. In the field of religious studies, humans are usually in the center of the analysis, but new materialism offers a differing approach that emphasizes how the material things have value on their own (Hazard 2013, 64). This is an alternative approach that has gained popularity, but it is not very compatible with my interpretation of *American Gods* because my thesis presents examples of people worshiping and argues that gods are human inventions alongside science and technology. For this reason, my perspective is very much human-centered. Also, the division between personal and institutional or collective, as I call them interchangeably, is useful for understanding what religion is, but over the course of this thesis, the dichotomy becomes somewhat trivial. According to William James ([1902] 2008, 49), to analyze personal religion is to analyze the mental, moral, or ritual relationship humans have with what they consider divine. To some extent this applies to institutional religion as well, so even though the two categories are opposite to each other, analyzing religious practices might blur the distinction. For now, I will use James's and Bergunder's categories to introduce different mythologies and religions in *American Gods*.

2.2 American Religiosity and Immigrant Beliefs in *American Gods*

Most would agree that the United States is an extremely religious country. Religious ideas are interwoven with the very being of the country, patriotism is almost synonymous to religiosity,

and even the national motto is “*In God We Trust*”. The rest of the world is used to hearing phrases such as “*God Bless America!*” or “*One Nation Under God*”, and even the most religious southern states have their own nickname, i.e. The Bible Belt. “By world standards, the United States is a highly religious country,” writes Mark Chaves, a professor of sociology and religion (2017, 1). But the country is not simply Christian, as my examples might suggest. There is a plurality in the American religious landscape, and this diversity is only growing. At one time, people and their religions were racially segregated from others, and certain denominations went hand in hand with skin color, but nowadays there exists a bigger ethnic diversity within religious groups (Chaves 2017, 19). Even though some segregation still exists, people of different religions mingle with each other more, forming friendships and even families, and statistics show that religious intermarriage is on the rise (Chaves 2017, 20-21). The same diversity that is on the societal level is realized in smaller scale personal networks, e.g. in schools and workplaces. All this intermingling is making American people more tolerant towards other religions and their practitioners (Chaves 2017, 22). Consequently, this increases plurality.

It would be erroneous to say that the United States is becoming more diverse just now because it has been that from the beginning. The country has been and is a country of immigrants, and immigration is an important source for religious diversity (Chaves 2017, 13). Before the Europeans arrived, a plurality of Native American religions already existed in the country. When the newcomers came from the Old World, they brought their own beliefs with them: some decided to abandon their old beliefs, some kept them to help with the settling process, and some adopted a more religious stance with stronger faith (Joselit 2008, viii). Before the 1800s, the number of immigrants stayed relatively even, but from 1820 to 1860, from 1880 to 1920, and after the year 1965 bigger immigration waves took place, which meant that more beliefs were brought to the country (Martin 2014). In *American Gods*, Mr. Ibis, the Egyptian god of writing, explains to the protagonist Shadow, “[t]his country has been Grand Central Station for ten thousand years or more. [...] Columbus did what people had been doing for thousands of years. There’s nothing special about coming to America” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 211). Columbus and his contemporaries were not the first people to carry their beliefs into the country because it has been happening for thousands of years. In fact, travelers have been arriving to the United States from all parts of the world for quite some time, bringing their beliefs and constructing the pluralistic religious landscape that the United States nowadays has.

The four “Coming to America” stories in *American Gods* are accounts of how a group of Vikings, a Cornish woman Essie, African twins Wututu and Agasu, and nomadic

people from Siberia arrived in America. In the first of the stories, Norsemen sail through the Atlantic Ocean and, after a long journey, reach the shores of North America. They settle in the new cold land, thinking they can “send the boat back to the northlands, and it would bring settlers, and bring women” in the spring (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 77). However, the men do not survive the winter. A group of Native people kill them to protect their lands and themselves because otherwise, “other Northmen would come to their shores”, and so in this faraway place, the Vikings are “forgotten, by history and their people” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 78). A long time passes before new Scandinavians arrive. The Norse gods Odin, Thor and Tyr are forced to hibernate with the remains of their believers because they were carried over the sea, but no new believers arrived and no one knows them in the new land. Upon the arrival of Leif Fortunate and his group of men, the gods are already there to greet them. In *American Gods*, Leif Erikson arrives a hundred years after the first group of Vikings, but according to *Erik the Red's Saga*, Leif was the first Icelandic voyager to find and visit America in the eleventh century (Langmoen 2005, 1080). This detail might be different, but the way Gaiman's fictional Vikings are received by the indigenous people is genuine. When the Vikings attempted to establish a settlement in North America, they first traded with the native population, but minor hostilities turned into attacks that hampered any plans of settlement (Langmoen 2005, 1082). They were not able to stay permanently due to the struggles, so even though the northerners managed to bring their gods, their beliefs needed much later immigration waves from modern Scandinavia to settle.

The second story addresses European immigration as well. Essie Tregowan is a Cornish woman who travels to North America having been sentenced to transportation from theft. This punishment was a common practice to remove unwanted people from Britain and locate them as manpower in the British colonies to help strengthen the empire (Hitchcock 2018, 199). Essie becomes a servant in a tobacco farm in Virginia after her captain sells her indenture to John Richardson, whom Essie marries later when his wife dies. Essie raises both her own and his mistress's child on the farm, telling them old tales of piskies, spirits and seal-women she heard when she was a young girl in Cornwall. To stay true to her beliefs, Essie pours “cider on the roots of the apple trees”, leaves “bread in the fields at harvest-time” and places “milk at the back door” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 110). The children follow her example, but Essie's beliefs never truly take root: Essie outlives her children, and her grandchildren do not want to hear about piskies and apple-tree men. Essie's stories no longer entertain people, and only she is left to practice them, which is unfortunate, because to survive, folklore needs to be entertaining and useful (James 1992, 170). The tobacco farm is a bad place for the Cornish beliefs, and “Cousin Jack”, a fellow Cornishman and a supernatural being from the old tales, agrees. Before he

guides Essie to death, he claims she brought him “into this land with no time for magic and no place for piskies and such folk” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 113). This is historically true because Essie’s story sets in the eighteenth century, whereas the bigger immigration wave from Cornwall took place in the nineteenth century. At that time, many miners emigrated to work in the West for economic reasons and, like Essie, they brought along their Cornish belief in e.g. mischievous mining spirits, “Tommyknockers” (James 1992, 159). Tommyknockers survived for a long time because they became ghosts instead of spirits, and so the belief conformed to American culture (James 1992, 168). It seems then that settling requires some adjustments.

The third “Coming to America” story is a glimpse of various African folk religions. Wututu and Agasu are twins who are sold to slavery by their uncle, and they become separated on a slave ship. Wututu is first taken to a plantation in the Carolinas and then to work as a maid in Louisiana where she is able to practice her beliefs, sell charms to customers and, later as Mama Zouzou, teach her knowledge to Widow Paris, i.e. Marie Laveau, even though her willing student has no “real interest in the gods” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 359). Widow only wishes to learn the craft, but not the ideas behind them. Wututu is devoted to “Elegba, the trickiest of gods, who was Great Mawu’s eyes and ears”, Mawu being the divinity who “made the world” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 351–2). These deities are found in the Dahomeyan religion but are shared along with some other beliefs by the neighboring Yoruba religion due to the close contact, rivalries, and reciprocal trading (Fandrich 2007, 782). Whether Wututu is closer to Dahomeyan or Yoruba religion matters little because, despite her efforts, she is unable to plant her native gods in the “barren and infertile” land in Louisiana (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 360). The reasons for her failure are historical. The Yoruba and Dahomeyan people were a scarcity in the nineteenth century Louisiana whose white population was bigger than the black population, and most of the slaves were from the Congo and therefore had different religious beliefs (Fandrich 2007, 786). The problem Essie has with her beliefs is similar to Wututu’s – there are not enough believers in their area to grow their gods.

Wututu’s twin brother Agasu is more successful with his beliefs in a sugar plantation in Saint Domingue. Nowadays known as Haiti, the island was once a wealthy French colony (Fandrich 2007, 779). Agasu and the other slaves are forbidden to speak their languages, but they manage to run into the woods at night to dance and worship their beliefs that they “brought in their minds and their secret hearts” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 354). This secrecy allows “the gods of Dahomey and the Congo and the Niger put down thick roots” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 355). Unlike Louisiana, Saint Domingue is a fertile ground for gods. Historically, the

vast majority of the slaves on the island were Dahomeyans, and they were empowered by their beliefs to overthrow the slaveholders (Fandrich 2007, 781–2). During the slave uprising in the novel, the slaves drink pig blood to bind themselves to their old gods, and Agasu is possessed by the strength of Elegba. The victory of the slaves reinforced the black identity on the island, and the Haitian War of Independence (1701–1804) helped situate African religions in the New World, particularly those from Dahomeya, Yoruba and the Congo, and create Vodou, the neo-African religion of Haiti (Fandrich 2007, 782). Wututu has the same gods as her brother, but Agasu has the support of the other slaves – the faith is stronger with more believers.

Beliefs need communities to prosper. All the religions in these stories are of collective nature, but the people who carry the beliefs to America leave their religious communities behind, and one person cannot keep a religion alive. Essie’s beliefs exist in Cornwall, but in Virginia, she is left to practice the collective faith alone. Wututu does not encounter other slaves to the same quantity as her brother does, so she cannot solidify her beliefs. Essie and Wututu have taken the first step of bringing the beliefs, but to strengthen their position like any other beliefs need, there has to be more waves of believers (Joselit 2008, 99). The African slaves exemplify how the religion arrives in two stages: the first people bring the gods that cannot survive without the additional waves of believers who increase the amplitude of believing. Even though by its definition, collective religion is something shared and fairly stable, this applies only in the location where it has been established as such. In a new location, such as America, collective religion does not manifest as collective if it lacks the community. In Essie’s case, her Cornish religion resembles a personal religion. She teaches it to her children, but she is the only one in the farm who truly believes in the piskies and other spirits, and the collective religion is alive in that part of Virginia as long as Essie maintains it as her personal religion.

The fourth “Coming to America” story is the most fictional of them all. The century is 14,000 BCE, and the location is in north-eastern plains of Siberia. A nomadic group of hunter-gatherers, led by a spiritual leader Atsula, travels to east to find a new land. With them, they carry “the skull of a mammoth” “on long poles, draped with bearskins” because this is their god Nunyunnini (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 445). Atsula has seen in her vision that by travelling sunwards, her people will find a new home for their god, but she must sacrifice herself and stay behind. This new home is North America, which was accessible to the Siberian peoples via the Beringian land bridge after deglaciation (Goebel et al. 2008, 1501). Atsula’s people take their god with them, but their collective religion and god do not survive because their group

dissipates over the next years. These “people spread out across the land” and instead of maintaining their old beliefs, they accept “new tribes and cho[o]se new totems” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 450). The religiosity of this story differs from the previous ones because it describes a faith that is extremely small scale. The nomadic Siberians are the entire religion and when they migrate, the religion migrates with them, leaving no roots behind. Additionally, Nunyunnini is the most fictional of the gods. It is a representation of completely forgotten beliefs that have left no evidence behind: no god of this name has existed, and the beliefs of this era are long dead.

In addition to the four stories, the main storyline is filled with other deities, some of whom tell their origin stories. Jinn, the ancient spirit from Arabic regions, immigrated to America with Muslims, and “the people of the Nile”, i.e. the Egyptian gods Thoth, Anubis, Bast, Set, and Horus, arrived some three thousand years ago with traders (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 210). One of the major deities amongst the old gods is Czernobog who is one of the very first gods Wednesday persuades to fight. On the surface level, Czernobog is an “Eastern-European immigrant”, but he is also “a squat black thing, darker than the darkness” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 145). In Slavic mythology, he is the black god and his brother, Bielebog, who appears in the springtime, is the white god. The three sisters living with him are the Zorya sisters, who in Slavic myths can be one person or three sisters guarding the sky and who represent the morning, evening, and midnight (Klimczak 2016). The Slavs moved to New York and from there to Chicago, but “[e]verything got very bad”: Czernobog is nearly forgotten in the old world, and in America, he is “a bad memory no one wants to remember” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 86). Just like the Egyptians, the Slavic deities are remnants of the past and on the verge of becoming forgotten.

When discussing immigration, the focus lies on the newcomers, but there is another side as well: those who were already there. Several peoples in America have been designated as native based on the fact that they were in the Americas before the greater waves of post-Columbus immigration. Native Americans are as indigenous as is possible in a land of immigrants, but nevertheless, they too are descendants of immigrants. Certainly, there might be some amongst the Native peoples who argue against this statement, and I do not wish to attack their beliefs and call them erroneous, but research suggests their ancestors were immigrants. Thousands of years ago, the first people to arrive in America came from Siberia via the same land bridge that is present in Atsula’s story, and modern Natives are their descendants (Goebel et al. 2008, 1500). Considering these people were first to arrive, they have rightfully claimed

the title indigenous, but it cannot be denied that the country is formed by immigrants, and Wednesday shares this notion by saying “[n]obody’s American. [...] Not originally.” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 117). Alongside the people came the religions. The gods have not waited in an empty land, but rather were brought along or created in the new environment for new purposes “[f]or it is from hearts they come, and to hearts they shall return” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 449). The gods of Native Americans are therefore interestingly both native and immigrants, which pegs the question: what is an American god. In order to answer this, I first have to discuss the Native American religion in *American Gods*.

Two notable characters represent Native beliefs in the novel: Buffalo and Whiskey Jack. To start my discussion, I would like to emphasize that these two are Gaiman’s fictionalized versions of Lakota beliefs and therefore do not represent all Native American beliefs and might differ from what some Lakotas believe. In *American Gods*, Whiskey Jack is a middle-aged man with sharp eyes and dark skin, but as much as he looks like a person, he is, in reality, a trickster spirit, Inktomi (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 382). According to Lakota beliefs, *Iktómi* is a transformative spirit that tricked people into leaving their underground homes and is the reason why people now live on the earth’s surface (Posthumus 2018, 50; different spelling). I will explain this later in the section 4.2 when discussing dreams and Lakota creation story, but it is necessary to mention how people first lived under the earth. In this sense, they are immigrants who emigrated from their subterranean home, whereas the trickster is not because in *American Gods*, Whiskey Jack, i.e. Wisakedjak, is also the fox spirit that “was here first, and [...] lives always under the sun” (Gaiman [2001] 379). In other words, the spirit was already living in the land before the arrival of the people. This indicates that Lakota beliefs are inextricably connected to the land, which also becomes apparent with the second character, Buffalo Man, who is an entity that appears to Shadow in his dreams. He has “a man’s body, oiled and slick” with “a buffalo’s head”, and in the end of the novel, he tells Shadow, “I am the land.” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 19; 593). The character represents something from the land with his animal features, and in Lakota beliefs, according to David Posthumus (2018, 94), the spirit of buffalo can either appear in an animal or a human form. Taking into consideration this dualism and how the belief cannot be separated from the land because they are the same thing, the Lakota spirits should not be called immigrants. It can be argued whether the people were created in America or they immigrated via the Beringian land bridge, but the beliefs seem to be truly American.

What, then, is an American god? First and foremost, the Lakota spirits are American because their very essence is tied to the land and their believers have inhabited the country for such a long time, but they are not gods, per se. There are characters, like Wednesday/Odin and Jesus, who certainly can be called divine, but the novel also has new gods of media, Internet, and cancer that are not gods in the traditional sense. On the other hand, Odin is not American, but the Internet is largely invented and developed in America, which means it is not an immigrant god. Defining an American god is extremely challenging, but I would like to propose a definition based on my interpretation of the novel and the American pantheon Neil Gaiman has created. An American god is either an immigrated belief or a belief created in America that people worship and that has a material connection to the country. Arguably, this is a definition that tries to cover all aspects while being very vague, but it is a starting point to understanding religious beliefs and significant entities in American society. The old gods are on the verge of being forgotten, but they still exist as ideas meanwhile the new gods are being used, developed, and integrated to the society and they have a material connection to the country.

For a long time, America has been synonymous with diversity, so it is no wonder that new beliefs and ideas belong to the contemporary American religious landscape (Joselit 2008, 101). The main point is that these gods, technological innovations, spirits, and contemporary phenomena have been integrated to the American society, and the American people might even accept them, the latter being somewhat uncertain because why would anyone want cancer as their god. To clarify my definition and take this discussion further, I need to examine why should the new gods be viewed as religious beliefs, and to do so, I will analyze how science and religion converge.

3 New Religions of America: Science and Technology

The theoretical framework of the previous chapter contains an introduction to some of the general aspects of religion. People have misconceptions of religion's origins and functions as the scope of it is so vast that conceptualizing it is hardly straightforward, and therefore, it is actually very challenging to give a precise definition of religion. The fickle nature of religion is, however, an advantage in my thesis because it allows me to broaden the traditional focus to include science and technology as well. Throughout the history of science and religion, these two fields have been separated and even pitted against each other. Geoffrey Cantor (2010) addresses this relationship from the perspective of the conflict thesis, i.e. the idea that two forces are continuously contesting each other, and such conflicting setting is also one of the main themes of *American Gods*. The old gods of traditional religious beliefs oppose the emergence of the powerful new gods who represent the side of science, and both groups compete to gain believers, but, all things considered, they are structured very similarly. Essentially, religion and science sense the same world, but their methods and interpretation vary: religion relies on senses, and science utilizes measurements and machines. Consequently, both fields provide their own beliefs of the same world, and these propositions are made into a system that Edmund Griffiths (2014) calls a belief system. Over the course of this chapter, my aim is to show that science resembles a religion of its own, and to start this discussion, I will define science with the help of its historical formation.

If religion is a difficult term to define, science bears a great resemblance to it. An early form of science existed already in Ancient Greece, but this classical version is closer to philosophy than modern science. Therefore, science, as it is nowadays understood, is a modern concept (Harrison 2010, 24). Due to the seventeenth century emphasis on empiricism and theoretical frameworks, modern science began to take its shape and distance itself from other beliefs and fields, e.g. philosophy and natural history. This era is called the Scientific Revolution, and it marks the shift from miscellaneous beliefs to scientific knowledge, as well as the rapid emergence of new innovations (Hård and Jamison 2005, 21). The focus on empirical knowledge, objective research, and theories means that science became something distinct from other fields. In other words, modern science came to be its own elaborate set of beliefs about the world (Hård and Jamison 2005, 39). By grouping together these beliefs, science becomes an umbrella term like religion is. So, to define science, the various sub-sciences and related fields need to be taken into consideration, which means that science can be defined by analyzing how it diverged from its predecessors and what historical changes it has

experienced. In the context of *American Gods*, science appears in the form of the new gods. By looking at these characters, it becomes obvious that science encompasses several sub-sciences: some of the gods are mechanical inventions, but, for example, the gods of the market forces represent the mathematical side of science, just like the media gods represent social sciences. Additionally, the new gods exemplify the historical changes of science as some of them are older like the abandoned freight train in which the new gods' henchmen interrogate Shadow and some are more recent like the helicopters that trail after Shadow when he escapes from the train (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 165; 170). I discuss these changes in greater detail in the fifth chapter, but now the focus lies on how the formation of science began with the Scientific Revolution and was followed by two more phases: the Industrial and Technological Revolution.

The two most notable changes in the history of science are mechanization and electronization. From the eighteenth century onwards, scientific advancements took the form of new machinery and industrial changes, which generated the name Industrial Revolution (Hård and Jamison 2005, 49). This era is known for the rapid industrialization of societies, more efficient production in factories, and new innovations, e.g. steam engines and chemical processing. There are industrial gods as well in *American Gods*, and during the final battle, Shadow notices one such god who is “a railroad baron, in an antique suit, [...] one who had seen better days” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 581). He is old amongst the new gods, and his better days are over because scientific changes brought along the “gray gods of the airplanes, heirs to all the dreams of heavier-than-air travel”, as well as the powerful car gods (*ibid.*). Mechanization continued what the Scientific Revolution started, but then electronization replaced mechanization as the face of science, starting a new era called the Technological Revolution (Caiazza 2002, 214).

The creation of technological applications is the result of science's long history of innovations and advancements that enabled something completely different to emerge (Hård and Jamison 2005, 53). Technology is a part of science, and to roughly encapsulate their relationship, science provides the theoretical framework, using which technological tools are created. In the novel, Technical Boy, whom I will introduce in greater detail later, represents a computer, which means he embodies the relation between old mechanics and new electronics, bringing together all aspects of science and technology. This type of a compact relation in which material inventions and their scientific base are joined can be summarized with the term technoscience (Hård and Jamison 2005, 4). The term was coined up by a Belgian philosopher Gilbert Hottois in the 1950s, but Bruno Latour popularized in 1987 in *Science in Action*, using

the term to discuss science in a sociological context (Encyclopedia of Science 2020). This is a very beneficial term because the new gods in *American Gods* represent both science and technology, in addition to some other contemporary trends that I will discuss later in this chapter. Discussing the two as separate fields is redundant, and technoscience also solves the issue of defining science by providing a definition of its own. Therefore, my approach to the new gods in this thesis is based on technoscience, i.e. the combination of scientific methods and theories with technical applications.

If science and technology can be merged into technoscience, how should the relationship between science and religion be understood? The common notion that they are separate fields has brought forth the concept *conflict thesis*, according to which the two disciplines are in a constant state of conflict. Geoffrey Cantor (2010, 285) notes that their clashing stems from differences, e.g. what information one can have about the world, what methods are used to obtain knowledge, or what are the overall values of science and religion. Pitting the two against each other is a very common dichotomy, and it is one of the main themes of Gaiman's *American Gods*. The technoscientific new gods want to replace the old, spiritual gods of traditional religions permanently, and both sides prepare for a war that erupts as single attacks and the final battle on Lookout Mountain, a sacred place. The war represents the conflict, but the actual fighting is almost invisible to the outsiders: the small-scale attacks are only briefly mentioned in the news and the final battle has no other human witnesses than Shadow. The reason for this is that the conflict between technoscience and religion is ideological. The novel's narrator notes that "[w]ars are being fought all the time, with the world outside no more the wiser: the war on crime, the war on poverty, the war on drugs. This war [is] smaller than those, and huger, and more selective, but it [is] as real as any." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 399). The war in *American Gods* is a societal change, a shift from one invention to another, a prayer to some other god, and the effects are great from the distance but very hard to detect up close.

The conflict between the old and new gods, i.e. the conflict of religion and technoscience, demonstrates what is significant in the American society. According to John Caiazza (2002, 208), a scholar of religion, Western societies have always had opposing knowledges as driving forces, the secular and the revealed, and after science and religion were separated, modern science came to represent the secular knowledge and religion the revealed, i.e. divine knowledge. Nowadays, religion has less authority than previously, whereas science has managed to strengthen its status. Science is now the story-teller responsible for explaining

specific phenomena, formulating theories of how the universe works, and discussing the “wonders of science” (Harrison 2010, 28). By adopting some of the role religion previously had, science dethroned religion as the only discipline with knowledge. The current significance of science can be recognized by looking at how pervasive technology is, which is a great indication of its value and how people have chosen to accept technoscience as their authority. This, of course, does not mean that technoscience is the sole authority, but it has certainly consolidated its place in societies. In *American Gods*, the new gods are widespread and powerful: people believe the Internet and follow the news anchors on television like they possess divine knowledge. When Shadow meets Wednesday for the first time, he asks the god’s name and the man remarks, “Ah, yes. The age of information [...] – not, of course, that there has ever been any other kind of age. Information and knowledge: these are currencies that have never gone out of style.” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 25). The old god’s words resonate the conflict that has been ongoing for a while: the winner of the conflict is the side that becomes the central force in the society and provides the most sought-after information – a story in the shape of a belief.

The conflict boils down to what believers find valuable. The societies cannot choose which side they favor, and the people make the decision by selecting the beliefs they find significant. Cantor (2010, 291) notes that progress follows conflicts, and conflicts should be analyzed on the level of individuals. Likewise, Caiazza (2002, 212) recognizes the opportunity for change on the level of individuals and remarks that William James’s term personal religion entails a change from a dogmatic, institutional religion to a personally experienced belief. If personal religion permits own beliefs and interpretations, why cannot personal technoscience do the same? Of course, it would be ludicrous to make own interpretations of scientific facts without any objective findings, but people can choose how they apply the technologies, i.e. practice and experience technoscience as if it was their personal religion. Individuals select what they devote their time to and concentrate on expressing their beliefs freely. As I showed in the previous chapter, there are several examples in *American Gods* of people choosing their beliefs, e.g. Essie’s grandchildren do not want her Cornish tales but rather local stories, but similarly, people can choose how they utilize technoscience, which I will discuss later in the section about worshipping the new gods. The notable idea here is that practicing one’s personal beliefs has an impact on what is seen as valuable in a society, which enables a change, but it also allows beliefs and practices to take new shapes from which new religions emerge (Caiazza 2002, 213). By contesting religion, capturing some of its societal roles and providing new ways to practice beliefs, technoscience becomes a religion of sorts.

I have now reached a point where the two disciplines that are supposed to be clashing actually share a resemblance. Technoscience is a worldview and a knowledge system, driven technologically and scientifically, and it can be compared to traditional forms of religion that are powered by divine knowledge. It can be practiced by using technoscientific inventions, and it has a personal level with a very materialistically religious shape that I will discuss in the next chapter: there are avid followers who devote their time to technology and whose lives are constantly influenced by scientific discoveries. John Caiazza (2002, 214) refers to this phenomenon with its own practices, ethics, and societal influence as “techno-secularism”. The word ‘secular’ emphasizes the ongoing conflict between religion and technoscience, and the suffix -ism represents the ideological properties of the concept. Techno-secularism’s religiousness relies on the power and authority technoscience encompasses. In *American Gods*, there is no fundamental difference between the old and new gods because the technoscientific gods are as divine as the traditional ones, and the people worship them in similar ways. Therefore, the conflict thesis, as much as it fits the battle between the gods, does not translate to the situation completely: the gods are not as conflicting as the thesis claims the opponents are. In fact, the thesis has received criticism for being too strict, and Cantor (2010, 286) notes that considering religion and science both involve human agents and similar beliefs, there is some intermingling between them that makes the conflict thesis more flexible. As important as it is to recognize the conflict, attention should also be given to the similarities, and looking at how technoscience resembles a religion will be my next topic.

3.1 Technoscience as a Belief System

In this section, I apply the concept of a belief system to technoscience and examine how it is present in *American Gods*. A belief system refers to “a set of propositions held to be true, to which some emotional charge (affect) is attached and which gives more or less cogent expression to a general sense of how the world is” (Griffiths 2014, 3). In other words, there is an interpretation of the surrounding world, i.e. a certain worldview, which is considered correct and to which people respond with devotion or other emotions. In that sense, religion and science are intersubjective truths: they are based on human experience, cannot be compared to an objective truth, and they create a continuum with other beliefs (Wallace 2005, 309). Religion certainly matches this description because it explains phenomena, builds a religious narrative according to which people live, and it is based on how people experience the world. By

comparing technoscience to this, it is rather obvious that the discipline too fits the idea of a belief system. Scientific worldview and its truths are based on empirical and quantitative research, and people often respond to these with vigorous approval, but even though technoscience is seen as objective and quite stable, scientific truths evolve constantly as a result of new findings that replace the previous truths. The way Shadow sees the gods on the battleground in *American Gods* is comparable to a belief continuum. The final battle takes place at the top of the Lookout Mountain, and when Shadow arrives there, he can see the battle “arena [...] [a]nd on each side [...] them [the gods] arrayed” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 581). The battle arena symbolizes a belief continuum by presenting a selection of belief systems, ranging from traditional deities to technoscientific entities. The continuum is an objection to the conflict thesis because one god is not better than the other, and they are all their own “intersubjective truths”, i.e. interpretations of the world.

The shaping of a belief system depends on its believers. All beliefs derive from the real world and how people experience it, their social conditions and context (Griffiths 2014, 105). Essentially, a belief is an idea that stems somehow from the material world. This is rather obvious because all mental phenomena originate from the interaction of mind and the environment (Wallace 2005, 132). The proposition that all beliefs are ideas with a physical foundation justifies the existence of religious beliefs and brings technoscientific beliefs closer to the religious ones. Denying religions or being skeptical of how technoscience could be counted as a belief system is not enough to reject beliefs of this sort: believing in something forms a belief system and therefore it exists (Griffiths 2014, 137). Whether the gods actually exist, does not matter. The beliefs are real in *American Gods* and they have real world inspirations, so this is enough to validate their existence. Undoubtedly, religion is a belief system and arguably it is *the* belief system, but because technoscience is one as well, its beliefs can be compared to religious ones and the religious appearance of technoscience stems from the discovered similarities of the two. Belief is not exclusively something religious but believing in something can have a quite religious manifestation. Therefore, the term ‘belief’ can serve as a tool for comparing different religions (Morgan 2010, 3). It bridges together differing views by presenting them in a similar form. Under other circumstances, placing Internet and believing in Egyptian gods in the same discussion on religion and belief systems would be quite challenging, but the concept of belief makes this possible.

American Gods presents a large assortment of beliefs that take a religious shape, and technoscience is the ultimate new divinity in the playground. As Carl Miller (2018, 332), a

technology researcher, writes in his book *The Death of the Gods: The New Global Power Grab*, “technology is offering a new kind of power, and new routes to power”. Those who understand technoscience and utilize it are in control of the new gods. Technoscience is everywhere, and its influence is global: being able to control technology means having influence over entire societies. The power of technoscience lies in its pervasiveness and how much people need it and *want* it in their lives. In the novel, these new gods of technoscience are described to have “a look, a very specific look. It said, *you know me*; or perhaps, *you ought to know me*. [...] [T]he world existed for them, [...] welcomed them, and [...] they were adored.” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 537). There is no denying how important technological inventions have become and how devoted people are to them, but this is only the beginning: “[t]he new gods have broken out of their cages, and we are only beginning to comprehend the world they are making” (Miller 2018, 335). New gods are powerful and prevalent, but how does this tie to belief systems?

Belief systems are strongly connected to knowledge. Historically, the keys to knowledge have been passed to other hands along the shift from faith and religious beliefs to science as the source of knowledge (Caiazza 2002, 215). Understanding the world is one of the objectives of technoscience, and this bears a great resemblance to the misconception that religions stem from the need for explanations. I discussed this in the section 2.1 and dismissed the idea because religious explanations are too particular and tend to mystify matters even more. However, there is no denying that religions as belief systems include some explanatory beliefs, and similarly, one feature of technoscience is to explain the worldly phenomena. In *American Gods*, the embodiment of modern source of knowledge, i.e. Internet, is Technical Boy, a fat youngster. His youth is a reference to how young both computers and Internet are in comparison to other technological inventions, but his size portrays how important a god he is for people. Technical Boy’s lackies abduct Shadow for a limousine ride during which he tells Shadow how the new gods are replacing the old ones. According to the boy, they are the future, having “reprogrammed reality” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 59). Scientific truths are constantly changing the way the world is understood, pushing aside any previous knowledge associated with the old gods. The face of truth has changed, and the traditional gods are no longer it.

Technical Boy’s godhood is knowledge and how to access it. The data flow he represents is hardly any different from divine knowledge when the world can be analyzed with science and the gained knowledge can be stored into a container created with technology. If God works in mysterious ways, then so does the computer whose operability is almost like hidden magic (Caiazza 2002, 214). Jure Leskovec, a technology researcher who Carl Miller

interviewed for *The Death of the Gods*, frames computer's role in a very Gaimanesque way: "God is the machine [...] The black box is the truth." (Miller 2018, 281). This could be flipped around to say that the machine is the god. Just like holy men and spiritual leaders provide guidance, Technical Boy gives answers when a word is typed into the search bar. The knowledge he possesses exists on another level, which is the reprogrammed reality he mentions: technoscience borders transcendence by reaching beyond materialism. Data seems to flow in another invisible sphere even though it is transmitted materially through wires and the computer. These notions belong to Dataism, i.e. the idea that flowing data constructs the universe, which started simply as a theory but is slowly becoming a religion, according to historian Yuval Noah Harari (2016, 444). In *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, he compares a data-processing system to a god who is in control instead of humans (*ibid.*). The computers conceal an entire world within them, and it has become as important as the real one. From this position of dominance, Technical Boy threatens Shadow: "One click and you're overwritten with random ones and zeros. Undelete is not an option." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 60). The computer along with the Internet resembles rather remarkably an omniscient – and to some extent omnipotent – entity.

A similar character who possesses knowledge in *American Gods* is the goddess of Media. She first appears to Shadow as a character from the television show *I Love Lucy*, but she can also take the shape of "every newscaster he'd [Shadow] ever seen on morning television" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 189; 466). By its definition, media refers to the means of communication and delivering information, so it should not be too far-fetched to say she is essentially a modern version of old messenger gods like the Greek Hermes. In Gaiman's book, the goddess appears in the context of television because social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, did not exist at the time of the novel's publishing, and she uses television which is more modern than newspapers or radio. During their first screen-mediated encounter, Media offers Shadow a job and has a newsflash for him: "We are now and tomorrow. Your friends aren't even yesterday any more [sic]." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 190). Ironically, since the novel's publication, the goddess is no longer tomorrow, but has then been replaced by social media, and these days, Internet is the main source of news (Miller 2018, 136). Nonetheless, Technical Boy and Media are overlapping, and both are responsible for sharing information. The role media plays in a society is god-like because it opens a window to the other side of the world, and people might not always believe the stories to be truthful or objective, but they still follow media platforms with devotion (Miller 2018, 123). Media is "the all-seeing eye": her power lies

in knowing, choosing what people get to know, and presenting it the way she desires (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 189).

If knowledge is the first main factor that connects technoscience to religion, authority is the second. Machines, technology, and science are tools for controlling and monitoring, but they have the capacity to overtake people and become the authority. The state, for example, is able to exercise power through the computerization of societies by regulating how technology is being used (Caiazza 2002, 214). In *American Gods*, The Spookshow or the Spooks are men-in-black type characters who are not really gods but they embody societal power. They are a combination of conspiracy theories and powerful government agencies in addition to secret societies that “have no loyalties and no love”, according to the goddess Easter (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 331). They abduct Shadow for an interrogation and show up to Samantha Black Crow’s house to ask some questions, they trail Shadow, and monitor the old gods, which is a step from an omniscient deity to an omniscient state and from *God is watching* to the *Big Brother is watching*. As expected, surveillance has become very common in modern societies with the help of technology (Mackay 1995, 244). Shadow is very cautious not to use his credit card or telephone because the Spooks are able to track him using them. However, the Spooks are not part of any official legal force that works for the American government. They work for the mysterious Agency and Mr. World. The agents are an exaggeration of how civilians view government agents in their unmarked black cars, black outfits, sunglasses, and codenames, but they are also powerful private operators with an access to technological advancements using which they have the ability to influence people’s lives. They form a conspiracy-theory-shaped belief system, in which authority is based on weariness and a cloud of mystery: by believing in a power that knows everything and does not hesitate to take action, people end up restricting themselves and feeding power to their beliefs. The Spooks, just like any other god, become a divine power because people cede their own power to them.

The ultimate authority amongst the new gods is Mr. World. Based on his name and position as the one in charge, Mr. World represents everything modern and is the embodiment of globalization. Whether globalization is understood as a process or an end result, it entails a social change that happens globally. By its nature, globalization is transnational: the movement of ideas, people, resources, and goods crosses borders without being limited to one nation only (Holton 2005, 295). Mr. World’s scope of power is worldwide, and with his help, the other gods gain believers internationally as well. The market gods become stronger by representing global markets instead of local ones, and Technical Boy, for example, would only be a small-scale

computer god without the Internet, which is a profoundly similar network as globalization that reaches everywhere as a vast, overarching system. The other gods need Mr. World, and due to his importance, he is in a position of leadership. He runs the Spookshow, as I mentioned already, but he is also a commander in the battle, and when Technical Boy is hesitant to fight, he goes to see Mr. World in his “operations center” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 547). Despite his leadership, Mr. World is barely visible in the novel, and Shadow only hears his “urbane voice” on the telephone when he accesses Mr. Town’s thoughts and later sees him on TV as a “man with his back to the screen” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 371; 438). Like globalization, he is everywhere but hard to pinpoint without focusing on what has become global, e.g. telephones or televisions. The main reason for his evasiveness, however, is his real identity: Mr. World is actually Loki, Wednesday’s partner in crime, and this dual identity is what makes him the ultimate new god. Loki is originally an old god, but by reinventing himself as Mr. World and attaching himself to other gods, he benefits from their sources of belief.

Technical Boy, Media, Mr. World, and the Spooks are the main new divinities, but there are glimpses of others as well. The transportation gods of cars, airplanes, and helicopters represent a more mechanical side of technoscience, but they are more recent than railroad gods who are now old “iron gods”, according to Mama-ji, the Hindu goddess Kali (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 152). Likewise, the modern world also believes in the “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”, as Wednesday lists them (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 150–1). They are a collection of inventions and advancements, but the new gods could also be a group of forces, such as the ones Mr. World negotiates with: “[t]he techies” of Austin (the technology companies from Silicon Valley), “players” in Hollywood (the showbusiness), and “the intangibles” from Wall Street (the financial markets) (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 372). Celebrities and other public figures belong to new gods as well because they are often worshipped like holy figures, as I will discuss in the next chapter. These all are American gods. It matters little where the belief originates from when they are relevant. They are American because their believers need them in America, and this is common to all the beliefs in the novel. Things exist and continue to do so because they are needed and being used. Beliefs are not simply utterances of ‘I believe in modern medicine, capitalism, or the goddess of love’: belief implies emotional engagement and participation, and ultimately, belief is about action and practice (Morgan 2010, 5). On that note, I will conclude my discussion on technoscience and belief systems to switch over to analyze the actual practice and the material building blocks of these beliefs.

4 Connecting Ideas and Matter: Embodied Gods and Worship

After a long discussion on what religion, technoscience, and belief systems are, it is time to consider the *how* aspect of them. Naming a few beliefs and deities from the novel and explaining what they represent provides a somewhat vague and incomplete image of what belief systems are because this is just the idea level of religion. In this chapter, my focus lies on the material side of religion, i.e. the material building blocks of gods and how beliefs are being practiced. By denying the Cartesian dualism of mind/body division, it is possible to analyze beliefs more accurately because no god is only a mental or material construct: all ideas have an intrinsic physical connection to the world. Humans and nature are the inspiration for the old gods, whereas the new gods embody technology and other innovations, but in spite of these different origins, all of the gods share a kindred divinity that is elevated from mere matter. The main connector between the material world and the idea level is the believer, and for this reason, the emphasis should be precisely on people and their religions as it provides information about single divinities and how people practice their beliefs. To put it bluntly, the believers make the gods what they are with their beliefs. I will approach this argument in two parts: first, by discussing how divine agency stems from nature using Boyer's and Guthrie's theorization on animism and anthropomorphism and then by focusing on the material ways to worship.

The two key names in my material reading of religion are Stewart Guthrie (1993; 2001) and Pascal Boyer (2001; 2005). Both of them focus on the evolutionary and cognitive aspects of religion and step away from the immaterial transcendence often associated with religion, emphasizing instead that beliefs are situational, mental products. Guthrie flips around the concept 'God made men' into 'men made gods', and Boyer discusses the cognitive operations needed to create divine and other supernatural beings. The premise for their religious analysis is that people have an intuitive need to interpret their surroundings to discover signs of life (Boyer 2005, 243; Guthrie 2001, 103). This is done automatically and often without truly realizing it. People categorize what they see and try to understand their surroundings, but sometimes they detect presences that are not there. Oftentimes, these presences are seen as humanlike, and Guthrie gives some reasons for this. Firstly, because people have an innate need to find signs of human activity, the mind provides a human agent as the primary explanation (Guthrie 1993, 187). Secondly, interpreting, for instance, any sudden movement as significant and meaningful has an evolutionary purpose because it is better to 'over-interpret' things rather than mistake something fatal as non-fatal (Guthrie 2001, 99). Interpretation is rarely volitional, it stems from a need to find agencies, and observations often take a humanlike form because

what matters the most to people are other people. Stressing on agency, Boyer (2001, 144) specifies that humanlikeness refers to having a humanlike mind rather than a body. In the case of deities, instead of detecting physical humanlike bodies, people analyze natural phenomena, e.g. lightning or earthquakes, and imagine humanlike agencies as the cause of them. The crux of Boyer's and Guthrie's approach to religion is finding these significant, intentional agencies that arise from materiality.

Religious beliefs emerge when the environment is interpreted and made significant using two techniques: animism and anthropomorphism. Animism refers to giving life to the lifeless, and anthropomorphism is about adding human characteristics to non-human entities (Guthrie 1993, 39). Not only do people discover agencies where they do not exist, but they give them human characteristics as well, e.g. emotions or intentions: people tend to project humanlikeness to the nonhuman (Boyer 2005, 241). *American Gods* contains several animations, e.g. the agentic wind and the land, and all of the godly characters are anthropomorphized beings with human emotions, bodies, and habits. The old gods are a mixture of nature, animals, and humans, whereas the new gods morph humans with machines and technology. People have intuitive categories for classifying entities, and according to Boyer, gods defy these categories with metamorphosis: they shuffle between different categorizations by combining them and stretching their limits (Boyer 2001, 67). Interestingly, the new gods are pushing the limits the most in the novel. Usually only the nearby categories morph, e.g. nature with animals and animals with people, but in the case of the new gods, the category of people merges with objects and machines. The animism and anthropomorphism in *American Gods* can be interpreted from Boyer's and Guthrie's viewpoint, but I would like to add another layer to this. If these two techniques are used to interpret the environment and therefore create ideas and beliefs from the material world by detecting agencies, I argue that they also operate the other way around and participate in maintaining these ideas by representing them in a material way. So, if people have detected agency and divine essence in darkness and moving matter, this agentic idea can also be represented materially in a humanlike form with dark features and dark personality, like the character Czernobog. Therefore, animism and anthropomorphism do not simply turn matter into ideas – vice versa, they give ideas a material form.

A great way to discuss the materiality of godly ideas is to focus on literature, which is responsible for the preservation and creation of many divine ideas. Several literary pieces, e.g. the Bible or Homer's *Iliad*, are literal manifestations of religious ideas in which gods exist as words on a page, and *American Gods* is simply one of the many material

representations of its godly characters, such as Odin or Anubis. This is one way for literature to represent gods, and the other way can be found within the text where the gods are characters, natural events, technological advancements, talking birds, or blinking screens. Animism and anthropomorphism in literature are called personification, and this literary device is a commonly used figure of speech, a trope, which breathes life into the lifeless and adds humanlikeness to it. The trope is so common in literature that many scholars have given their attention to allegory instead, seeing there is some overlapping in their usage, and discarded personification as too conventional (Melion and Ramakers 2016, 2). This is quite unfortunate because personification can have an aesthetic effect or a descriptive purpose, but it also makes relating to the story and comprehending abstract notions like death or war easier for the reader. It is a useful device when analyzing a book filled with godly characters because personification converts the invisible into a material and bodily being (Melion and Ramakers 2016, 1). Xenophanes, a Greek poet who lived in the sixth century BCE, was known to criticize religion, and he famously remarked that horses would have gods that look like horses if they had any (Leshner 2019). One has to agree with Xenophanes, and in this thesis, literature is no divine knowledge – it is a medium for people to turn ideas into matter.

4.1 Animism and Anthropomorphism in *American Gods*

Animism, in general, targets natural phenomena. It is easy to mistake a tall object for a human in dark, but it is less likely that somebody thinks a wooden table is a living being. Animism requires uncertainty of how to interpret signals received from the surrounding area, which makes nature a great object for animism. Many organisms in nature are already animate beings (flora and fauna), so any ambiguous motion, sound or other perception can easily be interpreted as intentional activity because things do not move by themselves and noise has to come from somewhere. Therefore, wind often becomes an animated phenomenon. The movement of air seems almost like an invisible being that one can feel and hear, and in literature, wind can symbolize breath, and is therefore very much alive (Ferber 2007, 236). In *American Gods*, there are numerous instances of wind being animated. It often makes howling sounds, and by making noises, the wind resembles a living being capable of speaking. Shadow hears “the wind rising, a bitter screaming around the house” and almost detects “words on the wind”, but he also notices the cold breath of the wind and how its “jack-frost fingers [are] a hundred times colder than the fingers of any corpse” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 276). The wind becomes an active agent

to the point where it might be understood as supernatural. During his encounter with a jinn, a spirit or a genie from Arabic mythology, the Arab businessman Salim tells him how his grandmother once claimed to have seen the fiery eyes of an ifrit/jinn, whereas the other family members told her it was just the sandstorm and blowing wind (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 202). His account is a great example of how sandstorm and wind can have agency that begins to take a human-like shape, mixing animism and anthropomorphism together.

Another major animation with an anthropomorphic touch throughout the novel is the upcoming storm. Guthrie remarks (1993, 52) that storms are often animated because they have a strong presence and evident visibility, and because of these traits, people tend to associate storms with angry gods. In Gaiman's novel, the notion of storm is introduced while Shadow is still in prison. Not only can he feel it coming but he is also warned by Loki, who is Shadow's fellow inmate Low-Key at this time. Throughout the novel, the gods mention the storm, and it comes closer as if it was an actual agency able to approach Shadow, and in the third part of the novel, titled "The Moment of the Storm", it finally arrives. To mourn Wednesday's death, Shadow takes the vigil and is hung from the World Tree as a sacrifice. I will discuss this from the perspective of worship in the next section, but now my interest lies on how nature imitates Shadow's physical and emotional state. Transferring human emotions to nature is called pathetic fallacy, a term that was first used by the literary critic John Ruskin, and Guthrie sees it as a specific form of personification (Guthrie 1993, 124). On the first day, everything is as calm as Shadow, but later "the lighting flickered and forked across the sky, and the thunder subsided into an omnipresent rumbling, with occasional bangs and roars like distant bombs exploding in the night, and the wind tugged at Shadow, trying to pull him from the tree, flaying his skin, cutting to the bone" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 498). The rough weather in *American Gods* reflects Shadow's disorientation and suffering, as wind and storm often are symbolically connected to turbulent emotions and subjective feelings (Ferber 2007, 237). The storm calms down when the vigil is over and Shadow is brought back to life by Easter, but on Lookout Mountain, the storm continues, the late afternoon is pitch black, and it rains "with cold violence" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 574). As long as the gods are furious and lust for blood, the storm rages with them, but when Shadow interrupts the battle, the weather calms down and the sky clears up.

A third example of personification in *American Gods*, in addition to the wind and storm, are the four seasons. They frame the different phases of Shadow's odyssey, mirroring his emotions and experiences as if the seasons were alive too. The seasons have many figurative

implications, and for example, in his third essay of *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, Northrop Frye ([1957] 2015, 160) associates each of them with a period in life (e.g. youth or death), certain symbolism and a literary genre. My discussion is limited to only one of them, tragedy, because an overly detailed analysis of genres is irrelevant due to my focus on materialism. In the beginning of *American Gods*, the weather is “oppressive, still and cold”, and the prison’s furnaces do not offer any warmth before December, which suggests the current season is fall (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 9; 7). This time of year is marked by old nature, i.e. falling leaves and darker colors, as well as signs of decay. According to Frye ([1957] 2015, 207), fall is the season of tragedy, a genre in which a suffering hero stands somewhere between men and gods. The cold and gray season matches how Shadow Moon’s story begins with the tragedy of losing his wife, which consequently pushes him into the world of gods where he is constantly tested and placed under divine power. He is destined to fall, as Wednesday and Mr. World have planned so, but by interfering with their scheme, the gods fail instead, and ultimately, Shadow’s story differs from a typical tragedy. It begins with one, but tragedy does not determine his story, and the fall changes to winter. The sky during Laura’s funeral is “iron-gray, featureless and flat”, but the season begins to change, and it snows “erratically, in ghost-like tumbling flakes” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 55). Ghost-like is a rather apt description because snow implies winter, and winter is the time of death (Frye [1957] 2015, 160). When winter replaces fall and its associations of decay and old age, death takes over.

The winter months are a time of isolation and stagnation. According to Wednesday, they “are the dead months” and “[n]othing big can happen until” they are over, so the gods can only ready their troops for the battle (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 301–2). Shadow works in a funeral home for the Egyptian gods for a while, and the winter is in full vigor when he leaves “the house of the dead” to move to Lakeside, a small town in northern Minnesota, to lie low (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 246). Everything is static, and it is typical in literature to associate winter with ice and snow halting everything (Ferber 2007, 239). Not only is the battle on hold, but the weather conditions also hinder the search for Alison, a young girl who goes missing in Lakeside. Every now and then, children go missing, and the German god Hinzelmännchen tells Shadow they are “winter runaways”, but in fact, the old man takes them as human sacrifices (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 297). Winter truly is the time of the dead, and the bodies cannot be discovered because ice seals them to the bottom of the lake. Quite similarly, winter and death hold spring at bay when Shadow leaves Lakeside. He is driving to Kentucky with Nancy and Czernobog where winter has already ended, but when the new gods promise them Wednesday’s body and they head over to Kansas to retrieve it, “[s]pring fade[s] back into the dead end of winter” (Gaiman

[2001] 2015, 463). The seasons reflect the events of the story and feel what the characters are feeling, but they also have power of their own. Before going to Lakeside, Shadow assists Wednesday in robbing a bank. The god asks him to think “gray skies and driving winds” because they need snow as distraction, and as Shadow fills his imagination with snowflakes, it also begins to snow (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 119–120). Shadow reckons it is a coincidence, but if he is the cause of the snow, it only proves how the weather ‘lives’ with Shadow. However, if the snowfall is coincidental, it still abets the men as if it had a mind of its own, and perhaps it is not too farfetched to claim the snow has an agentive will.

The storm marks the turning point from winter to spring. Typically myths have a cyclical pattern of death and revival, and whereas winter is the time of death, rebirth takes place during springtime (Frye [1957] 2015, 138). The storm hits when Shadow is hanging from the tree, and he dies temporarily, but the goddess of Easter lowers him from the tree, breathes “life into his lungs, a gentle in and out, and then the breath bec[omes] a kiss” like “spring rains and meadow flowers” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 560). The storm subsides, the sky becomes clear, and the sun is shining. In myths, reviving is often done by female characters, and Easter’s kiss revives Shadow because she is the goddess of springtime, Ostara (Frye [1957] 2015, 183). She embodies life and light, and starts a new life cycle in nature. During the vigil and his final moments, Shadow loses his real name to Zorya Polunochnaya, gives his heart to Anubis for a weighing, and discovers Wednesday is his biological father. The storm represents the death of old Shadow, and spring is the birth of his new identity. When Shadow comes back to life, his mind is as clear as a spring day: first, he realizes the war is actually a two-man con and interferes with the battle, and then he figures out Alison, the missing girl from Lakeside, is in the trunk of the old car that has been left on the ice. When spring comes and the ice melts, the car falls “into the cold waters of the lake”, and Shadow, going under with the car, finds all the missing children there (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 602). Spring reveals the dead, but at the bottom of the lake, winter prevails, and the children live in static cold. Shadow, too, is almost trapped under the ice, but Hinzelmännchen rescues him. Winter has already ended and cannot hinder spring, so Shadow cannot die again.

The final animation to cover is the land. Nearly synonymous to nature, the land is an entity whose power the gods recognize, as they know they cannot survive in a land that does not favor them. According to Heike Paul (2014), a professor who has studied American myths, there are two common myths about the land in America: the myth of agrarianism and the myth of expansionism. Whereas agrarianism sees the land as a paradise that a hardworking farmer

can cultivate, expansionism depicts it as wilderness to be tamed (Paul 2014, 314). The myths have differing perspectives, but they share the notion of the land having agency. The gods in *American Gods* represent both of these viewpoints: they hope to plant their roots and feed on some belief, but they also have expansionist objectives, and the new gods in particular want to become bigger by gaining believers. The land is particularly important to the Lakotas, who respect it and view it from the agrarian perspective. Whiskey Jack tells Shadow that “[t]he land was the church. The land was the religion. The land was older and wiser than the people who walked on it. It gave us salmon and corn and buffalo [...]”, but he also states how America is not a “good growing country for gods” (Gaiman [2001] 2015, 556). The land might provide sustenance and allow crops to grow, but gods cannot be successfully planted nor the land tamed. Oftentimes in American myths, taming the land is associated with male dominance: a rugged man explores and dominates the land which is given feminine attributes (Paul 2014, 329). A feminine land might be called Mother Nature or Mother Earth, and the goddess Easter exemplifies this in a way. There is also a moment in *American Gods* when the African girl Wututu calls America “barren and infertile”, which can be a reference to female fertility (Gaiman [2001] 2015, 360). A gendered analysis of the land such as this is possible, but in my interpretation, the land is animated to symbolize all believers. The gods are in no position to tame the people, and when they recognize the power of the land, the gods know that believers decide who grows in America and who withers away.

People are responsible for the creation and survival of gods. The statement that gods cannot grow in America has a defeated tone, but when Shadow tells the gods in the midst of the battle “[t]his is a bad land for Gods”, it exudes power (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 582). He is voicing the human perspective because he knows now that gods have no chance of survival without people. During his final moments, Shadow demands to know what gods are, and Bast, the Egyptian goddess, answers, “[t]hink of us as symbols – we’re the dream that humanity creates to make sense of the shadows on the cave wall” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 519). Bast is talking about animating the shadows and anthropomorphizing them into ‘us’, a group of agentive beings, making these shadows symbols, just like the land, the seasons and the storm are. Having heard Bast’s explanation, Shadow realizes that “[p]eople populate the darkness; with ghosts, with gods, with electrons, with tales. People imagine, and people believe: and it is that belief, that rock-solid belief, that makes things happen.” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 580–581). Throughout this chapter, I have considered how nature is animated and anthropomorphized, e.g. how seasons mirror the storyline, the storm experiences Shadow’s emotions, or how the land is an entity to be reckoned with, but I have not continued beyond the idea of agentive natural forces.

Bast's and Shadow's quotes show that the two techniques generate symbols, but these literary devices do not remain as ideas – they have a rock-solid form in literature. Personification creates bodies that are vessels for ideas, i.e. literary characters that focalize people's beliefs. This sounds rather abstract, so the best way to explain this notion is to look at how animism and anthropomorphism relate to the godly characters.

4.1.1 Metamorphosis and Personified Gods

The gods go through metamorphosis in two ways: they stretch the category of animals and nature towards humans or they add animalistic features to human bodies. I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter that Boyer describes the metamorphosis of gods as shuffling between ontological categories, and literature is full of examples like this, starting with Ovid's narrative poem *Metamorphoses*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, and now Gaiman's *American Gods*. Metamorphosis exists in stories to fulfill a goal, whether it is to entertain, make the character memorable, or educate the reader (Kelly 1985, 404). In Gaiman's novel, the goal that my interpretation stresses is godly representation. In his dreams, Shadow visits the Hall of Forgotten Gods which resembles a museum full of statues and carvings of extremely old gods. For the most part, they look human, but each representation of a god has something that sets them apart from regular humans, and there is "a woman-like thing" with a naked human body decorated with dangling "sharp knives" and "severed heads" but whose own head has been replaced by "twin serpents" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 64). In this example, metamorphosis is a device to represent what powers the goddess has and the beliefs attached to her. Shuffling the categories is necessary because all things exist in relation to other things, and the essence of gods is defined through other categories (Alberti and Marshall 2009, 348). By looking at the various metamorphoses and the category of god, it is possible to detect how gods are related to humans, animals and nature, or machines and technoscience as is the case with the new gods.

There are different levels of metamorphosis. Animating the nature and adding anthropomorphic features to animals is a rudimentary example of stretching the categories. For example, when Shadow sees trees that look like "strange, almost human shapes: they could have been witches, three bent old crones ready to reveal his fortune", he refers to the Norns, the three fate controlling women from Norse mythology (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 192). Seeing trees as witches is animism, but calling the Norns tree-like stretches the category of humans towards nature. As another example, there is a brief mention of a creature that is "blank gray color of

good Polish clay: the word inscribed on his forehead meant *life*” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 530). This being is Golem, a Jewish creature created from clay that moves like a living being but lacks a soul (Hughes 2012, 127). Golem does not fully belong to nature’s category because the clay takes a humanlike form, but the missing soul implies it is not a human either, so it shuffles the categories considerably. Then again, metamorphosis can also be very subtle, like having a nature-like smell. The goddess Bast has “a jungle female scent”, which refers to her wilder side as a goddess of cats, and the spring goddess Easter smells like an “intoxicating mixture of jasmine and honeysuckle, of sweet milk and female skin” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 228; 329). Nature is an obvious category for metamorphosis because the gods stem from there, e.g. thunder gods, spring goddess etc., but as an extension to nature, animal metamorphosis is extremely frequent too. When Shadow meets Bast for the first time, she is a cat and accompanied by a black dog who is Mr. Jacquel/Anubis, the god of dead (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 194). From the same pantheon, the sky god Horus appears in the novel, but he is always a hawk because he has “forgotten how to be a man”, according to Easter (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 544). This is quite ironic because Horus has not been a man in the first place. Still, on some level, humans and gods are ontologically similar (Kelly 1985, 408). It feels natural to consider the human form as the primary one to which animal and nature characteristics are added.

Still, a separate category for gods is needed because their representation can be divided into two. In the Hall of Forgotten Gods, the statues have only one static form, but the living gods can change between two forms: ‘the human’ and ‘the god’. The human form is a more muted form that reveals the godly powers with mundane clues, e.g. Wednesday has a small World Tree pin because he is the lord of the gallows. Mama-ji, the Indian goddess of war, looks like a normal Indian woman, wearing a sari and a skull necklace (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 154–5). Her godly form, however, is Kali, a black woman with blood-red tongue and lips and multiple hands, and her necklace is made of real skulls (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 151). The reason why I refer to them as ‘the human’ and ‘the god’ is because the former is visible in the human world, whereas the latter is the idea of the god. This is a representation that is visible at Backstage, a location that I will introduce later in this chapter. When the old gods gather at the House on the Rock to have their meeting, they travel to Odin’s Hall, a place that is simultaneously in Wednesday’s mind and at Backstage. Seeing the gods in someone’s mind means all of their representations, the idea level, are visible. Mr. Nancy appears as “an old black man”, “a jeweled spider”, “tall man with teal-colored skin”, “a young black boy, dressed in rags”, and “a tiny brown spider” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 144). He alternates between his human representation and the god representation, which emphasizes him being a trickster and a spider

god, Anansi. Similarly, Czernobog appears as “a gray-haired old East-European immigrant”, “a squat black thing”, and “a prince, with flowing black hair” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 145). The gods have two names, e.g. Wednesday/Odin, Mr. Ibis/Thoth, or Mr. Nancy/Anansi, and look old and frail in their human forms, as they are old beliefs with few believers, but the fragility is not present in their godly form that represents their powers. The gods are built with metamorphosis, so they mix the ontological categories, but in literature, personification can also blur the boundary between human and non-human characters. The personified being takes an active part of the storyline and becomes like any other character, so separating the personified belief from other characters is challenging (Guthrie 1995, 130). Based on this, I would argue that the two godly representations in *American Gods* exist so that ‘the human’ can be an active character in the storyline, whereas ‘the god’ is a visual representation of the belief. It would be very hard for Odin as the god of sky, war, and death to appear in the novel if he was all of these at the same time, so the character Wednesday takes his place.

By stretching the ontological boundaries from animate beings to inanimate objects, a new form of divinity emerges. In comparison to Loki, Anubis or some god that has millions of believers in this day and age, the new gods of TV, plastic surgery, and credit card might not seem like gods at all, but they can be animated and anthropomorphized too. The inanimate and the material are active agents when they act on people who recognize their agency (Alberti and Marshall 2009, 346). The novel, for example, animates the giant technology companies in Austin as “techies” and the financial markets on Wall Street as “intangibles” because their societal power is great enough to give them agency (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 372). The new gods are certainly influential in the material world even though they seem lost in their electric and digital sphere. Wednesday tells Shadow that the new gods constantly talk “about micro milliseconds and virtual worlds and paradigm shifts and what-have-you, but they still inhabit this planet and are still bound by the cycle of the year” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 301–2). Their material existence in the novel is dependent on metamorphosis because it is usually better for the storyline to have characters that are able to do something instead of being inanimate, passive objects (Kelly 1985, 412). With new gods, the category of objects and other inanimate things is stretched towards the category of humans rather than towards nature and animals. To give an example of this, Mr. Town, who is working for Mr. World’s Spookshow, is driving a Ford Explorer that has a GPS, “a little silver box that listened to the satellites and whispered back to the car” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 538). Not only is the GPS able to listen and whisper to Mr. Town like a human, but the car, too, is animated into an explorer. Some of the new gods are mostly humanlike, but they are still described as “the idea of a person and nothing like the

reality” because they “blur gently” and have “phosphor-dot quality to them” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 536). These divinities are movies stars, news anchors, or other influential media people whose distorted looks stem from them being famous on screen. Because the majority of the new gods are only briefly mentioned, they cannot be analyzed very well, and even Mr. World, who is their leader, is hard to analyze because his material representation is based on him being the old god Loki. Regardless, there are two gods that I can analyze in greater detail – Media and Technical Boy.

In the embodiment of Technical Boy and Media, their contemporary essence bleeds into humanlike bodies. As the embodiment of Internet and technological innovations, Technical Boy’s human form is merged with mechanical components. His eyes are glinting like “the green of an antique computer monitor”, and he bleeds liquid that smells like “burning insulation wire” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 59; 549). Here, computer parts are incorporated into a human body, but it could also be the other way around, and often the central processing unit of a computer is called a heart. Technical Boy is a teenager by appearance because his technology is new, and his young age can also be heard in the language he uses. It is profane and aggressive, and such lines as “don’t fuck with me”, which is something he repeatedly says to Shadow, can often be found in online discourse (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 57–58). The language is an example of Internet talk in the same way as the boy’s lackies, the children, mimic anonymity of the Internet: Shadow cannot grasp their gender or age because it is too fluid. Similar fluidness can be found in the goddess of Media. She first appears as Lucy Ricardo from the tv series *I Love Lucy* because “[i]t’s just an easy way to look, given the context”, but throughout the novel, she appears as newsreaders and other characters in the television (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 188–9). Instead of resembling a television like Technical Boy resembles a computer, Media appears in the TV by taking a human form. Sometimes, her appearance cracks and shows that she is not a human, and for example, Shadow notices when they first meet that she looks “cartoonish” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 190). When the new gods hand over Wednesday’s body and they say a few words for him, Media focuses on how death means new life and babies bring joy to the world, which sounds very diplomatic but also elusive. She does not speak directly about Wednesday, but rather uses a tone that e.g. politicians use when they comment on disasters. She does not have a clear identity because like she said, she changes given the context and becomes another media persona.

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which *American Gods* animates and anthropomorphizes entities and represents gods. This is a part of a larger

discussion on materialism, and the next section will be about material means to practice religion, but before changing the topic, the idea of giving agency needs to be summarized. David Morgan (2010, 72) states that “[b]y exerting themselves, people build the world about them, acting on objects, which in turn offer them a world in which to live”. He essentially sums up the relationship between matter and agency with two dimensions: things with meaning and things with agency. People create gods by detecting agencies in nature, animating objects, and assigning meanings to things, after which they believe in the agency to the extent that the gods can assert power over them. Computers were created as a tool for people, but after they started thinking and taking over people’s tasks, the computerized world became the reality to which people had to adjust. The significance given to sky and wars began to take shape, and from their agency emerged the belief in Odin who became so real that people began to worship and honor him. To return to the idea I presented in the beginning of this chapter, animism and anthropomorphism are techniques for interpreting the surroundings, but they also show what people find valuable and interesting, and there needs to be a meaningful connection to make a god. In order to find these connections, the study of religious materialism has to include a somatic perspective in addition to the semiotic one (Hazard 2013, 63). In other words, analyzing interpretations and symbolical meanings is a good starting point, but how a believer connects to their belief bodily and through their emotions needs some consideration as well. A comprehensive study of religious materialism boils down to understanding how people situate themselves in relation to matter. On that note, I will begin my discussion on how beliefs are practiced in *American Gods*.

4.2 Material Worship: Feeling, Body, and Rituals

If beliefs have a material origin, it is a natural consequence that they are being practiced materially as well. In the light of the recent interest in materialism in the field of humanities and the attempts to shift the spotlight from the human, some could argue that by focusing on how people mold gods from matter and practice their material beliefs, the material is marginalized and even subjugated by the human agency, what the shift from the anthropocentric, human-centered, view has problematized. New materialism, for example, asserts that the significance of matter should not be understood as given to it by people (Hazard 2013, 67). However, David Morgan (2010, 71) argues that even though studying materialism does not need to be anthropocentric, human-centered approach is a likely option when analyzing

man-made constructions, something that religion and technoscience are. To some extent the material can have agency as was seen in the previous section, and the material participates in the practice of beliefs, as I will discuss here, but the primary agent is still the human. For this reason, my reading of the *American Gods* emphasizes the human as a salient component in the making of belief systems. With an emphasis like this, four important themes emerge – feeling, body, space, and performance – that are crucial for the material practice of beliefs (Morgan 2010, 56). By the means of these themes, I wish to discuss in this section how believing is a material practice that often includes bodily involvement, emotions and a space where believing takes place, and in effect, how tangible gods can be.

Feeling, as the first theme to be considered, induces beliefs. The word 'feeling' denotes a duality because one can feel emotions as well as physical sensations, and Stewart Guthrie (1993, 9) argues that religious experiences are rooted in the interpretation of emotions and bodily sensations. When somebody believes in something, not only can they physically sense what causes the belief by, for example, seeing or hearing it, but their mind also forms an emotional connection to it. This emotional connection is more than simply having emotions, and David Morgan (2010, 57) emphasizes that the word 'feeling' implies a stronger and a more meaningful connection than 'emotion' because it entails bodily senses. In *American Gods*, the omniscient narrator notes, "[a]ll we have to believe with is our senses: the tools we use to perceive the world, our sight, our touch, our memory" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 152). Feeling is one of the fundamental ways in which materiality merges with beliefs, and in addition to taking part in the creation of divine ideas, senses are crucial for maintaining and practicing beliefs. The Vikings, who arrive in the New World in one of the "Coming to America" stories, feel proud and gleeful to sacrifice a person in the name of Odin, and although the Arabic businessman Salim is fearfully respectful when he encounters the Islamic spirit jinn, this emotion is soon replaced by devotion as he "blinks back tears" of appreciation (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 77; 204). The Norsemen's emotional connection stems from successfully giving a sacrifice to their god, whereas Salim's humility and respect relate to him being worthy of the jinn's time. There is no one "religious emotion", according to William James ([1902] 2008, 73), but rather the emotions people associated with their religious beliefs are ordinary emotions. Therefore, it is normal to feel pride and glee like the Vikings or fear and teary-eyed devotion like Salim. Believing relates to feelings so tightly that it is logical to state that beliefs are emotions and feeling is believing.

American Gods portrays Shadow's journey from doubt to belief and then back to skepticism. In the beginning of the novel, he is hesitant to believe in something he cannot see and even though he can "feel the disaster hovering above the prison in those final weeks", he is not superstitious (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 7). On some level, he can sense the imminent storm – the battle between the gods – and he can feel the wind blowing and almost smell snow in the air, but emotionally he is uncertain, blaming his imagination for everything (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 9). The disconnection between his doubt, i.e. lack of emotional connection, and his senses prevents him from believing. Throughout the novel, Shadow's attitude towards the gods and what he experiences shifts between silent acceptance and constant questions. In the beginning, he disregards his confusion with utterances like "What the hell was I drinking last night?" or "It was a dream", the former referring to his and Mad Sweeney's night of fighting and the leprechaun showing him how to access his gold stash, and the latter meaning Shadow could not have been visited by his dead wife in the motel (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 49; 81). Doubt is a defining feeling throughout his story, which is rather natural because religions often leave a lot of room for doubt with all the unbelievable miracles, supernatural abilities and divine beings they speak about (Sim 2006, 137). Despite occasional attempts to rationalize what his senses tell him, Shadow slowly begins to accept the world around him. When they are robbing the bank and it begins to snow, Shadow wants to rationally believe "he had nothing to do with the snow", but he also feels "strangely proud", as if there is a part of him that believes (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 121). Likewise, he refuses to believe he can actually see the godly forms in Odin's Hall, but he also understands he has to because his senses say so (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 152). At this point, he is starting to believe and accept the gods, despite exclaiming "This is crazy" to Media when she talks to him as a tv character (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 188).

The peak of Shadow's belief is the storm, after which he steers towards skepticism. The gods around him are constantly telling him they are either symbols or to "[b]elieve everything", as the Buffalo Man does (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 146). Before the storm, Shadow dreams of the Buffalo visiting him on a few occasions. Amongst Lakotas, dreams are a vision-like way to connect the human with the nonhuman, from whom the human may receive guidance to find their path in life (Posthumus 2018, 139). The Buffalo helps Shadow to believe and, in one dream, directs him to climb through rocks and the earth until Shadow squeezes through a small opening in the ground and reaches light (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 264–6). This dream is a reference to the Lakota creation story in which people, who have been living beneath the earth, decide to climb up to the surface, and they enter through a cave, followed by their wise man, Tatanka, who turns into a buffalo (Martinez 2004, 85–6). This same wise man visits

Shadow's dreams and tells him to climb to light to face his beliefs. The dream foreshadows the moment of the storm which is a moment of revelation and the birth of Shadow's new identity, as I discussed earlier in the context of animating spring. The quest to discover his true identity goes together with his journey from doubt to belief and culminates in dying and being revived by Easter. Knowing now who he is, what the gods are, and what to believe in, he interrupts the battle and tells the gods, "I think I would rather be a man than a god. We don't need anyone to believe in us." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 584). His newfound belief builds on self-confidence and feeling skeptical. According to critical theorist Stuart Sim (2006, 8), skepticism is a way to stand against authority and challenge the basis of their power. This is exactly what Shadow is doing with his words: he undermines the gods and shows that the emotional connection to beliefs need not be devout.

The second theme in the practice of material beliefs is body. The humanlike gods of the novel are personified beliefs, but embodiment can also be more than symbolical because every believer carries their beliefs within them, quite literally embodying them. Essentially, the body signifies and "hosts belief" (Morgan 2010, 59). The body holds emotions and feelings within, but it also practices beliefs through movements, transforming the bodily participation into a performance of sorts. This bodily practice is more ritualistic, but before addressing examples of it, I offer some examples of how people carry gods within them. In the beginning of this thesis, I quoted Jesus telling Shadow how gods exist in the minds of people and barely have an identity of their own. This could be read as one way to host the belief: as an idea, belief is rooted in the mind of the believer, and it requires a body to manifest externally. An example of a belief taking over the body to externalize itself is when Elegba, the African trickster god, speaks with Wututu's mouth on the Dutch ship. The words she speaks to the guard sexually harassing her are not her own but rather Elegba's (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 352). The trickster's promise to bite off the guard's penis is Wututu's way of being empowered by her belief in Elegba to stand against the man. The trickster also takes control over Wututu's brother, who is known as Hyacinth during the slave revolt, promising the other men freedom (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 355). Acting as a form of empowerment, Agasu's belief in the trickster god emerges from his mind and seizes his body which allows Agasu to fight against his oppressors.

Worship is a performance that combines the body, feeling, and space. Performance is one of the four theme's Morgan identifies, but because it essentially encompasses the others, I will cover it along the second theme of body and conclude this section with a separate discussion on space. Drawing from Ervin Goffman's work on how human interaction is shaped

like a performance, David Morgan (2010, 65) understands performance in the domain of religion as presenting the self to the divine through worship. Religious rituals are counted as performance, and a conventional example from Christianity would be going to the church to listen to a sermon, pray, and participate in the communion. Worship is about participation and action, and, for example, the African slaves in Agasu's (Hyacinth's) story "would gather and dance, and sing and worship" during the night (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 355). This form of worship connects the slaves and performs their beliefs through movement and sound. Equivalently, beliefs connect people to objects and things that have sacred meaning attached to them (Morgan 2010, 58). In the story of Atsula, the nomadic group worships a skull of a mammoth because it is a representation of Nunyunnini, their god (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 445). Their belief needs a physical form, so the skull becomes an embodiment of their belief, the believers form an emotional connection (feeling) to it and have a material way of worshipping their god. Nunyunnini is only one example of worshipping an object, and I will cover this in greater detail in my analysis of the new gods, but now I focus on the way old gods are worshiped as the two differ slightly.

One physical way of connecting to another is sex. Graham Harvey (2013, 212), who has researched the everyday practices of religion, notes that in a religious context, a sexual practice can be regulated through restraints or rules, for example, by stating what is allowed or expected. Even though the context might change, sex always connects two or more bodies, creating an embodied experience of belief. When it encompasses meanings, sex becomes a religious practice. In *American Gods*, humans have a sexual connection with other humans, for example when Laura cheats on Shadow with his friend Robbie, but mostly the sexual acts take place in a religious context between a human and a participating god. Catherine Bell (1992, 39) states that if a religious ritual is seen as a performance, there has to be someone observing it, but David Morgan (2010, 65), on the other hand, notes that even though deities can simply be present during worship as observers, the divine can also be an active participant. In the novel, there are several cases of gods participating. When Wednesday and Shadow are leaving Eagle Point after Laura's funeral, the god spends the night with a blonde girl in a motel room, and later, in the novel, he tells Shadow that taking a virgin is an "easy prescription to get warm blood flowing through an old frame" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 71; 260). In a similar way, Nancy tells Shadow that women invigorate him (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 137). There is no mention whether the gods reveal who they are to their partners, but these people still participate in the ritual, and by combining the body and feeling, sex becomes a performance with two participants: the believer and the believed.

There are two scenes in the novel that showcase how structured and ritualistic worship sex can be. When Salim is about to leave the taxi the jinn is driving, he invites the other to his hotel room, and the jinn arrives later that evening. Before they begin, the jinn washes himself because in Islam, purification is a part of a ritual (Jansen and Dresen 2012, 219). Similarly, Salim washes his mouth afterwards for hygienic reasons, but in the context of the worship, it could also be post-ritual purification, considering washing can take place before, during, or after a ritual (Harvey 2013, 30). This adheres to my previous discussion on collective religion in chapter two and how believers follow conventions when performing rituals. Islam might not have unspoken rules about how to be intimate with a spirit, but having a mutual goal and performing purification is enough to turn the somewhat unconventional moment into a ritual. The worship is highly emotional and reciprocal, and the scene shows how Salim expresses strong feelings of devotion. For example, at one point during the night, Salim begins to cry, and the jinn kisses “away his tears with burning lips” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 205). They engage in sex, exchanging bodily fluids, which creates a kinship between them as bodily fluids always contain the possibility of transformation (Jansen and Dresen 2012, 217). In certain contexts, semen could have a metaphorically contaminating effect, but in this scene, it is a continuation of the ritual and a part of the overall exchange that sex as a performance is.

Sex can also be about power as the second ritualistic scene with Bilquis and her human customer indicates. Bilquis is the Queen of Sheba who has appeared in the Old Testament, in later Jewish accounts, and in the Qur’an as a strong female leader going to visit King Solomon (Inloes 2012, 424). In *American Gods*, Bilquis is a goddess of sexuality and fertility who works as a prostitute. The power of the woman in this representation lies in how instead of servicing men, she transforms the situation into a ritual and asks her customer, “Will you call me goddess? Will you pray to me? Will you worship me with your body?” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 31). In this way, Bilquis gets the money and the sustenance a belief grants her. The sex she has with her customer is not as emotional and reciprocal as Salim’s night with the jinn is because the act is even more ritualistic and structured. Catherine Bell (1992, 76) remarks that in a structured environment, the body becomes ritualized through action. Essentially, patterns, movements, and how the act is realized determine whether something is ritual. Bilquis meets the man in a dark red room that has silk scarves over lamps, a huge bed with satin sheets, a red candle, and a statue of a fertility goddess. Lighting up a candle and placing the money under the statue begins the ritual. During it, the man worships Bilquis with his body, but he also uses his words to create a prayer, saying “Bring me your lust [...]. Let me walk in dark places unharmed [...]. I worship you with everything that is within me” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 31).

The words are performative, which means the man performs what he is saying, i.e. worshipping, by uttering the words “I worship you”. The ritual comes to a conclusion when Bilquis literally consumes the man with her body, taking all of him and his belief into her.

Another bodily connection between the believer and the divine is human sacrifice. Religious offerings create intimacy between the giver and the recipient and are often based on an expectation of receiving something in return (Harvey 2012, 148). In the past, people would smash skulls for Czernobog on high mountains, as well as make “blood-sacrifice to him, libations spilled with the hammer” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 100; 463). The power in this worship lies in transferring life from the sacrifice to the god because not only is the god given a body but also the life it represents: in the novel, by visiting the site where the sacrifices were made, Czernobog absorbs the lifeforce of the dead. Blood in itself is highly symbolical as it reflects life, kinship, and power, all of which are components of a sacrifice (Jansen and Dresen 2012, 219). Human sacrifice as a form of worship shares similarities with sex because it connects the human and the god through a body, which acts as a channel for the beliefs, but, self-evidently, sacrificing a life is a horrific form of worship. The ultimate offering of something valuable and vital is a child sacrifice (Harvey 2012, 148). In the novel, Hinzelmännchen, the old man living in Lakeside, is actually a kobold and a German child god who gained his godly status by being a child sacrifice himself. In one of his dreams, Shadow sees a child raised in darkness, and later in the novel, Hinzelmännchen reveals that a group of people in Black Forest raised him in isolation, sacrificed him by piercing his body with blades, and then burned it to worship the bones for luck (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 613). The sacrificial ritual was executed to receive fortune, and, similarly in the present-day Lakeside, Hinzelmännchen grants the town prosperity and protection after taking the life of a child every winter, as I mentioned earlier when talking about winter and death. Hinzelmännchen conforms to the belief that created him, and in general, taking a life and offering it strengthens the belief and consequently the god, who might be lenient and give something back to the believer.

There is also another form of sacrifice in *American Gods* that does not involve human participants – god sacrifice. They are material, humanlike beings in the novel, and because all ideas and material entities can die, gods die too, which is connected to paradigm shifts that I will discuss in the following chapter. In the story of the Vikings, a bard sings how Odin was once “sacrificed to himself” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 76). To repeat history, he dies again in the hands of Mr. World/Loki, but this death is a part of his and Loki’s plan to start a war so they can feed on death and chaos. Wednesday/Odin is “the sacrificial lamb” (Gaiman

[2001] 2013, 577). The other gods will not participate, so Wednesday becomes the first sacrifice to start a chain of other sacrifices, i.e. the gods fighting against each other. It matters little who dies because each death feeds the duo. In this way, the battle acts as a ritual to gain power, and it includes aspects like declaring the recipient of the sacrifice, and an object to channel the beliefs, which is the spear that pierced Odin's side. When Mr. World stabs Technical Boy, he utters, "I dedicate this battle to Odin", and similarly Laura states, "I dedicate this death to Shadow" when she impales herself and Loki with Odin's spear (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 549; 572). The words are a formal part of the ritual, and the spear is just a material object that represents death and power, seeing "[i]t is only a gesture" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 469). All things considered, godly sacrifice boils down to symbolism. The battle shows how worship and rituals have an effect only when there is meaning attached to them, i.e. material sacrifice is nothing without the belief that guides it. The battle of the gods is not an actual battle but rather a symbolic struggle of clashing beliefs and a demonstration of how sacrificing one belief powers another – the stronger the god, the more worship, offerings, and attention is directed to the belief it represents.

From blood and body, the discussion can be steered towards eating and drinking as practicing beliefs. Along with sex and sacrifices, ingesting various substances is another means of creating a physical bond between the believer and the divine. First, eating and drinking can have a symbolic meaning, and in Christianity, for instance, wine and bread represent the body and blood of Christ (Jansen and Dresen 2012, 217). Expectedly, when Shadow meets Jesus during his vigil, Jesus offers him a drink which is "brackish red wine" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 503). The meaning of eating is constructed by moving between materialism and the idea level of beliefs: people do not actually eat human flesh or drink human blood; wine and bread connect them to the Christ symbolically. Secondly, eating and drinking can be very communal acts with the ability to unify people (Harvey 2012, 106). A meal or a drink can establish who believes and who participates in the belief, and they are a literal way to accept the belief within. In the story of Atsula, she urinates into a cup, leaves it in the snow overnight, and shares it with her followers the next day, pouring the rest "on the ground in front of their god, a libation to Nunyunnini." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 446). The meaning here is twofold: to connect the group and to honor their god. In fact, food and drinks can also be used as a sacrifice or an offering only for the god to consume. Just like with sex and human sacrifices, eating is a very apparent way of feeding on the beliefs, and *American Gods* is full of examples of gods eating and drinking or accepting food offerings. I will now offer several examples of humans and gods consuming, as well as, offering and accepting food as a form of bodily practice of their beliefs.

Shadow seals the deal to work as Wednesday's bodyguard by drinking three glasses of mead, a drink that is often associated with mythical significance. It is the medieval drink for celebrating kings and successful battles, and in Norse mythology, it provides wisdom and divine madness both into battles and sexual encounters (Meadows 2014). For Wednesday, mead is "[h]oney wine. The drink of heroes. The drink of the gods." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 40). He offers it to Shadow, who, by accepting the alcohol and drinking all of it, signs an abiding contract with the god. Mad Sweeney joins the two men's company in the bar, and even though the leprechaun provokes Shadow to fight him and the human accepts, proving his worthiness to Wednesday by fighting, the three men are unified by the drinks they share. Drinking seals the deal and creates a moment of togetherness, another example of which is the toast in Mad Sweeney's honor. The leprechaun has died, so together with the Egyptian gods at the funeral home, Shadow toasts Sweeney by pouring "a generous tot into each glass", raising his glass and saying a few words for him (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 242). Later in the novel, Wednesday talks about gifting another god some Soma, which is a ritual drink of the ancient Indians, said to have psychedelic effects (Thoricatha 2015). Using soma as a reference, the old god explains that mead is "[c]oncentrated prayer and belief, distilled into a potent liqueur." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 309). In this way, alcohol is an example of a drink that is a form of worship, relying heavily on body and sensations. The substance is a representation of belief, and ingesting it is like accepting divinity into one's body.

An offering of food invites the god to reward the believer. As with any offering, there are two purposes: to show that one believes and to expect something in return. According to Boyer (2005, 251), people assume that gods have strategic information, i.e. they know answers and have special powers for specific situations. Gods might not be able to do everything, but when there is an issue, they possess the knowledge and abilities to solve it. In *American Gods*, Essie offers milk to piskies, Cornish fairies, to remain in good health and advises her children to carry salt and bread, which are "the old symbols of life and the earth", so that they will stay safe (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 109–110). Assumedly, the gods have strategic information of what the people need and the means to provide it, e.g. a cure for illnesses, so the offerings are an exchange. The believer gives an offering and receives something in return. The arrangement Hinzelmann had with the first inhabitants of Lakeside follows this pattern as well: a child is sacrificed every winter and in return, he protects the town. Giving the gods something is a very common way to worship, but it need not involve an exchange always. People can simply offer, as Nancy tells Shadow, a "pile of fruit to eat, maybe curried goat" without wanting anything in return (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 137). The offering is simply a means to express one's

beliefs. However, whether a practitioner of belief is expecting something in return for their offerings or not, others might judge their belief by their appearance. Negative signs, e.g. sickness, can quickly be interpreted as a proof of disbelief, whereas beauty and health are seen as signs of belief (Morgan 2010, 60). In other words, the healthy might be seen as a better practitioner or having more faith than someone who looks sick, so in a sense, even without any offerings, believing is rewarded.

Belief has potential to reward the believer, but undoubtedly, the object of belief, the god, reaps the benefits. People hope to have a reciprocal relationship with their gods, but it is the god that ultimately needs the relationship to exist. Belief is the sustenance that keeps the gods going, and worship is the material manifestation of the feeding, as can be seen in the novel. Wednesday uses food to coax the other gods into joining his battle because feeding them food represents feeding them beliefs, which makes the old gods stronger. When Wednesday and Shadow have dinner at Czernobog's house, Zorya Utrennyaya's gray hair becomes "incongruously golden" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 94). A simple meal is an act of worship, which is sustenance and enough to reinvigorate Zorya Utrennyaya. Similarly in chapter six, Wednesday is planning to buy the gods dinner after their meeting at the House on the Rock to persuade them and offer some belief. Mr. Jacquel/Anubis, the Egyptian god of death, combines sacrifices and eating in his line of work. Together with Mr. Ibis/Thoth, the god of writing and death among many things, Jacquel owns a funeral home where he also performs autopsies, sometimes slicing off small parts of the organs for him to eat (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 216). The dead have not been sacrificed for him, but in a ritualistic way, he opens up the bodies and eats to sustain himself. Offerings connect to other ingestible substances too, and, for example, Nancy tells Shadow, "I think [...] that our kind, we like the cigarettes so much because they remind us of the offerings that once they burned for us, the smoke rising up as they sought our approval or our favor." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 137). Nancy likes to smoke, Czernobog smokes during Shadow's first visit to his house, and Wednesday also shares a cigarette with Whiskey Jack after they have eaten and are discussing the upcoming war. Overall, the relation of offerings, ingesting substances as well as bodies is very intricate.

Worshipping a dead body needs to be discussed separately due to how important it is for the storyline. As Shadow agrees to work for Wednesday, he also promises to hold his vigil in case the god dies. A typical wake as a death ritual entails gathering in the presence of the dead one to see them and be awake with them (Huntington and Metcalf 1979, 190–1). The vigil in the novel, however, is more inclusive, and Shadow partakes in a 'substitute death'.

When Wednesday is killed, Shadow is tied by the Norns to the World Tree where he hangs for nine days and nine nights with Wednesday's body at his feet. His participation worships the old god because, as I mentioned, Odin once sacrificed himself and hung from the World Tree, so by going through what Odin did, Shadow fortifies the power acquired from the sacrifice. The vigil as a reenactment of Odin's sacrifice is completed when Mr. Town jabs a branch of the tree in Shadow's direction because this causes Shadow's side to bleed as if he had been stabbed with a spear (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 542). From Wednesday's perspective, one death symbolizes "all the men, all the blood, all the power", but ultimately, "it's not the death that matters. It's the opportunity for resurrection" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 470). The old god has died, but this has pushed the others to fight, so all the future deaths and Shadow's demise during the vigil will be powerful enough to resurrect him. His death is not permanent, and as long as somebody believes in him, he survives. Right before his death, Wednesday tells Shadow that "[i]f you move and act in the material world, then the material world acts on you." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 416). Whether he only says this to ensure Shadow does not suspect his death, there is a grain of truth in his words. The material world can destroy the god and his death is a material one, but Wednesday can also be resurrected with the material world – his vigil.

Without belief, the idea of a god fades and the body deteriorates. The old gods look physically old, but biology or diseases cannot kill them because their materiality is entwined with the belief: to kill a god, the idea must die and to hurt them, the belief must be scarce. Mad Sweeney and Technical Boy both go through an episode comparable to withdrawals, but only Mad Sweeney perishes. When the new gods encounter the old gods and Shadow in the center of America to hand over Wednesday's dead body, they are on neutral land which, to a computer like Technical Boy, is offline: it is a dead zone to operate in for him and his children (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 477). During that night, the god screams and rages in his room, which could be a temper-tantrum of a teenager, but because there are no believers to feed him, he could be going through withdrawal. The 'Internet addict' he is needs to be connected online. Similarly, Mad Sweeney needs his lucky coin, the material representation of sun and luck, to survive. Without the coin, he loses touch with his essence and cannot feed on belief. Whereas Technical Boy's misery is only momentary, Mad Sweeney cannot get his coin back because he accidentally gives it to Shadow who passes it on to Laura Moon. The leprechaun twitches and trembles, and Shadow notes it looks like junkie shivers (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 234). Whereas Wednesday dies physically in the hands of Mr. World and Technical Boy's body is temporarily injured by being offline, Mad Sweeney loses his connection to belief, and his death is permanent, at least in the context of the novel.

Throughout this section, I have introduced various ways to worship the godly characters in *American Gods*. This discussion could be longer because the novel is filled with so many divine beings from different mythologies, but fortunately, the analysis can be narrowed down with David Morgan's themes of feeling, body, and performance, space being an independent section in the end of this chapter. This way, the examples of emotional connection, ritualistic sex, ingesting substances, and worshiping the body provide a sufficient picture of the novel's material means to practice beliefs. My analysis has focused mainly on the old gods, so the next section will be about the new gods. Morgan's themes are applicable to them as well, but there are some quintessential differences between the gods, and the new gods are not worshiped in the traditional sense, so to support my discussion, I will include Gordon Lynch's (2010, 43) ideas about sacred objects, i.e. material or ideological object that is in relation to some religious belief. In a similar manner, Morgan (2010, 70) associates material religion with 'things' that are socially constructed and more than just material objects or ideas: they are defined in practice and by being in relation to them. A thing could therefore be either an old god like Anansi or a new god that is an object, e.g. Technical Boy, because both of them exist in relation to believers or users, who practice their belief in computers by using them. On that note, I will continue to the next section where I take a closer look at new gods and how to worship them.

4.2.1 New Gods as Objects/Subjects in Worship

Performance, one of the themes Morgan identifies, lends itself quite nicely to the analysis of new gods. These new divinities cannot be analyzed like in the previous section because they are hardly worshiped by pouring cider in the ground in the name of TV, or by sacrificing humans for credit card gods, although animals are sometimes sacrificed for science and Instagram is a shrine for beauty. In this thesis, I have divided my interpretation of the new gods into three parts: why they are religious beliefs in the third chapter, how they are embodied in the first part of this chapter, and now how they are worshiped materially. By dividing my analysis this way, I can discuss the new gods along with the old ones, showing that way how similar they truly are, but with this separate section, my purpose is to concentrate on the distinct way body, sensations, and performance are tied to create an object-oriented worship. The vast majority of the new gods mentioned in *American Gods* are tools, machines, or other material inventions with the exception of Mr. World/globalization, cancer, and the humanlike radio and

media personas. They have a different material connection to the world than the old gods, who exist through material worship but cannot be discovered in the world without human mediation. New gods, on the other hand, require an object-oriented focus. The reason why I emphasize performance over the other themes is because it encompasses how people worship objects by giving them time and their presence. In other words, new gods can be analyzed by looking at how they are used and how they exert power over people in the form of eating their time and demanding their attention.

Media and Technical Boy are some of the most visible new gods in the novel. The story sets in the early 2000s, which was a remarkable time for these gods because the number of computer owners and users was constantly growing, but meanwhile the old devices like television still remained relevant (Pew Research 2014). In the novel, Media appears on the TV screen, but these days she could make an appearance through computers or smartphones as well. She tells Shadow that instead of being a television herself, “the TV’s the altar. I’m what people are sacrificing to. [...] Their time, mostly” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 189). It is a convenient medium for her because televisions are everywhere, and no matter how Shadow avoids the new gods during the winter months, he finds two televisions in Lakeside. His neighbor’s son is playing in front of a TV screen, when Shadow visits the apartment, and while being detained, Shadow notices how the policewoman is watching “a small white portable television” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 418; 434). They are not the main focus in these scenes, but having televisions in the background shows how common they have to be so that people become accustomed to them and, in a sense, ignore them. TVs demand time and presence, and even Shadow wishes he had one so he could be entertained (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 415). Media, or television in this context, is a goddess because people need and want her. Even though there is no godly character that embodies telephones in *American Gods*, these are widespread devices as well, and even Wednesday uses one to call Shadow. The third technical invention that has his fair share of users is Technical Boy. His disdain towards the center as a meeting place indicates he does not encounter many places in America that have “[n]o power” and are “[o]ut of wireless range” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 472). The prevalence of technology signals its importance and frequency of use, which, in my interpretation, demonstrates how this is a form of worship. Stuart Sim (2006, 74) suggests that the contemporary intelligent system is science. Considering its connection to technology, one could claim that technoscience has replaced God as the intelligent system and that in the context of *American Gods*, Media and Technical Boy are the new divine order.

New gods are objects to use, but simultaneously, they are subjects with agency. For example, computers are machines that have been created and programmed by people, but their development has led to them taking over people's jobs and creating dependency on computers, which makes them the masters instead (Sim 2006, 93). On some level, they are therefore objects to use, but as Gordon Lynch (2010, 43) suggests, objects are very dynamic with all the feelings, associations, and significances that both individuals and social contexts add to them. By being in relation to these objects, people give them life, and the objects become subjects (Lynch 2010, 50). Media, for instance, can be a passive machine that people stare at or an influencer that people listen to. During their meeting in the center of America, the goddess persuades Shadow to join their side by saying, "We can make you *famous*, Shadow. We can give you power over what people believe and say and wear and dream", but she also threatens, "We can make it bad for you. You could be a bad joke forever, Shadow. Or you could be remembered as a monster." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 475–6). Just like she says, media holds power over people and influences their decisions, opinions, and interests. Of course, media is controlled by people and agencies, but the system of actors becomes so blurry that it begins to resemble an agentic entity. Quite similarly, money entails this object/subject dichotomy. *American Gods* contains a scene in which Wednesday takes Shadow to a casino to meet a god in "charcoal-gray suit" whose appearance is "forgettable" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 304). Shadow struggles to remember meeting him, and even the god's employees at the casino ignore the man capable of "feeling the flow of the money" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 305). He is the embodiment of money: his presence is as fluid as the flow of it, and the gambling customers worship him by spending their savings at his casino. He is very old, but seeing how important money is in modern societies, he is also a new god. People use money like an object, but by being a significant power that dictates people's lives, money is also a subject.

To worship a new god, is to use them and need them, give them time and attention, but also to recognize the hold they have over people. In some cases, this hold is an emotional connection similar to the one believers have with old gods. Before the battle on Lookout Mountain begins, the new gods arrive with their expensive transportations, looking like "the world existed for them" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 537). Amongst these divinities are movie stars, TV people, news anchors, and other famous people placed on the pedestal who might be the closest equivalent to gods, heroes, and legends in our modern society. People know their names, admire them, and follow their careers or personal lives. In the novel, Shadow does not encounter any of them personally, and even though they arrive in a visible way, the celebrities seem very distant. This mirrors how in reality people feel they are emotionally connected to celebrities,

but this sense of intimacy is an illusion, which is referred to as parasocial interaction (Giles 2018, 41). The interaction lacks reciprocation because the famous person is rarely aware of their admirer's existence, meanwhile the other side creates and maintains the relationship with their interest. This way, even talking about celebrities is a form of worship (Giles 2018, 49). The power to influence transforms these gods into subjects, but the lack of reciprocation makes them look like objects.

In media and the world of fame, resembling an object means the person is objectified. The fame of celebrities and stars is rooted in media representation that essentially produces who and what they are (Giles 2018, 16). People become picture perfect ideals, which is why in *American Gods*, Laura describes the new gods as she walks up Lookout Mountain as "faintly artificial; several of them were translucent" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 568). These beings are beautified versions of people, products of media representation, and therefore objects, but there is power in these ideals, and it is often connected to sex and nudity. Although reciprocal bodily connection is not a form of worshiping new gods, sex is connected to them through media representation. Sex is used to sell products, attract audiences, and influence consumers. By being influential products, new gods become subjects, and *American Gods* has a brief example of sex being used as a means to influence people. Media attempts to entice Shadow with nudity during their first television mediated interaction by saying, "I can give you so much more. [...] You name it, honey. What do you need? [...] You ever wanted to see Lucy's tits?" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 190). Her goal is to convince Shadow to join their side, and she is teasing Shadow with nudity and using sex appeal for persuasion. To worship Media is to give her attention, but the worship could also be actual sex or giving money, like is the case with Bilquis. She is an old god, whose ritualistic sex I discussed earlier, but in the novel she also resorts to advertising her body and services online to gain worshipers, i.e. paying customers. Media only teases Shadow because the new gods are about selling an image, but Bilquis as a goddess of fertility requires sex. She is, however, willing to settle for "money, good money" because "that's an energy in its own right" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 403). This could be applied to many of the new gods because paying for something means it is either needed or wanted, which is appreciation and therefore worship.

New gods can be worshiped as objects or subjects, but all worship boils down to recognizing their significance. This might be a truism to state, but seeing there are so many various types of new deities, identifying all the ways to worship new gods is somewhat impossible. In *American Gods*, many of the new gods are only quickly mentioned, but from the

few examples I have discussed here, one can deduce that to be a new god is to be significant in the society, which then means that their worship is based on accepting or at least acknowledging their societal power. I argued in chapter three that technoscience entails authority and knowledge and I would like to add providing opportunities as a third property. Technoscience has the ability to make people's lives better or worse, e.g. it extends lifespans, and it also bridges together the gap between creativity and the impossible (Jackelén 2005, 870). Essentially, technoscience gives something in return for its worship. Although every new god is not related to technoscience, this field encompasses many of the new inventions and trends, and technoscience could very well be the most important one of them. Many gods are related to it, and for example, the new god of hospitals, which is mentioned once in the novel, connects to technoscience's ability to make lives better. On the other hand, the new gods can be harmful like cancer whose representation has a "cancerous" face, "a glutinous voice", and "a tumorous lower lip" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 537). The disease is a side-effect of modern lifestyle and harmful to people, but this danger is power that makes it a god. New gods can also be dangerous inventions, and it is a gun that kills Hinzelmann, when Chad Mulligan, a local policeman, pulls the trigger (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 615). Significance does not, therefore, imply benevolence. All in all, to worship and recognize the significance of something is to maintain the relation between belief and matter.

4.2.2 Immanent Places of Power: Space in Practicing Beliefs

The final aspect of material beliefs to discuss is space. This section stands on its own because it finalizes my discussion on worship and ties it together with the bigger picture, i.e. how ideas connect to matter. All worship takes place somewhere, but whether the location is truly sacred, depends on how it channels the idea level. David Morgan's themes include space as one of the approaches, and he understands religious space in two ways: first, it is a socially constructed location that derives its sacredness from rituals and worship, and second, it is a location whose power people recognize before entering into a relation with it (Morgan 2010, 62–3). These two viewpoints are often seen as opposing, but Morgan claims they can be unified, and considering how *American Gods* has religious spaces that exemplify both of the viewpoints, I will include both of them. Locations like Ashtree farm where the world tree is and Lookout Mountain with Rock City are places that have been defined by their rituals, but simultaneously they are manifestations of power, as is the House on the Rock. To understand locations like these, I will

utilize Gerardus van der Leeuw's ([1933] 1986) understanding of space, on which David Morgan also bases his ideas. To van der Leeuw, when people take a part of space and locate themselves there, it becomes a position which can be turned later into a place with buildings and other structures (van der Leeuw [1933] 1986, 393–4). Space is therefore something undetermined, whereas place is the identified and defined location. In this section, I will apply van der Leeuw's ideas to understand which locations matter in *American Gods*, and to finish this chapter's discussion on materialism, I will explain how matter leads to the Backstage, i.e. the immanent idea level of beliefs.

The place can either be very sacred or a negative space that repels gods. The center of America, where the new gods hand over Wednesday's body, is a negative space, which Czernobog explains to Shadow by saying it is "less sacred than any other place. Of negative sacredness." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 465). The true center of America is a farm in Kansas, but a monument and a park were built two miles north from the actual center, so this location became "the exact center of America" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 462). However, no tourists arrived, it was not worshiped, and it became a negative space as well as a neutral zone for the gods to meet. The reason why the location is not sacred is because no real power exists there. For a place to be sacred, there needs to be power that draws people in, so essentially no buildings or structures can be made holy by simply building them somewhere (van der Leeuw [1933] 1986, 398). Space that truly manifests power is called a place of power, and the House on the Rock in *American Gods* is such. Wednesday tells Shadow that the House is "a roadside attraction [...] [w]hich means it is a place of power", and he elaborates by saying that people once realized "something important was happening there, that there was some focusing point, some channel, some window to the Immanent" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 129–130). This is essentially how van der Leeuw sees sacred places: they are truly powerful places whose sacredness does not depend on people building holy buildings or monuments there, although building something is a way to recognize the power of the place. The House on the Rock is a roadside attraction with multiple rooms and sights to see, but it is also a gateway to the Immanent, which is why the gods use the carousel located in there to travel to Wednesday's mind and to Odin's Hall in the Backstage. The carousel is "like a prayer wheel", according to Mr. Nancy, because it is "[a]ccumulating power" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 139). It takes the old gods and Shadow from the material representation, i.e. the House, to the idea level where the real sacredness is.

There are three other locations – world tree, Mount Rushmore, and Rock City – that are places of power, whose sacredness is also defined by rituals and worship. All of them are

channels to real power, but by being locations of worship, their holiness also stems from constructed meanings, which means they illustrate how Morgan's twofold religious spaces can be unified. The world tree is located on Ashtree farm in Virginia, but it is a representation rather than the actual World Tree from Norse mythology, i.e. an ash tree called Yggdrasil that holds together the cosmos (Kure 2006, 68). This tree and the one on which Wednesday was once hung are both versions of the real thing, and Shadow appropriately describes the tree "spectral and yet utterly real" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 490). It is a material representation of the World Tree's idea, as well as a bridge to the power of that place. While Shadow is hanging on the tree deliriously, he becomes one with it, feeling how the tree's roots go deep into the ground as if they were reaching for his past (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 502). The vigil helps Shadow find his identity, but it is also a ritualistic way to worship Wednesday, which constructs the sacredness of the place. In other words, the location is powerful on its own, but using the tree for a ritual enhances this power. Similarly, Mount Rushmore that is located in South Dakota is "a holy place" according to Wednesday, who explains the presidents' heads with "[t]hat's the American Way – they need to give people an excuse to come and worship. These days, people can't just go and see a mountain." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 366). The Black Hills are sacred to the Lakotas, and the location is a place of power, but the American holiness of Mount Rushmore is constructed and fortified by the flooding tourists whose visits are a form of worship. The very same thing occurs in Rock City, which has been a "place of awe and worship for thousands of years" and now all the tourists that visit there have "the same effect as water turning a million prayer wheels" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 579). All of the three places are sacred, but for two different reasons: there is an underlying power in the locations which stems from the Backstage, but they are also transformed into sacred spaces with rituals that utilize the connection between beliefs and matter.

The battle between the gods takes place on Lookout Mountain, which is located in Georgia, and Rock City, the sacred tourist attraction, is at the top of the mountain. Lookout Mountain "resembles an impossibly high and commanding hill" that the Chickamauga controlled before the white men came, and throughout the mountain's history, it has belonged to the winning side "[f]or whoever controlled Lookout Mountain controlled the land; that was the legend. It was a sacred site, after all, and it was a high place" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 528). Just like Rock City, Lookout Mountain is a place of power that connects to the Immanent, but it also gain its sacredness from tourists and ritualistic conquests such as the battle between the old and new gods. Climbing the mountain symbolizes the battle or the struggle gods face in America in general, the peak refers to winning, and essentially, who conquers the mountain,

wins over the believers in America. When Shadow faces the gods on the mountain, he notes how thin the reality is there, referring to how close to the Backstage the mountain is (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 579). The boundary between matter and ideas is translucent and frail, which means it is, for example, easy to shift between the human and the god form that I introduced earlier in this chapter. Shadow sees Wednesday on the mountain after the god's death, and he is a ghost "fading back into the ether", which means he bounces between matter and ideas (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 579). Similarly, the command center of the new gods benefits from the thin reality. Mr. World sets up "the Rainbow Room – a walled section of the path [that leads to the peak], its window glass covered in clear plastic sheets of green and red and yellow film" (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 547). The room is actually a damp cave with plastic sheets and plastic chairs on which Mr. World sits with Technical Boy, but with bending the boundary between matter and ideas, the room becomes an operations center. It is not as fancy as the Rainbow Room in the Rockefeller Center, but that is because the Rock City version is an imitation, a copy of an idea.

The Backstage is where all the sacred power emanates from. To help Shadow conceptualize the place, Wednesday calls it "being behind the scenes. Like in a theatre or something. I just pulled us out of the audience and now we're walking about the backstage." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 374–5). The Backstage is the idea level of religion, i.e. what people believe. The most famous philosopher to talk about the idea level must be Plato who identifies a transcendent world of ideas and a material world whose physical objects are copies of the transcendent ideas (Kraut 2017). The Backstage is a such idea world, but taking into account my previous discussion on how the beliefs stem from material origins, the ideas are not transcendent in the same way as Plato's ideas are. Instead, they belong to the world of Immanence, which is often seen as an opposing view to Transcendence. Several philosophers have commented on Immanence, e.g. Baruch Spinoza and Gilles Deleuze, but these thinkers and their works form such a vast and complex web of theories that it is beyond the scope of my thesis. On the other hand, immanence cannot be disregarded completely because my interpretation of *American Gods* is fundamentally immanent because it encompasses material spirituality, and immanent refers to "that *which resides* within reality" (Corten and Doran 2007, 366). Religious ideas are within the material world rather than somewhere beyond it. In *A Secular Age* (2007), philosopher Charles Taylor coins up the term "the immanent frame" which signifies a shift in perspective from transcendence to immanence and how the world is constructed on a natural and individual order without cosmic powers (Taylor 2007, 542). God or some other absolute power is no longer responsible for the world, the natural order replaces a supernatural one, and individual people gain autonomy in the absence of cosmic powers. This

all sounds quite familiar if my previous discussion is considered: the world of *American Gods* is organized around believers and their material beliefs.

The Backstage can be depicted as material immanence. When Shadow and Wednesday travel to meet Whiskey Jack in South Dakota, they take a shortcut through the Backstage in the form of the Badlands. They are behind the scenes, and it is “not good for the audience”, i.e. people, to be there because it is the godly dimension (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 374). However, the location is not transcendental because it is a material place, and the Lakota beliefs are connected to the land there. Quite interestingly, towards the end of the novel, Lookout Mountain is described as “merely a representation of the thing, not the thing itself”, whereas the Backstage is “the quintessence of place” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 580). The thing itself is a very Kantian idea (*Ding an sich*), and for Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, experiencing the thing itself is impossible because experiences are always subjective and the thing is beyond people’s reach (Rohlf 2016). The description of Lookout Mountain sounds like Kant’s transcendental idealism, but in my interpretation, it depicts material immanence. The reason for this is that Taylor’s immanent frame allows two interpretations of immanence: first, the world is based on materialism and there is nothing beyond it, and second, the world encompasses spirituality and divine meanings (Taylor 2007, 550). Immanence does not exclude divinities if they are combined with matter. As I have already stated multiple times, all material representations have an idea level, but to continue this notion I want to state that it need not be out of this world to encompass “the thing itself”. The two versions of Lookout Mountain are like ‘the god’ and ‘the human’ that I introduced in the personification part of this chapter. The only difference is that this time, the godly form includes the space where this godly representation takes place. The Backstage is the source of the sacred because it represent beliefs and the power that stems from rituals and worship – the sacred has a material origin.

Throughout this chapter I have discussed how *American Gods* depicts religious materialism. First of all, religious beliefs are constructed materially as they either originate from nature or contemporary innovations, and they take an embodied form that either utilizes nature and animals or machines and other technoscientific means. Building the beliefs from matter is only the first aspect of religious materialism, and the second one is how these beliefs are being practiced. Worship is a performance that relies on body, feelings, and space, and it aims to consolidate the connection people have with their beliefs. Practicing beliefs externalizes what is seen as significant, and in the case of the new gods, significance turns them from objects to subjects. The new gods are very much material entities, and this entire time, I have justified

why they are divine beings, but my discussion can be flipped around to argue why the old gods are less divine than is usually thought. The immanent frame is a very beneficial approach because it pulls back the old gods from transcendent spheres to the material world where the new gods are. In the era of immanence, the absence of cosmic order has created a void that can be filled with a new authority, a new set of rules and a new material order (Corten and Doran 2007, 568). Immanence emphasizes the role of humans, and being man-made constructions, the gods depend on people to exist and survive, but immanence also enables a new order amongst the gods. When the hold of transcendental gods and religious beliefs wavers, technoscientific gods emerge and take control. On that note, I will end this chapter and continue on by shifting the discussion back to the relationship between religion and technoscience.

5 Shifting Paradigms and the Present-Day American Gods

The word paradigm has appeared in this thesis every now and then, and I want to give it my full attention now. In chapter three, I mentioned how science and religion have been placed as adversaries or two opposing belief systems, and this relation could be analyzed from the perspective of paradigms. Thomas Kuhn's (1962) definition of paradigms shares a close resemblance to Griffith's understanding of belief systems and enables me to analyze how the battle between the old and new gods symbolizes a change of belief systems. Technical Boy talks about a paradigm shift, which refers to how religiosity is structured around patterns, i.e. changing beliefs and paradigms, and *American Gods* contains several interesting examples of this. In Atsula's story, Siberian mammoth god is replaced with newer gods, Bilquis updates sexual worship to online sex advertisements, and Easter is now the goddess of chocolate bunnies. By going through examples of paradigm shifts in the first part of this chapter, I will steer my discussion towards the final section in which my goal is to identify some of the prevailing paradigms in the present-day America. To conclude my analysis of godhood in the context of Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, I want to introduce updated versions of the novel's gods, i.e. the American gods of 2020.

5.1 Evolution and Revolution: How the Beliefs Change

Paradigm shift has become a very popular buzzword over the past decades. The concept catapulted into fame when Thomas Kuhn used it in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) and shaped paradigm shift into what it is today. According to Kuhn ([1962] 2012, 11), a scientific paradigm is one coherent tradition of beliefs, models, and practices that defines a community and sets apart a distinct set of applications and theories. Essentially, a paradigm is a framework, which makes a paradigm shift a change of this framework. Originally, Kuhn utilized the term in the field of science, but it has since been adopted to social sciences, philosophy, and other fields, and I will apply it to my analysis of the old and new gods as opponents. In *American Gods*, the war is about claiming more space and believers. Wednesday/Odin and Mr. World want to feed on power from death and chaos, and the new gods want to remove old beliefs from America's religious landscape. To Technical Boy, the war is a paradigm shift in which the old gods are "consigned to the dumpster of history" while the new gods "ride [their] limos down the superhighway of tomorrow" (Gaiman [2001] 2013,

59). The main paradigms of the novel are, therefore, old and new gods, i.e. traditional religions and technoscience. However, this is only the uppermost level, and the main paradigms can be divided into smaller ones: they contain separate deities and mythologies. Old gods can be divided into mythologies and belief systems e.g. Norse gods, the Egyptians, Lakota beliefs etc., and within these there are individual gods like Loki and Horus. This way, a paradigm shift can occur between religion and technoscience, the Norse pantheon and Lakota beliefs, or railroad gods and helicopter gods.

Paradigm shift is about replacing the old with new. Theories and beliefs are constantly developed further and re-assessed, enabling competing beliefs to emerge, and from these beliefs, one can be identified as better than the others, shifting what is this way the accepted paradigm (Kuhn [1962] 2012, 18). The scientific theory which explains some phenomena better than others becomes the new understanding of that phenomena, and a god that seems to fulfill a community's needs the best, becomes the accepted target of worship, i.e. the new paradigm that defines the community's identity. In the story of *Atsula*, the mammoth god Nunyunnini is replaced with raven and fox gods because these new gods "gr[o]w more powerful in the land", whereas the mammoths of the new land are "bigger, and slower, and more foolish" and therefore not the best choice for worship anymore (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 450-1). People are presented with a choice, and because the new gods seem stronger, *Atsula*'s people choose to worship them instead, making raven and fox gods the new paradigm. After the shift, old beliefs begin to disappear because they are no longer useful, and those who cling to the old ideas, become irrelevant as well (Kuhn [1962] 2012, 19). When *Atsula*'s group heads for the new land, *Atsula* stays behind literally and figuratively: whereas her people choose the new paradigm, she remains as the oracle of her old belief, becomes irrelevant, and dies worshipping her mammoth god alone. Similarly, Wednesday's death is portrayed by the new gods as believing in the wrong thing and falling off the wagon of progress. They livestream his death to Shadow who hears a female voice-over saying freedom is "what it means to be an American. *That's* the miracle of America. Freedom to believe means the freedom to believe the wrong thing, after all." (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 437). Their tactic is to convince Shadow to join their side by emphasizing how the old gods are old beliefs and they are the prevalent paradigm.

Gods need ideas and material means to remain relevant. In section 4.2, I already showed how the lack of worship damages gods and now I want to connect this to paradigms. To explain interaction with objects, Gordon Lynch (2012, 43) states that "[w]ithout such everyday mediation of the sacred through material and sensory forms, sacred objects experience

a social and cultural death like the old gods.” This refers to how the idea of something sacred, i.e. belief, needs a material connection to the world whether it is the believer and their practices or some object. Lynch states that the old gods are dead, but I do not agree with this statement because these beliefs still exist today, for instance in literary works like *American Gods*. The novel is one material mediation of the beliefs and contains examples of material ways to worship, as I discussed in the previous chapter. In the novel, some beliefs have a very strong material and ideational presence, like Technical Boy, but some beliefs exist only as material remains. Atsula and her god leave behind physical evidence in the form of bones, a preserved skull and a cloak, but their identities are not known simply by looking at the remains, and the belief itself is lost to the next generation (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 450). This is an extreme example of cultural and social death. Atsula and her god are completely fictional, so they have never even existed, but there are some other very old beliefs that are real and have managed to survive.

The Hall of Forgotten Gods represents old paradigms. In the section about personification, I explained how the gods are represented as statues and sculptures, i.e. as impassive beings with only one representation. This form exemplifies how Gordon Lynch (2010, 44) conceptualizes the creation of a sacred object: the sacred idea is connected with a material object through the means of transference. The statues participate in the transference, and they store the memory of old paradigms. The narrator tells that some beliefs are already so ancient that they have vanished barely without any trace. The oldest gods have no longer names, their worshipers have died, and “[t]heir totems are long since broken and cast down” (Gaiman 2013 [2001], 65). It is, as if, the connection between materiality and ideas has been severed. There are also gods several millennia old that are still remembered. They have statues and other material objects as reminders, but even more importantly, they have “a name burning on the floor” (Gaiman 2013 [2001], 64). Each statue has a name plate, which resembles how the names of these gods have also been carved into stone. Hershef, one of the gods the narrator mentions, is described as a “ram-headed man holding the golden ball” (*ibid.*). Even though written evidence of him is scarce, the name Heryshaf can be traced back to the First Dynasty of Egypt when it was written down on the Palermo Stone, a fragment of an ancient stele (Hart 2005, 68). The god has existed materially thousands of years on a stone and still does, even though the belief has been replaced, making Hershef/Heryshaf a forgotten god and a lost paradigm.

Gods can survive by evolving on the idea level. Beliefs are mental products, which I discussed in chapter two, and each person formulates belief differently in their mind, which

changes the belief over time. The goddess Easter is no longer what she once was, which Wednesday uses against her to persuade her into joining the war. Wednesday explains that “Easter festival takes its name from Eostre of the Dawn”, but when he pushes Easter to go ask people if they know that, the goddess admits her name “has no meaning to them [people]. Nothing at all.” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 333–4). People do not know the origin of the name and the original beliefs, but they worship the new Easter with bunnies and chocolate eggs. Similarly, Mama-ji, the Indian goddess Kali, explains that “[b]ack in India, there is an incarnation of [her] who does so much better” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 151). Most gods have arrived as immigrants and have incarnations, i.e. other versions of the belief that exist in their native land and in other locations where the belief has spread. By existing in multiple places, the belief has multiple believers and therefore further developed versions. Wednesday himself exists both in America and in Iceland because Vikings travelled “to America a long time ago [...] and then they returned to Iceland”, letting the ideas evolve in two places (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 633). Shadow meets the original Odin at the end of the novel who tells him that Wednesday is Odin, but Odin is not Wednesday, which refers to the Norse belief being the original one. Kuhn ([1962] 2012, 84) would call them paradigms strong enough to handle a change by evolving.

The gods can also survive by changing materially, which is the other side of belief’s evolution. The new gods, in particular, are pressured to change because by its nature, technology is never anything stable (Mackay 1995, 241). It is constantly developed and improved, which is a driving force for change. According to Shadow, the new gods are “afraid that unless they [keep] pace with a changing world, unless they remade and redrew and rebuilt the world in their image, their time would already be over” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 581). Renewing the idea oftentimes renews the materiality as well, and considering how the metamorphosis of the new gods relies on machines and other objects, their renewal must be material. For example, Jesus calls the “god of the guns” and the “god of the bombs” new gods, and even though one could assume their renewal is slow, their material development is very much a huge industry (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 504). There is a need for more efficient and destructive weapons, which is why new high-tech weapons are under a constant development (Lindsay 2013, 427). All development is controlled by beliefs and ideologies that stem from the need for something. Warfare industry, for example, pushes for developments to protect or control people, and it emphasizes ideas about efficiency, victory, and information (Lindsay 2013, 430). When the new gods kill Wednesday, Mr. Town, one of the Spooks, justifies his Agency’s actions by saying “[w]e’re risking our lives to make a difference.” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 437). He talks about terrorism and implies Shadow killed his two colleagues and is

therefore a terrorist too. The novel came out before 9/11, but the way Mr. Town invokes images of terrorism and making a difference resonates with the American tendency to justify the development of warfare. Whatever the real intentions or underlying ideologies are, they influence the development of new ways to *protect*.

Change mirrors the trends of contemporary times, and for this reason, the old gods can utilize technology to evolve. They can insert traditional aspects of their religion to technological innovations, creating this way a hybrid religion that benefits from two paradigms. Religions can, for example, be found online where people pray, execute rituals, share their interpretations, and find information about other beliefs (Campbell 2012, 682–3). Religious communities exist online in the same way as other communities, bringing people together and enabling simultaneously the private practice of beliefs. There are websites for various religious groups, holy texts can be downloaded as e-books, and searching information can help construct own belief systems. The traditional boundaries of religions are alive, from which a new form of “networked religion” emerges (Campbell 2012, 689). When discussing the worship of the new gods, I mentioned how Bilquis, the Queen of Sheba, has moved her religion online after “negotiating [the] new territories” on various adult websites where she has placed personal ads to get more customers (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 401). Bilquis was once “worshiped as a living goddess by the wisest of kings”, but times have changed, and she must find someone to worship her bodily for her to remain strong and relevant (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 400). She uses the Internet to advertise herself and connect with prospective customers, but she needs the physical act of sex to reinvigorate her, and Campbell (2012, 686) remarks that online form of religion does not replace the embodied practices or experiences that traditional religions provide. However, taking aspects of both paradigms, religion and technoscience, appears to be quite beneficial for invigorating the belief.

Ultimately, paradigm shifts depend on people’s demands, reflecting what is deemed significant in the society. Throughout this thesis, I have claimed that gods rely on believers, their needs and interests, and for this reason, paradigms follow the principles of supply and demand. Human demand defines what beliefs are needed, which causes the supply of gods to change: new forms of spirituality arise, old beliefs evolve, and some are forgotten. Technical Boy tells Bilquis that both the new and old gods deserve to be indispensable, and this can be accomplished by moving their “kind from the fringes of the slipstream to the higher ground of the mainstream” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 404). Mainstream therefore implies there is a demand for some specific belief system. Bilquis has already moved herself to the world of market

economy where she sells her services in an exchange for sex and money, and in a similar way, Mr. Ibis and Mr. Jacquel, the two Egyptian gods, have an independent funeral home in which they do embalming, autopsies, and offer other funeral services. Their business is independent in comparison to all those “fields of human merchandising [that] value nationwide brand identities” and to the small-town funeral-homes that appear as local, but truly are “as local as Burger King” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 208–9). The gods recognize that death is always a profitable business and offer their religious expertise as a commodity without becoming a brand. Profiting of religion is not a modern idea, as religion has been a market for a great while. Boyer (2001, 275–6) explains that selling rituals, services, and religious information has been a way to keep specific beliefs relevant. It is a way to compete against other religious providers who wish to occupy the mainstream the same way as Technical Boy and the other new gods.

Technical Boy summarizes the paradigm shift with three key words: “evolution, devolution, and revolution” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 404). Things either evolve by further development and progress or they devolve and go backwards. On the other hand, they might change drastically through a revolution, which is what the top level paradigm shifts are about, e.g. transition from religion to technoscience. Roland Barthes ([1957] 1991, 147) talks about revolutions in the context of myths and states that they reveal what the reality actually looks like and this way abolish myths. Instead of representing the reality directly, myths mirror it with condensed meanings that can be revealed with a revolution, a transition to another myth. Essentially, Barthes’s revolution is a paradigm shift. The war between the gods fails, but the revolutionary shift towards a technoscientific society is very real, and the old gods recognize that. When Mad Sweeney is on the verge of death and requests to get his lucky coin back, i.e. his life force, he exclaims he needs to get “[a]way from a world in which opiates have become the religion of the masses” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 237). He twists around Karl Marx’s famous statement “[r]eligion [...] is the opium of the people”, which is a critique of religion’s hold over people (Marx [1843] 1970). Now, the opiates are the religion, which is Mad Sweeney’s way of saying that the new gods are modern forces in control of the society.

5.2 The New New Gods of America

In this section, I want to update some of the new gods to match America in 2020. The *American Gods* TV show is doing the same thing, and the writers have already replaced Media with Social Media, a younger goddess of new media platforms (Shaw-Williams 2019). I will leave the

creative brainstorming for them and focus on technoscientific gods, seeing they are central gods right now. To locate gods in America, one needs to identify what is significant and what people believe in, and in America this seems to be technology, patriotism, capitalism, and politics. All of these are tied to the myth of American exceptionalism, which stems from the country's history and Constitution, and is, these days, associated with America's self-appointed title as the greatest country in the world (Spanos 2013, 292). America is a technological powerhouse, military superpower, and a notable actor in the global economy. On some level, America itself is a god, but there are also individuals – for instance celebrities and politicians – who are worshiped like deities, and one such person seems to be the current President of the United States, Donald Trump. On the other hand, new movements and trends have gained popularity and changed the way the society looks like, feminism being one of them. A waitress in the novel mentions she worships “[t]he female principle [...] the goddess within us all”, and although feminism is not recent, the Me Too movement against sexual harassment in 2017 has given the goddess an updated look (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 333). To gain followers, the movement utilized social media and ended up becoming a globally influential movement. In fact, social media as an extension to technology seems to be a key player in the contemporary America.

Modern societies can be described as technological societies. Technoscientific innovations have come a long way since the turn of the century, technology is now a part of the everyday life at home and work, and the level of dependency on it keeps increasing. In the introduction to his book *The Death of the Gods*, technology researcher Carl Miller (2018, xv) states that all societal changes and new hierarchies boil down to technology. It is part of the everyday life, but technology also invades the space of, for example, politics, military, and education. Technological giants like Apple, Google, and Microsoft determine the direction other technological companies take, but they also have an impact on business and economy (Miller 2018, 117). Therefore, technology is very much a pivotal new god, and the hubris Technical Boy expresses in *American Gods* is justifiable. However, the giants do not control all of the technology because nowadays individuals with technological skills can stand up to the giants and decentralize power by, for example, creating “self-governing islands”, i.e. networks and servers that have no authority figure and are run by the users (Miller 2018, 104-105). A third interesting actor in the field of technology, in addition to the giant companies and individual experts, is the technology itself or, specifically, artificial intelligence. Although, creating a humanlike intelligence is nearly impossible and something from a sci-fi book, AI has already replaced some mechanical jobs, e.g. in factories, and by narrowing down the scope of

intelligence, it is possible to create machines more capable than humans (Harari 2016, 375–6). Technology is a vast field, and Technical Boy is only one of the many gods to emerge from it.

Many of the new gods in the novel have since merged with technology, creating new forms of the goddess of Media and the celebrity gods. Modern societies emphasize information and knowledge that has to be accessible every hour of the day, which is described with the notion “information economy”, i.e. a society that no longer follows the traditional nine-to-five work schedule (Spiegel and Dawson 2008, 281). Now, information is constantly needed and given, which has shifted television’s time-bound nature to constant broadcasting and streaming, and whereas the TV used to be a passive object in the room, it is now portable and in mobile devices (Spiegel and Dawson 2008, 282–3). Essentially, the goddess of Media and Technical Boy have merged into one. Amongst the modern new gods are the streaming services like Netflix and Amazon Prime that feed on people’s attention, take their money, and provide new series to worship. Moreover, television is no longer the most convenient medium for the goddess of Media to appear because she now represents social media in the form of YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter, to name a few. Whereas the celebrities in the novel represent mostly stars from television screens, the new celebrity gods are social media influencers who are individuals with personal audiences to whom they market products and ideas (Giles 2018, 155). The social media platforms are their channel to communicate their divine knowledge, and the audience worships these gods by subscribing to their channels and buying their products.

The old gods are not forgotten in this day and age. Gaiman’s old gods are still present in mythologies, folk tales, and oral histories, but they also exist in literature, as I suggested in chapter four. Gaiman’s *American Gods* has materialized the gods and maintained their ideas, but other popular novels are doing the same, e.g. Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. Gods are very common characters in video games (e.g. *God of War* franchise) and in movies, which is due to the development of technology and visual ways to represent gods in popular culture (Gordon 2016, 225). Right now, maybe the most famous gods in popular culture are the Norse gods in Marvel movies. The Hollywood blockbuster movies from the Marvel’s Cinematic Universe have gained a worldwide fanbase of devout followers that sustains old gods like Loki, Odin, and Thor. I started this thesis with a quote in which Jesus tells Shadow gods are remade in people’s minds, and the movies are doing exactly this to the Norse gods just like Neil Gaiman has done in *American Gods*. Media and popular culture are revitalizing gods by giving them a spotlight, but many of the gods have changed since their mythology days by becoming more superhero-like (Gordon 2016, 229). The change is based

on how the god is being used and what values or significances it symbolizes. For example, the novel's Loki embodies globalization, and the Marvel's Thor, who resembles an American superhero, represents American freedom and justice (McSweeney 2018, 75). Loki, Thor, and Odin are deities by their very nature, but the enormous fanbase that idolizes their characters transforms them into present-day American gods of popular culture.

The scope of the gods is not limited to America because the new gods of 2020 are very much global divinities. Maybe the gods connected to patriotism and politics are worshiped only in America, but content in social media, television series, movies, and other forms of media consumption circulate internationally because the audience is global (Spiegel and Dawson 2008, 284). The god might be created in America, but the community of believers is worldwide. In chapter two, I suggested that an American god is a belief that was either created in or emigrated to America and it has a material connection to the country. In this era of updated gods, my definition has one flaw: it does not take into account how global these gods are. Social media influencers, Odin, AI, and Jesus are American gods, and their origin matters little when they are worshiped in America, but they are also global gods with believers around the world. To my great amusement, Loki as Mr. World represents globalization in ways Neil Gaiman could not have predicted when *American Gods* was published: the god was well-known then, but the attention he gained with the Marvel movies is beyond the original scope of Mr. World. Even though I have mostly concentrated on technology in this section, I do have to acknowledge that traditional forms of beliefs and gods, like in Christianity and Islam, are also amongst the gods of 2020. In the beginning of chapter two, I mentioned that the number of religiously affiliated people is growing and the world is not becoming more secular, which means that there are strong old gods that do not need film industry to reinvigorate them. What this means is that even though the prevailing paradigm appears to be technoscience, it does not threaten traditional religions. When the battle is about to begin on Lookout Mountain, Loki tells Laura, “[i]t’s never a matter of old and new. It’s only about patterns.” (Gaiman [2001] 2013, 570). The conflict thesis places traditional beliefs and technoscience as adversaries, but it is not about old and new – the global religious landscape is vast enough for both of them.

6 Conclusion

I began this thesis by claiming that the nature of godhood is problematic. There are too many gods, and each seems to possess their own powers, not to mention some are supposedly more genuine than others. Gods elude definitions, but, in some instances, that is for the best because the divine is a sensitive topic and one wrong statement can lead to an uproar. On the other hand, Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* provides a rather diplomatic answer to the problem of godhood; in the beginning of the novel, Gaiman's caveat states that "[o]nly the gods are real". The rest of the novel might be fictional, but at least the gods are real. When I began writing this thesis, my intention was never to argue *if* the gods exist but rather *how* they exist. All of them are as real as the next one because if the idea exists, then the god is real. Ideas about gods do not float in space – or wherever the world of Transcendence is located because it certainly is not within this reality – and they have a very material connection to the world. The primary connector is the believer whose mind provides a cozy resting place for the god, but oftentimes the belief stems from nature, represents a material entity, or is brought to life through material worship. Gods as embodied beliefs exemplify material immanence, which means their ideas are bound to the materiality of this world.

In the second chapter, I chose to analyze religion to set the foundation for my analysis of religious beliefs, although my approach was somewhat unconventional. Instead of beginning with a definition for religion, I introduced Pascal Boyer's (2001) three common misconceptions about religion's origins and functions: religion explains, comforts, and provides social order. By showing what religion is not, it is easier to recognize what religion is, namely an indefinite collection of beliefs. I prefer to approach religion as a collection because the beliefs in *American Gods* are from several mythologies and some are rather atypical, e.g. Technical Boy and the Spooks. Instead of narrowing down religion, I introduced immigrant beliefs and godly characters from the novel, using William James's (1902) division of personal and collective religion: personal beliefs are tied to the believer, e.g. the Cornish woman Essie, whereas collective beliefs share the power of the believing community. From this discussion, I proceeded to analyze technoscience, the amalgamation of technology and science. The main reason for giving technoscience its own chapter was to exemplify Cantor's (2010) conflict thesis, i.e. how religion and technoscience are seen as adversaries, but I also wanted to bring the new gods to the foreground because the novel presents them as side characters most of the time. I concluded chapter three with a discussion on beliefs, employing Edmund Griffiths's (2014) notion of a belief system, and stated, echoing Caiazza's term techno-secularism, how

technoscience resembles a religion with its tendency to exert authority, provide knowledge, and attract followers.

My analysis in the fourth chapter is divided into two parts: material embodiment and material worship. Leaning on Pascal Boyer's (2001; 2005) and Stewart Guthrie's (1993; 2001) cognitive theories of religion, I argued how people have a tendency to interpret their surroundings and discover humanlike agencies. In this manner, gods are created by giving agency to matter. Whereas Guthrie talks about animism and anthropomorphism, Boyer uses the term metamorphosis, and literary theory calls this technique personification. The seasons of the year and the storm are animated to represent the storyline, Shadow's emotions, as well as the battle between the gods, meanwhile individual gods like Technical Boy and Wednesday embody the metamorphosis of human bodies with either machines or nature, the former being the case with Technical Boy and the latter with Wednesday. The creation of the god is the first example of how ideas and matter converge, and material worship is the second one. To organize my discussion, I employed David Morgan's (2010) four themes to analyzing material religion: feeling, body, performance, and space. Material worship entails an emotional connection to beliefs, but this connection can also have a bodily dimension, e.g. object worship, sex, human sacrifice, and eating and drinking. New gods as technoscientific inventions and contemporary trends differ in some ways from the old gods, so to analyze them, I focused on how they are powerful objects that can become agentive subjects. As the last theme, space tied together my material analysis, and by means of it, I claimed that the novel's places of power represent how immanent ideas are material by nature, and, therefore, the connection between ideas and matter is unmistakable.

The fifth chapter focuses on paradigms and how belief systems change. Thomas Kuhn's (1962) term paradigm shift originates from science, but it has become a popular concept since its publication and is compatible with belief systems, seeing that science is one as well. From the perspective of paradigm shifts, I introduced examples of changing beliefs and conceptualized the battle between the gods as a paradigm shift. Looking at this novel almost twenty years after its publication has its advantages because this time difference allows me to conceptualize how another paradigm shift has taken place after the novel. The role of technoscience has only increased, and the new gods are even stronger than in the novel: Media is these days the goddess of social media, and the celebrity gods are now famous from Snapchat and Instagram. The present-day America is full of technoscientific believers, but this era has also revived some of the old gods, e.g. Loki, with Hollywood blockbusters and worldwide

fanbases. In fact, twenty years after the publication of *American Gods*, the nature of the divinities has become increasingly more global, and the American Gods of 2020 are more international than bound by the country's borders.

American Gods is a text that appears simple at first glance, but proves itself rich and multi-dimensional when analyzed in greater detail. In the introduction, I mentioned there are obvious gaps in the research possibilities, and the analyses of the novel often focus on mythology and the American identity. These themes are the first impression the reader gets from the novel, and they are important ones, but the novel offers other interpretations too. Not only are the individual gods an inexhaustible research topic, but the land itself is one as well. The novel is a roadtrip story, which provides an interesting glimpse to the American landscape and roadside attractions, but the land could be approached from the materialist perspective as well. My material reading has emphasized humans as the believers and worshipers, but the novel could also be placed in the new materialist frame that would allow the land to speak for itself. Moreover, it would be interesting to see if anyone wishes to argue that the Backstage, which is an immanent location in my thesis, is actually "the thing itself" in the transcendental sense. On the other hand, one area to study could be the new gods and their contemporary versions. I started this conversation, but a further investigation of the gods is possible, and it will be very intriguing to follow in which direction the television series is taking the story. *American Gods* is one of Gaiman's finest texts, and it deserves the attention it is receiving right now. Out of all the different ways to interpret the story, my thesis emphasizes how the novel provides a window to America's religious landscape – which gods stand in the spotlight, which beliefs are cast aside, and how the believers construct the connection that exists between ideas and matter.

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Appendix 1: Finnish Summary

Johdanto

Pro gradu -tutkielmassani tarkastelen jumalkuvan materiaalista rakentumista Neil Gaimanin teoksessa *American Gods* (2001; suom. *Unohdetut jumalat*). Kirja koostuu lukuisista jumalhahmoista, jotka ovat alkuperältään mytologioista, kansanuskoista sekä suuremmista uskonnoista, mutta jumalien joukkoon lukeutuvat myös yhteiskunnallisesti tärkeitä teknologiset keksinnöt sekä nykyaikaiset ilmiöt, joita palvotaan kuin jumalia. Tämä jumalkatras muodostaa amerikkalaisen pantheonin, jota tutkimalla voi määrittää, mikä on tärkeää Yhdysvalloissa yksilö- ja yhteiskuntatasolla. Jokainen jumala edustaa yhteyttä idean ja materian välillä, minkä vuoksi tämä tutkielma pureutuu jumalten materiaalsiin rakennusaineisiin sekä palvontamuotoihin: jokaisen jumalhahmon alkuperä on määritettävissä joko luonnossa tai ihmisten keksinnöissä, ja tätä ensisijaista kytköstä vahvistavat uskojen ruumiilliset palvomistavat.

American Gods -teos kertoo päähenkilön Shadow Moonin kokemuksista keskellä jumalten sotaa. Vapautuessaan vankilasta Shadow matkaa vaimonsa Lauran hautajaisiin ja kohtaa lentokoneessa vanhan miehen, joka esittäytyy nimellä Wednesday, mutta on oikeasti muinaisnorjalaisen mytologian pääjumala Odin. Wednesday matkaa ympäri Yhdysvaltoja suostutellen muita vanhoja jumalia taistelemaan rinnallaan sodassa uusia, teknologian ja nykyajan ilmiöiden jumalia vastaan, ja hän haluaa Shadow'n liittyvän hänen riveihinsä turvamiehenä. Suostuttuaan jumalan ehdotukseen Shadow lyöttäytyy miehen matkaan ja kohtaa lukuisia jumalhahmoja pitkin Yhdysvaltoja, esimerkiksi saksalaisen lapsijumalan Hinzelmännin, egyptiläiset Anubiksen ja Thothin sekä afrikkalaisen Anansi-hämähäkkijumalan. Kirja huipentuu sodan kulminoitumiseen Lookout Mountain -vuorella, jossa Shadow keskeyttää taistelun ja paljastaa jumalille sodan olevan vain yhtä suurta hämäystä, jonka tarkoituksena on vahvistaa sen suunnittelijoita Mr. Worldia eli Lokia ja Wednesdaytä eli Odinia. *American Gods* nimensä mukaisesti käsittelee niin mytologioita ja uskonnollisuutta kansallisella tasolla kuin yksilöidentiteettiä, ja nämä teemat ovatkin yleisiä kirjasta tehdystä tutkimuksesta. Kuitenkaan Gaimanin teosta käsitteleviä tutkimuksia ei ole monia, joten tämä pro gradu -tutkielma pyrkii täyttämään tutkimuskentän tyhjyyttä sekä tarjoamaan uudenlaisen näkökulman kirjalle materialismin kehyksestä.

Tutkielma koostuu neljästä analyysiluvusta, joista kaksi ensimmäistä rakentavat uskonnon ja tieteen yhteyttä toisiinsa sekä esittelevät Neil Gaimanin teoksen uskonnollisuuden muotoja, neljäs luku keskittyy materiaan ja ideoiden yhteyteen, ja viides luku tutkii paradigmojen muutosta. Havainnollistaakseni uskonnon käsitteen monimuotoisuutta lähestyn sitä William Jamesin (1902) ajatusten kautta jakaen uskonnon kahteen: kollektiiviseen ja henkilökohtaiseen uskontoon. Tämä jako edesauttaa *American Gods* -teoksen uskontomuotojen tulkitsemista, mutta se myös pohjustaa keskustelua uskontokäsitteen laaja-alaisuudesta. Kolmannessa käsittelyluvussani siirrynkin tieteen ja teknologian saralle yhdistäen ne uskontoon ensin selventäen teknotieteen muodostumista omaksi alakseen ja sitten Edmund Griffithsin (2014) uskonjärjestelmiä käsittelevän teoretisoinnin kautta. Neljäs käsittelyluku rakentuu kahteen osaan, joista ensimmäinen edustaa kognitiivisia tieteitä Pascal Boyerin (2001) ja Stewart Guthrien (1993) näkökulmasta ja keskittyy analysoimaan materiaalisen maailman tulkintaa. Tämä osio esittelee, kuinka jumalat rakentuvat painottaen ideapuolta, kun taas luvun toinen puolisko edustaa ruumiillisen palveluksen analyysia David Morganin (2010) ideoiden pohjalta. Viides käsittelyluku tutkii uskonjärjestelmien muutosta paradigmina ja sisältää myös pohdintaa siitä, miltä nykyiset amerikkalaiset jumalat näyttävät.

Uskonnon monet kasvot

Uskonnon on vaikea antaa yksiselitteistä määritelmää, sillä uskonto pitää sisällään valtavan määrän eri uskomuksia, tapoja ja jumalia. Amerikkalainen filosofi William James ([1902] 2008, 42) on todennut, että uskonnolla ei ole selkeää olemusta, jonka avulla sen voisi määrittää, sillä uskonto itsessään on kuin kokoelma uskonnollisia elementtejä. Pro gradu -tutkielmassani asetankin tämän ajatuksen etualalle ja lähestyn uskonnon määritelmää nurinkurisesti aloittamalla siitä, mitä se ei ole. Kognitiivinen uskontotieteilijä Pascal Boyer (2001, 5) nimeää kolme yleistä harhaluuloa uskonnon alkuperästä ja tarkoituksesta – uskonto tarjoaa selityksiä, lohtua ja yhteiskunnallisen järjestyksen – ja perustelee, miksi nämä eivät pidä paikkansa. Uskonto saattaa tarjota tapauskohtaisia selityksiä, mutteivät kaikki uskonnot kykene tai pyri yleismaailmalliseen selittämiseen, eikä uskonto myöskään tarjoa uskojilleen lohtua, sillä itseasiassa uskonnon luoma kuva maailmasta on melko hirvittävä. Kolmanneksi sosiaalinen järjestys on olemassa ilman uskontoa ja toisaalta uskonnollisissa yhteisöissä ilmenee sotia, mikä osoittaa, etteivät järjestys ja uskonto kulje käsi kädessä. Siispä Boyer päätyy Jamesin kanssa samankaltaiseen ajatukseen siitä, että uskonto on moninaisuus, jota ei tulisi selittää näiden kolmen teeman kautta, vaan ennemminkin uskonto tulisi nähdä ihmismielen tuotteena

(Boyer 2001, 33). Yksilöt käsittävät uskonnon eri tavoin ja välittävät ajatuksiaan toisille, mikä tekeekin uskonnosta sekä yksilöllisen että kollektiivisen idean. Henkilökohtainen uskonto keskittyy omiin tuntemuksiin ja uskomusmuotoihin, ja kollektiivinen usko edustaa sovittuja sääntöjä ja tapoja sekä ryhmän uskonnollisuuden ulkoista ilmentämistä (James [1902] 2008, 45–6).

American Gods sisältää neljä maahanmuuttokertomusta, joista jokainen ilmentää uskontojen saapumista Yhdysvaltoihin maahanmuuttajien matkassa. Yhdysvallat on maa, joka on rakentunut maahanmuutolla, joten on vain luonnollista, että sen uskonnollisuus on myös muualta tullutta. Ensimmäisessä kertomuksessa joukko viikinkejä rantautuu Yhdysvaltoihin, mutteivat he kykene luomaan jumalilleen vahvoja juuria, sillä alkuperäisasukkaat surmaavat heidät. Toisessa kertomuksessa korninainen Essie myydään amerikkalaismiehen talouteen viljelemään tupakkaa, mutta vaikka kuinka nainen yrittää ylläpitää korniuskomuksiaan, hänen omat lapsensa ja tilanomistajan lapset eivät niitä halua. Siinä missä viikingit edustavat kollektiivista uskonnonmuotoa, Essie harjoittaa yksin uskomuksiaan, mikä tekee siitä henkilökohtaisen uskonnon. Kolmannessa kertomuksessa afrikkalaiset kaksoset Wututu ja Agasu myydään orjiksi ja erotetaan toisistaan, mikä johtaa siihen, että Wututu joutuu harjoittamaan kotiseutunsa uskomuksia yksin, mutta Agasu saa muiden orjien tuen ja onnistuu muodostamaan vahvan uskonnollisen yhteisön Haitin alueelle. Neljäs tarina puolestaan kertoo tuhansien vuosien takaa siperialaisesta ryhmästä, joka saapuu Amerikkaan Beringian kautta, mutta hylkää oman mammuttjumalansa uusia uskontoja kohdatessaan. Näiden narratiivien lisäksi *American Gods* pitää sisällään lukuisia muita jumalhahmoja, joista esimerkiksi Lakotaintiaanien uskomukset asettuvat kiinnostavaan asemaan sekä alkuperäisinä että maahanmuuttajina.

Tiede ja teknologia uskontoina

Nykyinen käsitys tieteestä on melko tuore. Alun perin tieteen piiriin on laskettu myös filosofian ja historian alat, mutta tieteellisten tutkimusmenetelmien kehittyessä tiede alkoi eriytyä muista omaksi alakseen. Eritoten tieteen olemusta määrittävät sen historialliset vaiheet, joista käytetään nimitystä teollinen ja teknologinen vallankumous. Teollisen vallankumouksen myötä mekaniikka lisääntyi, kun taas teknologian kehitys toi mukanaan elektronisen yhteiskunnan, jollaisessa eletään paraikaa. Sillä tiede ja teknologia ovat saman kolikon kaksi puolta – tiede luoden teorian ja teknologia tieteen kasvot –, näistä kahdesta voi käyttää yhdistävää käsitettä

teknotiede, joka edustaa materiaalistien keksintöjen ja niiden tieteellisen kehityksen yhtymäkohtaa (Hård ja Jamison 2005, 4). Teknotiede edustaa yhtä yhteiskuntaa ohjaavaa voimaa, minkä takia se saatetaankin nähdä uskonnon vastustajana. Tätä ajatusta nimitetään konfliktiteoriaksi, joka Geoffrey Cantorin (2010, 285) mukaan esittää, että uskonnon ja tieteen eripura syntyy eriävistä maailmankuvista, tiedonhankinnan metodeista sekä epäyhteisistä arvomaailmoista. *American Gods* -teoksen asetelma vanhoihin ja uusiin jumaliin edustaa konfliktiteoriaa ja jumalten sota onkin konfliktin fyysinen ilmentymä.

Kuten myös uskontoon teknotieteeseen sisältyy ajatus henkilökohtaisista uskomuksista ja niiden harjoitusmuodoista. Tiedettä ei toki voi yksilötasolla tulkita samalla tavalla kuin uskontoa, mutta yksilöt voivat suosia tiettyjä teknotieteen muotoja ja siten vaikuttaa niiden yhteiskunnalliseen arvostukseen, mikä puolestaan synnyttää uskonnollisia piirteitä (Caiazza 2002, 213). Kun teknotieteellisellä ilmiöllä on omat käytäntönsä sekä kyky vaikuttaa yhteiskunnallisella tasolla, tulee siitä teknosekularismia eli maallinen teknouskonto (Caiazza 2002, 214). Teknotieteen uskonnollisävytteiset piirteet huomioiden se on sijoitettavissa uskontojen kirjoon. Tätä ajatusta tukee käsitys uskonjärjestelmistä, jotka tarjoavat totena pidetyn näkökulman maailmaan ja jonka uskomuksiin muodostuu jonkinasteinen tunneside (Griffiths 2014, 3). Keskeisiä teemoja uskonjärjestelmissä ovat auktoriteetti ja tieto, jotka molemmat esiintyvät sekä uskonnon että tieteen piirissä, mutta ne ovat myös löydettävissä *American Gods* -kirjan jumalhahmoista. Technical Boy on uusi jumala, joka edustaa tietokoneita ja internetiä mutta myös tiedon tuomaa auktoriteettiasemaa. Tietokoneena hän on kuin vastauksia antava uskonnollinen johtaja. Median jumalatar on vastuussa tiedon levittämisestä, kun taas Mr. World globalisaation ilmentymänä edustaa kansainvälistä auktoriteettia, sillä jokainen jumala tarvitsee häntä ollakseen merkittävä.

Ruumiillistuneet jumalat ja materiaallinen palvonta

Neljäs käsittelylukuni jakautuu kahteen pääteemaan: jumalten materiaaliseen rakentumiseen sekä jumalten palvontamuotoihin. Ensimmäistä teemaa lähestyn tutkielmassani kognitiivisen uskontotieteen näkökulmasta, jonka mukaan ihmiset havainnoivat intuitiivisesti ympäristöönsä löytääkseen elonmerkkejä eli toimijuutta (Boyer 2005, 243; Guthrie 2001, 103). Tämä aiheuttaa sen, että toisinaan toimijuutta havaitaan siellä, missä sitä ei ole, mikä johtaa tulkintaan ihmisenkaltaisesta olennoista (Boyer 2005, 241). Kirjallisuudessa tästä käytetään nimitystä personifikaatio, kun taas Guthrie (1993, 39) käsitteellistää tilannetta animismin (elollistamisen)

sekä antropomorfismin (ihmisenkaltaistamisen) avulla, ja Boyer (2001, 67) nimittää ontologisten luokitusten sekoittumista muodonmuutokseksi (engl. *metamorphosis*). Gaimanin teoksessa tuuli on elollinen entiteetti, ja myrsky ilmentää sekä jumalten sodan vaiheita että Shadow'n tuntemuksia, kun hän roikkuu maailmanpuussa. Vuodenajat elävät tarinan mukana alkaen ensin syksystä, joka edustaa rappeutumista ja tragediaa eli Laura-vaimon kuolemaa, edeten sitten talveen eli kuoleman ja pysähdyksen aikaan, jolloin sota on seisahtunut, ja päätyen kevääseen eli Shadow'n identiteetin ja ruumiin heräämiseen eloon. Jumalhahmoissa puolestaan personifikaatio näkyy siinä, että jokainen jumala edustaa ruumiillistunutta uskomusta, jossa on havaittavissa ontologisten kategorioiden sekoittuminen. Technical Boy on ihmisruumiin ja koneiden muodonmuutoksen lopputulos, kun taas Easter-jumalatar ruumiillistuu keväisen luonnon tavoin.

Toisen teeman eli jumalten palvontamuotojen tarkastelussa hyödynnän neljää näkökulmaa – tunteminen, keho, performanssi ja tila –, jotka David Morgan (2010, 56) on nimennyt keskeisiksi uskonnollisten käytäntöjen tutkimuksessa. Tunteminen esiintyy *American Gods* -kirjassa emotionaalisenä kytköksenä uskomuksiin, mitä esimerkiksi Shadow ilmentää ensin skeptisismillä ja sitten jumalten olemassaolon hyväksynnällä. Keho puolestaan on koko ajan mukana palvomisessa. Uskomus voi ottaa uskojansa kehon haltuun, kuten afrikkalainen Elegba-jumalatar valtaa orjien kehot, tai se voidaan symbolisesti niellä juoman tai ruoan muodossa. Kehollinen palvonta jumalaan voi ilmetä seksuaalisena yhteytenä tai toisaalta kehoja voidaan myös käyttää uhrilahjana. Perinteiset jumalat edustavat tämän sortin palvontamuotoja, kun taas uusia jumalia lähestytään objekteina. Gordon Lynch (2010, 50) hahmottaa objektien suhdetta ihmisiin todeten, että ihmiset elollistavat objektit ollessaan niihin yhteydessä, mikä johtaa objektien muuttumiseen subjekteiksi. Uudet jumalat ovat pääsääntöisesti objekteja, sillä ne edustavat teknotieteen innovaatioita, mutta kun niitä käytetään, niille annetaan aikaa ja pidetään merkityksellisinä, ne muuntuvat ihmisiin vaikuttaviksi subjekteiksi. Technical Boy ja Media-jumalatar television muodossa edustavat tärkeitä keksintöjä, jotka kuuluvat ihmisten arkipäivään, mutta voimakkaita jumalia ovat myös kuuluisat mediajulkimot, jotka vaikuttavat ihmisten kulutuspäätöksiin. Raha edustaa sekä vanhaa että uutta jumalaa, ja se voi olla joko objekti tai erittäin voimakas subjekti.

Neljäs käsittelyluku päättyy materiaalisen tilan tutkimiseen. Uskonnollisella paikalla voidaan tarkoittaa joko tilaa, jonka merkitys määräytyy rituaalien ja palvonnan perusteella, tai se voi olla tila, joka huokuu pyhyttä (Morgan 2010, 62–3). *American Gods* -teoksessa on sijainteja, jotka ilmentävät molempia määritelmiä. Paikat, kuten maailmanpuu ja

Rock City, ovat muodostuneet rituaalien suorittamisen yhteydessä, mutta toiset paikat, kuten tienvarsinähtävyys House on the Rock ja sodan huipentumispiste Lookout Mountain, edustavat aitoa pyhyttä ja ovat siksi vallanpaikkoja (*places of power*). Nämä pyhät paikat edustavat ideoiden ja materian kohtaamispistettä, sillä pyhyys kumpuaa immanenssista, jota kutsutaan kirjassa Takanäyttämöksi. Jumalaiset ideat sijaitsevat siellä, mutta Takanäyttämö ei ole transsendentti eli maailman ulkopuolinen, vaan se on hyvinkin materiaallinen ja todellisuuteen sidoksissa oleva tila. Kanadalainen filosofi Charles Taylor (2007, 550) käsittää immanenssin kehyksenä, joka tarjoaa kahdenlaisen tulkinnan todellisuudesta: ensinnäkin maailma on täysin materiaallinen eikä sitä voi ylittää ja toiseksi maailma voi sisältää hengellisiä merkityksiä. Tämä kehys tukee pro gradu -tutkielmani pääväitettä, että jumalat ilmentävät ideoiden ja materian yhteyttä, sillä se tuo jumaluuden idean materian tasolle sekä mahdollistaa kaikkien jumalien samankaltaisen tarkastelun.

Muuttuvat paradigmat ja Amerikan uudet jumalat

Viides käsittelyluku tutkii ideoiden ja materiaalisuuden kytköstä muuttuvien uskomusten avulla. Paradigma on nykyään hyvinkin tunnettu käsite, jonka esitteli alun perin tieteenfilosofi Thomas Kuhn. Hänen mukaansa paradigma on koherentti uskomusten, käytäntöjen ja ajattelumallien kokonaisuus, jota määrittää oma teoreettinen kehyksenä (Kuhn [1962] 2012, 11). Paradigmamuutos tarkoittaa siis vaihtuvaa ajattelumallia. Koska uskonjärjestelmien muutos edustaa muuttuvia paradigmoja, *American Gods* -teoksen sota on paradigmamuutos, jossa uskonnon ja teknotieteen ajattelumallit ottavat yhteen. Ajattelumalli voi kokonaan vaihtua, mitä uudet jumalat ajavat takaa yrittäessään työntää vanhat uskomukset valokeilasta, mutta ajattelumallit voivat myös kehittyä joko idean, materian tai molempien tasolla. Gaimanin kirjassa esiintyy unohdettujen jumalien sali, jossa vanhat uskomukset on ikuistettu kivipatsaisiin. Sali edustaa materian säilymistä ja siten idean hengissä selviämistä, mutta toisaalta jumalidea voi selvitä muutoksesta myös kehittymällä, ja Easter-jumalatar edustaakin nykyään enemmän pääsiäistä kuin kevättä ja syntymää. Jokainen jumala on paradigma itsessään, mutta selkeämmin suosiossa ovat teknotieteelliset uudet jumalat, joilla riittää uskojia ja jotka ovat yhteiskunnallisesti merkittävässä asemassa.

Päätän viidennen käsittelylukuni pohtien, miltä amerikkalaiset jumalat näyttävät nykyhetken amerikkalaisessa yhteiskunnassa. Teknologia on uusista jumalista yksi keskeisimmistä, sillä se on ujuttautunut jokaiseen arkielämän sopukkaan, mutta se myös

määrittää muita aloja, kuten koulutusta, politiikkaa ja kaupankäyntiä. Teknologian myötä Media-jumalatar on muuttanut kasvonsa sosiaalisen median muotoon, ja sen erinäiset sovellukset kuten Instagram ja Snapchat ovat synnyttäneet uusia mediavaikuttajajumalia edellisten julkimoiden rinnalle. Vanhat jumalat ovat myös hyötäneet kehityksestä, sillä monet niistä elävät populaarikulttuurin sisällä, ja tämänhetkisistä vanhoista jumalista tunnetuimmat lienevät muinaisnorjalaiset Loki, Odin ja Thor, joille Marvelin sarjakuvat ja elokuvat ovat tuoneet maailmanlaajuisia suosiota. Tutkielmassani vastaan Gaimanin kirjan esittämään kysymykseen amerikkalaisten jumalten olemuksesta todeten niiden olevan uskomuksia, jotka ovat joko amerikkalaista alkuperää tai maahanmuuttajia, mutta joita palvotaan Yhdysvaltain maaperällä. Nykyajan amerikkalaiset jumalat eivät ole kuitenkaan rajoittuneet vain yhden maan rajojen sisälle, vaan globalisaation mukana tuoma kansainvälisyys ja maailmalaajuinen levittäytymismahdollisuus tekevät näistä uusista jumalista globaaleja. Jumalten sodan ei tarvitse olla paradigmanmuutos, sillä maailmanlaajuisella uskomuskentällä on kyllä tilaa niin perinteisille kuin teknotieteenkin jumalille.