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Transforming Literary History into Romantic Myths in Comics: Neil Gaiman's Sandman, Alan Moore and J.H. Williams III's Promethea, and Mike Carey and Peter Gross's The Unwritten

Nicholas P. Katsiadas

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TRANSFORMING LITERARY HISTORY INTO
ROMANTIC MYTHS IN COMICS: NEIL GAIMAN'S *SANDMAN*,
ALAN MOORE AND J. H. WILLIAMS III'S *PROMETHEA*,
AND MIKE CAREY AND PETER GROSS'S *THE UNWRITTEN*

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Transforming Literary History into Romantic Myths in Comics:
Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, Alan Moore and J. H. Williams III's *Promethea*,
and Mike Carey and Peter Gross's *The Unwritten*

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This project challenges prevailing ideas in comics studies about the intersections between graphic novels and literary history. Prevailing criticism tends to function divisively, situate titles within exclusive categories of fiction and nonfiction, and I examine the ways that nonfiction artists reimagine and establish relationships with history. This project seeks to expand the field by arguing that if we can use certain methodologies to glean meaning from historical representation in nonfiction, then we can use similar methodologies to glean meaning from mainstream fiction's historical representations. With this premise, I examine the ways Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, Alan Moore and J. H. Williams III's *Promethea*, and Mike Carey and Peter Gross's *The Unwritten* transform literary history into mythology. These titles, I argue, can be better understood as occupying spaces between mainstream fiction and historically-based nonfiction.

Historical representation becomes an interpretive act for Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross. What becomes a key narrative component in all three series is the way that the artists recreate human history as contingent with the imaginative storytelling for which mythical figures are responsible. The narratives follow a logic that posits how imaginative storytelling drives human history, and these mythologies share one broader idea: faith in imaginative creativity's potential to elevate humankind's state

of being. Aesthetic interstices between fiction and nonfiction come to the fore in the ways that the artists ironically write stories about the virtues of writing stories. A specular function of the artists is at play in each series: from visibly representing themselves in panels (as in *Promethea*) to visible images of literary texts within texts that reflect on the function of texts. If we read the artists' specularly, we can demonstrate how invented myths complement the artists' personal ideas about imaginative creativity and a sense of responsibility to create stories for humankind's benefit.

The aesthetic interstices between nonfiction and mainstream fiction are not only important to comics studies in terms of better understanding narrative but, also, in terms of the ways that these aesthetics create space to better understand comics' intersections with a greater literary history. In *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*, the artists' use of myth to reinterpret the history of storytelling suggests that we can trace these aesthetics from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to the early-nineteenth century—to first-generation Romantic authors and their narrative practices. When considering the artists' ways of thinking about creativity, it suggests that not only can we identify how the titles occupy a space between nonfiction and fiction, but we can also identify their intersections with literary structures and ways of thinking about imagination and creativity from the larger European Romantic movement. The importance in identifying such intersections is at least twofold: We can consider a greater literary history of comics, and we can borrow from literary-critical history to better understand a greater spectrum of formal aesthetics at play in narrative.

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INTRODUCTION

TRANSFORMING LITERARY HISTORY INTO ROMANTIC MYTHS IN COMICS

A pdf version of this dissertation with images is available from Nick Katsiadas at nick.katsiadas@gmail.com.

In comics studies, genre-based criticism tends to function divisively and situate titles within exclusive categories of fiction and nonfiction. For example, Hillary Chute claims to focus attention on what she describes as “the strongest genre in the field: nonfiction comics” (452). With this perspective, she considers the opportunities that the medium and genre generate for “historical and personal expression” (453), and she focuses Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Joe Sacco’s *Palestine* as typifying how comics are “structurally equipped to challenge dominant modes of storytelling and history writing” (456). Here, Chute capitalizes on the ways that Spiegelman and Sacco challenge dominant modes of historical narration by constructing relationships with the Holocaust and the Israel-Palestine conflict in a graphic medium. She explains how such narratives garner critical attention by offering “serious, imaginative works that [explore] social and political realities by stretching the boundaries of a historically mass medium” (456).

Chute goes on to describe the “dominant” (456) and “most important graphic narratives” as autobiographies which “portray torture and massacre in a complex formal mode that does not turn away from or mitigate trauma” (459). In this claim, critical opportunities arise. For Chute, narrative strength is determined by the ways nonfiction artists form relationships with “vicious historical realities” while highlighting traumatic experiences (457). What is missing from this scope is the greater spectrum of historical experience from which artists draw and how the medium offers a greater range of genres,

beyond nonfiction and autobiography, in which artists reconstruct history in purposeful, complex, and equally important ways. Further, when Chute provides an abbreviated history of comics, she excludes modes of historical representation in mainstream fiction: “I offer a context for American work but do not emphasize the development of the commercial comic-book industry, which is dominated by two superhero-focused publishers, Marvel and DC” (455). Chute’s dismissal of the commercial comic book industry offers a glimpse into deep-seated critical biases against mainstream comics, particularly superhero narratives, and their importance to American culture. Despite an exclusive and hierarchical framework, however, Chute’s perspectives create opportunities to open conversations about historical representation in mainstream comics.

Ben Saunders’s response to Chute is helpful when opening lines of historical inquiry to mainstream fiction. Saunders warns the field against threatening “Divisions in Comics Scholarship” when responding to her claim that nonfiction is the most important genre. He writes, “Dangers and distortions threaten when we allow generic divisions to shape our critical narratives” (292-3). Here, Saunders addresses how even though Chute’s goal is to “treat comics as a medium—not as a lowbrow genre” (Chute 452), she ironically shapes an aesthetic hierarchy between genres—between highbrow (nonfiction) and lowbrow (mainstream fiction). Saunders cedes the fact that many nonfiction comics have a larger presence within universities and garner much attention from scholars. According to Chute, these comics are “waking up literary critics” (457). Saunders does not doubt this claim, nor does he doubt that nonfiction is a strong genre. What he does is caution the field against canon formations and being “divided from within” (292):

Old-fashioned and politically divisive arguments about high culture versus low culture, or fine art versus commercial art, have a disturbing tendency to reassert themselves along generic lines. Despite the best efforts of literary theorists to deconstruct such aesthetic hierarchies, they prove remarkably resilient. Indeed, with almost tragic irony, these hierarchies frequently reproduce themselves in the criticism of art forms traditionally regarded as debased. (293)

Here, Saunders suggests that comics studies scholars must learn from the critical histories of other fields and avoid the limitations and exclusions that canon formations create if the discipline is to survive and thrive. He concludes his response to Chute by capitalizing on this point: “We require such skepticism regarding academic canons from our graduate students in literary studies, film studies, and art history, after all. The future of comics studies will surely require no less of us” (294).

The importance of Chute and Saunders’s exchange is at least twofold. First, Saunders’s warning encourages us to keep critical lines of inquiry open to all genres that the medium offers and to facilitate the field’s growth when treating the medium along generic lines. With this premise, this project seeks to expand the field by arguing that if we can use certain methodologies to glean meaning from historical representation in nonfiction, then we can use similar methodologies to glean meaning from mainstream fiction’s historical representations. Secondly, although she privileges nonfiction and representations of trauma, Chute’s framework is helpful to read how artists in mainstream fiction construct relationships with history, and we can open up her framework to a greater spectrum of historical experience that comics artists represent. Specifically, this project covers representations of literary history and confronting

historical forces of modernity in mainstream fiction. Representations of such historical forces become legible in narratives that create tensions between humankind and economic, political, technological, or other historical activities. In this vein, the importance of this approach rests in the ways that we can delimit methods of historical inquiry and facilitate the field's growth by reading the ways that mainstream artists complement historical experience with "serious imaginative works" that reimagine and reinterpret literary history.

If we avoid constructing methodological boundaries along generic lines, we open the field to greater understandings of narrative aesthetics at play in the medium. This project treats formal aesthetics of historical representation in titles from the Modern Age¹ of comics: Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, Alan Moore and J. H. Williams III's *Promethea*, and Mike Carey and Peter Gross's *The Unwritten*.² These titles, I argue, can be better understood as occupying spaces in-between mainstream fiction and historically-based nonfiction and autobiography. We can establish this idea by taking Chute's perspectives of the "productively self-aware" artist of nonfiction (457) and extending them to mainstream artists whose narrative aesthetics indicate a self-awareness and productive purpose in how they recreate literary history within genres beyond nonfiction—namely, with invented mythologies. In Chute's words, "Graphic narrative suggests that historical accuracy is not the opposite of creative invention" (459), and if we use this idea to read mainstream titles, it is helpful to see how the artists use invented mythologies to construct personal relationships with history.

This project demonstrates that critical conversations about historical representation in fiction and nonfiction do not need to remain closed, static, and exclusive

but can be open, porous, and interstitial by examining *Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea*. Such a methodological step is possible by considering the distinct ways that Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams construct narratives in which literary history is directly linked to human experience. Chute's framework suggests that the artists reimagine the past in order to construct meaningful relationships with it, and the artists' focus on literary history suggests that there is a greater spectrum of historical representation within the comics medium, beyond traumatic experiences and "vicious historical realities." *Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea* are series in which the artists construct value systems for reading human history's connection to literary history, and these systems establish relationships between human history, modernity, and imaginative creativity. The artists construct these relationships by converting literary history into totalizing mythological narratives, and formal aesthetics of myth provide the artists an imaginative versatility to reinterpret and re-present literary history in distinct ways.

Historical representation becomes an interpretive act for Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams. What becomes a key narrative component in all three series is the way that the artists recreate human history as contingent with the imaginative storytelling for which their mythical figures are responsible. The narratives follow a logic that posits how the imaginative storytelling for which their deities are responsible drives human history. In *Sandman*, for instance, Gaiman builds the imaginary world of The Dreaming, and its patron, Morpheus, uses the power of dreams to energize storytellers to fulfill a distinct purpose: to *sustain* the integrity of human consciousness in its ongoing confrontation with modernity. Similarly, Moore and Williams build the imaginary world

of The Immaterialia, a space/place from which all imaginative creativity emanates, and they recreate the history of humankind in which this realm's patron—Promethea—*awakens* humankind to new truths and knowledge through the powers of imagination. Carey and Gross construct a history of humankind in which a metaphysical white whale named Leviathan *develops* the human imagination by energizing storytelling. In these mythologies, literary history becomes an extension of these figures' benevolent creative energies, and these figures become vehicles through which the artists reinterpret the history of storytelling as a force benefitting humankind. These mythologies share one broader idea: faith in imaginative creativity's potential to elevate humankind's state of being.

In *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*, Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross construct relationships between mythical figures and historical realities. In doing so, they construct broad historical models, and in these models, the imaginative storytelling for which Morpheus, Promethea, and Leviathan are responsible becomes a force that elevates human integrity and sets and sustains guidance for human understandings of reality. The narrative logic follows how imaginative stories are pedagogical and affective, that the integrity of human history is contingent with the lessons found in them and the affective experiences that they elicit. Moreover, there is a distinct irony at play in these titles with this narrative logic, where fiction meets reality: While using invented myths to ascribe redeeming values to the history of storytelling, Moore and Williams, Carey and Gross, and Gaiman are engaged in acts of storytelling. The artists become a part of their myths on formal, self-reflexive levels.

Aesthetic interstices between fiction and nonfiction come to the fore in *Promethea*, *The Unwritten*, and *Sandman* in the ways that the artists ironically write stories about the virtues of writing stories. A specular function of the artists is at play in each series: from visibly representing themselves in panels (as in *Promethea*) to visible images of literary texts within texts that reflect on the function of texts. If we read the artists' specularity, we can demonstrate how invented myths complement the artists' personal ideas about imaginative creativity and senses of responsibility to create stories for humankind's benefit: The creative process becomes one in which the artists simultaneously reconstruct historically-based literary creativity with invented mythologies and construct narrative and personal parallels with it. In this vein, they demonstrate the association that their work has with prior literature on at least two structural levels. First, they create opportunities for their characters to interact with what is constructed as their literary ancestors, including: historically-based authors, such as J. R. R. Tolkien, William Shakespeare, G. K. Chesterton, and Rudyard Kipling; preexisting literary characters, such as Queen Titania, King Auberon, Red Riding Hood, and Frankenstein's Creature; and preexisting imaginary worlds, such as Wonderland, Narnia, and Middle-Earth. The artists create narrative parallels between their stories and preexisting literature through such interactions, indicating sources that energize their creativity. On another level, what these interactions signal—and is missing from much scholarship dedicated to the titles—is the self-reflexivity where the artists consciously connect the storytelling with which they are engaged to the ideals that they ascribe to preexisting literary texts with myth. Such a reading creates critical opportunities both to consider dimensions of nonfiction—dare we say autobiography?—in mainstream fiction

and to discuss how artists reinterpret, recreate, and construct personal relationships with history.

Aesthetic interstices between nonfiction and mainstream fiction are important to comics studies both in terms of better understanding narrative and, also, in terms of creating space to better understand comics' greater literary history. With *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*, though, prevailing criticism tends to limit the series' aesthetics to postmodern notions of metafiction and pastiche. For example, writing about *The Unwritten*, Peter Wilkins identifies how Carey and Gross incorporate elements from preexisting stories in a "metafictional science fiction" mode of narration (225), and Essi Varis describes the presence of preexisting literary elements as "amplif[ying] the pastiche-like quality" (3). Similarly, Cyril Camus not only examines Gaiman and Moore's professional relationship but, also, what he perceives as postmodern aesthetic commonplaces in their work: "[T]hough their respective fictional worlds are different in tone and atmosphere, some features are also common to both, from their extended practice of integrative fiction or metafiction to their pervasive concern with mythology, both as mere intertext and as a model for their brand of fantasy" (148). Roderick McGillis also explores how "Alan Moore's work updates its source material in what we might call a postmodern dance of selves" (206). Such criticism typifies critics' tendency to limit understandings of mainstream fiction to postmodern literary history and of artists' creative processes to ideas about pastiching preexisting stories to create new stories or as ironic, metafictional interactions with literary history. Alternatively, the artists' uses of myth to reinterpret the history of storytelling suggests distinct and distinctly differing intersections with literary history, beyond postmodernism, and we can trace these

aesthetics from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to the early-nineteenth century—to first-generation Romantic authors and their narrative practices.

Many scholars create critical apertures for comparatively reading modern comics with works from the Romantic period. For example, Jack Stillinger and Deidre Lynch discuss the ways that William Blake's illuminated manuscripts have a "marked influence" on the "graphic novels of the present day" (77). David Kunzle also acknowledges how "No invention is entirely new," but it may "reasonably be said" that Rodolphe Töpffer, an early nineteenth-century Genevan schoolmaster, invented the comic strip and comic book as we know them today (ix). Chute addresses how these critical moves are "obvious: making claims in the name of popular culture or in the rich tradition of word-and-image inquiry (bringing us back to the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages)" (452). What is missing from many conversations is a focus on genre and creative process.

A missing dynamic to the respective critical discourses of *Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea* is consideration of the ways that the artists transform literary history with totalizing mythological narratives and reflexively construct distinct trajectories of human history of which they commit to being a part. In these trajectories, the subject of imaginative creativity is venerated as an energizing force of human history, and the artists reflexively integrate their function within their histories. When considering the artists' ways of thinking about creativity, it suggests that not only can we identify how the titles occupy a space between nonfiction and fiction, but we can also identify their intersections with literary structures and ways of thinking about imagination and creativity from the larger European Romantic movement. The importance in identifying

such intersections is at least twofold: We can consider a greater literary history of comics, and we can borrow from literary-critical histories to better understand a greater spectrum of formal aesthetics at play in narrative. Where and when narrative aesthetics develop, what historical conditions energize them, and what lasting influences literary-historical ideas have on artistic creativity are all generative questions for the field of comics studies. Many answers can be found in slow and patient methods of reading narrative in relation to literary history.

A methodological step towards literary-historical hermeneutics with comics meets at least one difficulty—skepticism in comics scholarship to borrow from literary-critical methodologies because of the image-text nature of the medium. Aaron Meskin covers much of the skepticism in the field, and what he highlights are the problems created, rather than solved, by constructing methodological boundaries between literature and comics. These boundaries tend to operate exclusively and hierarchically, and they often close off comics scholarship from literary-critical insights that can help us better understand formal-aesthetic patterns of narrative and creativity in comics. Developing better ways of reading narrative aesthetics requires remaining open to insights from fields outside of comics scholarship, especially when elements from those fields—to which critical histories are attached—are present.

Meskin sidesteps the skepticism of whether to use literary-critical methodologies by highlighting comics as artistic hybrids with multiple artistic ancestors. He includes literature among these ancestors, but he also argues that each title's ancestors vary, that they do not require the same ancestors. It is safe to say that many comics do not have literary ancestors. For instance, some comics do not contain words: "That is, there are

wordless comics (sometimes called ‘mute’ or ‘pantomime’ comics), and these do not seem to meet a necessary minimal condition” for having literary ancestors (224). When literary ancestors are present within a comic book, though, Meskin convincingly argues that we may

appropriately appreciate the literary aspects of a comic book...in light of the norms and styles and concerns that attach to literature. Note that this does not imply that an appreciator of a hybrid must have *prior* knowledge of the norms that govern ancestral art forms—it might be the case that knowledge of those norms is provided by means of engagement with the hybrid. (239 Meskin’s emphasis)

Here, Meskin suggests that on one hand, the presence of literary elements in a comic does not necessitate prior experiences with literary sources to understand their use and function in narrative; understanding narrative aesthetics might be achieved just by reading the comic. On the other hand, he also suggests that there are appropriate and important conversations to have where we can appreciate the functions and implications of literary presences in comics by consulting literary ancestors—and that comics can be helpful to better understand literature. We can take Meskin’s ideas of consulting literary ancestors a step further by consulting larger literary-critical histories attached to ancestors in order to better understand their purpose and function within comics.

There are important considerations to make about Romanticism when tracing the narrative activities of Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams to this period. In *The Unwritten*, *Promethea*, and *Sandman*, the artists construct personal relationships with literary history, modernity, and ideals of imaginative creativity with their invented myths, and questions about Romanticism and modernity need answered in order to build

a critical framework for identifying formal-aesthetic intersections at narrative levels. What Romanticism is, what aesthetics can be traced to Romanticism, what historical conditions gave rise to them, and what lasting effects Romanticism has had on ideas of creativity are important considerations when making the critical bridge to comics, for answers to these questions are as diverse as they are consensual.

Isaiah Berlin's discussion of Romanticism as a historically-distinct time period is helpful to better understand its legacy in our contemporary moment. Berlin explains how human history contains identifiable creative patterns during periods of time and in certain spaces/places. He suggests that by reading these patterns, we can "isolate the dominant pattern which that culture obeys" (2). These patterns, in other words, reveal a consensus of thought that helps shape perceptions of history that we find in creativity: "The history not only of thought, but of consciousness, opinion, action too, of morals, politics, aesthetics, is to a large degree a history of dominant models" (2). Berlin traces the development of Romantic historical models in the mid-eighteenth century to reactions against Enlightenment models. These Enlightenment models, he suggests, were dominated by ideals of attaining "some kind of rational order, in which tragedy, vice and stupidity...can at last be avoided by the use of carefully acquired information and the application to it of universally intelligible reason" (3). Such historical models posit how the universe consists of identifiable, material structures inertly awaiting discovery, and in this frame of knowledge, it is only by committing to empirical science, reason, and logic that humankind will discover truths about the universe and liberate itself from folly, suffering, and destruction.

Berlin goes on to discuss how Enlightenment ideas of the “absolute knowledge to be obtained in the world” (2) came under attack during the Romantic period in two competing ways:

[W]hat the romantic movement proclaimed, may be summarised [*sic*] under two heads. One of these...is the indomitable will: not knowledge of values, but their creation, is what men achieve. You create values, you create goals, you create ends, and in the end you create your own vision of the universe, exactly as artists create works of art – and before the artist has created a work of art, it does not exist, it is not anywhere....

The second proposition – connected with the first – is that there is no structure of things. There is no pattern to which you must adapt yourself. There is only, if not the flow, the endless self-creativity of the universe. The universe must not be conceived of as a set of facts. (119)

Berlin explains how Romantic authors explored these ways of thinking about creativity and will within literary works. This frame of knowledge suggests that Romantic literature explores prior knowledge to create new knowledge. The idea that humanity’s purpose is to create became energized in the human imagination during the Romantic period, and the elevation of artists’ roles in an ongoing historical process of creativity becomes a dominant pattern in much Romantic literature.

Many Romantic scholars concur with Berlin’s perspectives on the ways creativity and the role of artists became dominant ideas in the Romantic movement. M. H. Abrams suggests that Romantic “thinkers gave literature and the arts a prominent...place in their metaphysical systems (192-3), and Berlin characterizes much Romantic literature as

creativity in which individuals “traced historical evolution in terms of unconscious dark factors interweaving with each other in all kinds of inexplicable ways” (126). Here, Abrams and Berlin discuss the ways that many Romantic authors understood their place in history as forerunners in restoring a greater awareness of always already ongoing creative activities evolving human consciousness and civilization towards ideals of unity and freedom. In this way, many Romantic authors create distinct and distinctly differing historical models from those of the Enlightenment by committing to ideals of creativity and its vital relationship with individual and collective historical experiences. In short, Romantic models resist modes of thought that reduce the universe to what are constructed as inert, identifiable facts that were always already there, awaiting discovery. By contrast, ideas about a larger, always already moving system of history began to take an enormous hold on Romantic patterns of creativity: The idea is that by committing to creativity, humankind’s state of being is elevated, for creative acts become extensions of artists’ mystical, imaginative powers. In such models, artists take pride of place as dedicating—and sacrificing—their lives to ideals of creating and sustaining human integrity through what Friedrich Schiller calls the “aesthetic education of man” (491).

Romantic ideas about creativity and the role of art in one’s education are not only two dominant patterns of creativity during the period, but they are also two of the period’s most important legacies. Berlin describes Romanticism’s legacy as “the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred, and all the other shifts which have occurred in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries appear...in comparison less important, and at any rate deeply influenced by it” (1-2). In this shift, creativity is validated as valuable, and this activity is defined by ideas of contributing to

an ongoing historical process. My point is that for many Romantics, creativity becomes the driving force of history, art becomes a secular religion of modernity, and we find these ideas energizing creativity from the late-eighteenth century, through the nineteenth century, and right up through our contemporary moment—in *The Unwritten*, *Promethea*, and *Sandman*.

Michael Saler's ideas about contemporary imaginative creativity is a good place to start walking backwards from the twenty-first century to Romanticism. Saler traces contemporary imaginative world-building to early twentieth-century ideals of artistic compensation for a "disenchanted modernity," and in his study, he chiefly isolates the work of three literary figures: J. R. R. Tolkien, H. P. Lovecraft, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. During this time, he argues, artists sought to provide solutions for spiritual problems of an increasingly secular, reason-based culture. Burgeoning scientific fields and perspectives of the natural world—including but not limited to evolutionary theory and psychology—demystified, secularized, and disillusioned much of the Western world's sense of mystery and wonder. Joshua Landy and Saler discuss this secularization as creating a "God-shaped void" for which authors sought to compensate with imaginative creativity (*The Re-Enchantment of the World 2*). The goal was to re-enchant a disenchanted world, and Saler suggests that artists "freed [themselves] from the religious and utilitarian strictures of [Samuel Taylor] Coleridge's era," or the Romantic era (*As if* 31). This liberation from religious and utilitarian strictures may be, but they are not as confining as Saler makes them seem to be. There are places where the secular and the sacred meet in the Romantic period, and these intersections persist up through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

William Buckler's research helps us better understand the prevalence of Romantic faith in imaginative creativity during the early-twentieth century. Writing about William Wordsworth, Buckler describes this "faith that, allowing for the secularization and deflation of language, persists right through Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, and Lowell as the archetypal Romantic faith" (37). The process of secularizing inherited religious experiences in order to energize the human imagination and regenerate a relationship with the sacred world through art was central to nineteenth-century Romanticism's faith in imaginative creativity, and this faith continued to persist in artistic creativity. The larger scope of this project argues that we see these concerns in *The Unwritten*, *Promethea*, and *Sandman*. This frame of knowledge suggests that Carey and Gross, Moore and Williams, and Gaiman recall and intersect with the process of sacralizing creativity as energizing human history, and they do so by inventing mythologies that reimagine and define a modernity by an interpretive urgency to create art—an urgency seen in the ways that the narratives evaluate historical tensions of modernity and posit how resolutions can be achieved within aesthetic realms. Within Berlin's and Buckler's frameworks, Carey and Gross, Moore and Williams, and Gaiman commit to the rules that their mythologies create: contributing to ongoing historical processes that elevate humankind's state of being.

The idea that history is an always already moving system of human activity in which individuals perpetually (re)create and, at the same time, alter the system is a general consensus in Romanticism, and many authors of this time interpret the integrity of this system as contingent with the literary creativity that they inherit and with which they engage. Literature, in this frame of knowledge, serves as an aesthetic space in which

authors not only explore theories of historical evolution but, also, explore their identities as artists in relation to their predecessors. Abrams writes, “The several decades beginning with the 1790s constituted a genuine epoch in intellectual and cultural history; not, however, by absolute innovation but by a return to a mode of hereditary wisdom which was redefined, expanded, and applied to the emerging world” (146). Here, we see how many Romantic writers use literature to express commitments to restore humankind’s awareness of inheriting wisdom within a historical process. Literary creativity and artistic engagement—reading—become redemptive activities and the means to develop human integrity.

If we extend Romantic critical methodologies to *Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea*, it suggests that Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams recall Romantic ideas of literary creativity and inheritance, and we can focus their formal aesthetics of historical representation and specularity. In doing so, not only do we open the field’s understandings of narrative aesthetics to a greater literary history, but we also bring these titles into the fold of preexisting comics studies that orient to historical representations of narrative inheritance. For example, James Young argues that Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* emerges from a post-World War II generation of Holocaust survivors who inherit historical narratives. He writes,

Maus also suggests itself as a model for what I would like to call ‘received history’....This postwar generation, after all, cannot remember the Holocaust as it actually occurred. All they remember, all they know of the Holocaust, is what the victims have passed down to them in their diaries, what the survivors have remembered to them in their memoirs. They remember not actual events but the

countless histories, novels, and poems of the Holocaust they have read, the photographs, movies, and video testimonies they have seen over the years. They remember long days and nights in the company of survivors, listening to their harrowing tales, until their lives, loves, and losses seemed grafted indelibly onto their own life stories. (669-70)

Here, Young discusses how Spiegelman highlights the process of inheriting his father Vladek's Holocaust narrative, and he argues that not only does he inherit a historical narrative but, also, the trauma attached to the narrative. Representing such inheritances, he argues, is a consensual creative pattern of this post-war generation. Vladek's story, in other words, is passed to Art Spiegelman, and the transference not only of one generation's historical experience but, also, their trauma becomes foregrounded. If we borrow Young's framework to read representations of narrative inheritance, we can open new lines of historical inquiry in mainstream fiction if we are open to the idea that comics artists are not limited to representing the inheritance of nonfiction narratives energized by trauma. Creativity is not solely shaped by such experiences, nor do historical narratives representing trauma take pride of place in narrative complexity or strength.

If we combine Young's method to read narrative inheritance with Romantic notions of inherited wisdom, we can better understand the histories that Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross construct. In doing so, we can shift attention in the current discourses of *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*—from reading literary presences as postmodern metafiction or pastiche to reading literary presences as literary inheritances. The artists construct mythological frameworks for historical narratives that foreground ideas of artists inheriting creative responsibilities to systems of human

history, and the specular function of the artists suggests that the ideas about creativity that the narratives foreground rebound on the artists: In creating opportunities for their characters to interact with literary ancestors, they signal an awareness of inheriting responsibilities to the histories of imaginative storytelling that they recreate. This sense of responsibility does not indicate an inheritance of trauma but, rather, what we will see as paranoia.

While ascribing values to the history of storytelling, Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross take initiatives to connect their creativity to literary history, and they use mythology as a vehicle through which to represent literary inheritance. In this vein, their uses of myth intersect with Romantic myth-making in at least two ways: They convert literary history into mythologies, and they use myths to represent understandings of inheriting creative responsibilities to an always already ongoing activity of life in relation to art: According to Berlin, “All [Romantic] art is an attempt to evoke by symbols the inexpressible vision of the unceasing activity which is life” (122). Understanding how the Romantics perceived myths is important to discuss paranoia as a formal-aesthetic paradigm in *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*. Berlin writes,

When [the Romantics] asked themselves how...one could begin to understand reality, in some sense of the word ‘understand’...the answer which they sought to give, at least some of them, was that the only way of doing this was by means of myths...because myths embody within themselves something inarticulable, and also manage to encapsulate the dark, the irrational, the inexpressible, that which conveys this deep darkness of this whole process. (121)

Here, Berlin explains how myths function as aesthetic spaces in which Romantic authors exploit the possibilities of symbolism and personification in order to explore and express complex understandings of reality and one's relation to it.

Many Romantic ideas posit how the totality of reality is never (and never will be) fully intelligible, but Berlin's discussion reveals how many Romantic writers saw myth as having a distinct purpose and function to create new understandings of reality and to push human progress forward:

Myths were ways in which human beings expressed their sense of the ineffable, inexpressible mysteries of nature, and there was no other way in which it could be expressed....Myths conveyed this mystery in artistic images and artistic symbols, which, without words, managed to connect man with the mysteries of nature.

This, roughly speaking, was the doctrine. (49)

Here, Berlin suggests how myth provided many Romantics a narrative versatility and freedom to represent what "could be expressed only symbolically and could not be expressed literally" (100). The idea that creativity takes pride of place as the driving force of history became energized during the Romantic period, and what was elevated as the power of literature was "converted into rich sources of mythology" (122). In these mythologies, power is ascribed to figures that represent the "energy, force, will, life" of reality—that is, literature—and for many Romantics, this power is understood as protecting humankind from external forces (18). Berlin writes, "This view of great images dominating mankind – of dark forces, of the unconscious, of the importance of the inexpressible and the necessity of discounting it and allowing for it – spreads into every sphere of human activity" (124). By utilizing the power of myth, the Romantics

construct literature as an extension of ineffable creative powers, and authors become a part of the history that these powers drive and protect by creating art *about the power of art*.

For the Romantics, myth-making becomes a pedagogical project that “act[s] out the historical process” (Abrams 257) and intends to improve humankind’s historical awareness of the role of art in one’s education. In this way, myth-making sustains an analytic activity that seeks to “choreograph” the motion of readers’ minds according to the “cues” and ideas a work contains (Pfau *Wordsworth’s Profession* 180). On one hand, Gaiman’s, Carey and Gross’s, and Moore and Williams’s myths intersect with Romantic myths by embedding a logic that reinterprets human history with deities that represent ideals of artistic creativity: Authors become extensions of artistic ideals. On the other hand, another key is how Romantic myth-makers construct historical models that elevate artistic creativity *and* explore their identity in relation to these models. The author exerts ownership of myth by engaging in the creative activities that they reimagine through myth. This frame of knowledge posits how such myths of self-exploration embed what Abrams discusses as the “cardinal role of art” in human activity:

Schiller thus inaugurates the concept of the cardinal role of art, and of the imaginative faculty which produces art as the reconciling and unifying agencies in a disintegrating mental and social world of alien and warring fragments – a concept which came to be a central tenet of Romantic faith, manifested in various formulations by thinkers so diverse as Schelling, Novalis, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley. (212)

Here, the key is how the European Romantics become not only arbiters for but, also, practitioners of the cardinal role of art that they foreground in myths. Gaiman's, Carey and Gross's, and Moore and Williams's aesthetics intersect with these narrative activities: Understanding the importance of literature to their myths on narrative levels is necessary to understand the importance of literature to the artists on personal levels. The myths convey the artists' personal ideas about literary history and their own creativity's relation to it.

In tandem with the artists' personal ways of thinking about literary history, Romantic criticism provides critical frameworks that suggest we can read historical conditions energizing comic book artists' creativity. Berlin writes, "[R]omanticism is truly a wild wood, a labyrinth in which the only guiding thread is the will and the mood of a poet" (100). Here, the artist's mood and will become guides to verify historically-distinct conditions of creativity in the history of emotions, and Berlin describes two aspects of mood that were "obsessive phenomena" in the Romantic period: nostalgia and paranoia (104). On one hand, the artist's mood becomes nostalgic in expressions of a sense of loss and the desire for recovering some ideal unity of the self or some prior state of humankind. Abrams characterizes it as a sense of "hopeless nostalgia for a lost condition to which civilized man can never return" (185). It is important to note that many Romantics expressed this sense of loss in diverse ways—whether it be as humanity's loss of an Edenic state of being, a falling out of unity with nature, losing one's sense of self and purpose, or (among others) the loss of an imagined ideal of classical antiquity. Berlin writes, "The nostalgia is due to the fact that, since the infinite cannot be exhausted, and since we are seeking to embrace it, nothing that we do will ever

satisfy us” (104). Literature, in this paradigm, is a creative process energized by ideas of loss and recovery.

On the other hand, paranoia defines the artist’s mood when in expressions of an urgency to resist and guard oneself against hostile, deterministic forces—whether economic, political, technological, or some other historical force. Berlin writes about Romantic ways of thinking about these historical forces:

There is a notion that although we individuals seek to liberate ourselves, yet the universe is not to be tamed in this easy fashion. There is something behind, there is something in the dark depths of the unconscious, or of history; there is something, at any rate, not seized by us which frustrates our dearest wishes.

Sometimes it is conceived as a kind of indifferent or even hostile nature, sometimes as the cunning of history, which optimists think bears us towards ever more glorious goals, but which pessimists...think is simply a huge fathomless ocean of undirected will upon which we bob like a little boat with no direction, no possibility of really understanding the element in which we are, or directing our course upon it; and this is a huge, powerful, ultimately hostile force, to resist which or even to come to terms with which is never of the slightest use. (106-107)

In this paradigm, paranoia becomes legible in languages of compensation, combat, and commitment to guard oneself and humankind against hostile historical forces outside of one’s control. For many Romantics, artistic productivity becomes a means by which to resist such forces: Creativity becomes a means of moving forward, of “expanding our nature, by destroying the obstacles in our path...liberating ourselves more and more and allowing our infinite nature to soar to greater and greater heights” (106). The importance

of Romantic paranoia rests in the ways that Berlin describes it as something “which obsesses the twentieth century” (106), and we can extend this perspective to Gaiman’s, Moore and Williams’s, and Carey and Gross’s ways of thinking about human history and artistic creativity as a means to sustain, awaken, and develop the human imagination.

Thomas Pfau’s ideas about paranoid narratives provide a framework to read a greater spectrum of historical experience and historical representation in graphic narratives. Pfau takes Berlin’s ideas about the poet’s mood a step further by detailing a “psychohistorical narrative” in which Romantic authors simultaneously confront modernity and develop formal aesthetics of mood (*Romantic Moods* 1). For Pfau, three distinct moods become prevalent formal-aesthetic patterns in Romanticism: paranoia, trauma, and melancholy. He suggests that we find these aesthetics of mood in “vaunted claims of spiritual renewal, political justice, and cultural innovation, on the one hand, and a continual sense of affective and epistemological bewilderment, on the other” (1). Here, Pfau identifies mood in the ways writers represent “felt” emotional experiences in tasks of “awaken[ing] to their own historicity” (11). He argues that the Romantic task to better understand a historical state of being, despite never being fully intelligible, pushed writers to experiment with “‘virtual’ (aesthetic) solutions to experiences often ‘felt’ to be wholly intractable” (2). Here, Pfau emphasizes the ways that Romantic writers express commitments to analyze problems of modernity and imagine solutions to these problems in aesthetic realms of literature. In these realms, mood is understood as a productive tension between individual feeling and reality, and mood becomes distinct when writers confront and imagine how art resolves historical tensions of modernity. When extending this framework to Gaiman’s, Carey and Gross’s, and Moore and Williams’s narratives, it

suggests that Romantic patterns of creativity and aesthetics of mood have had lasting effects on creativity.

In Pfau's framework, literary creativity becomes a virtual activity: an inhabitation of an aesthetic space where writers orient to tasks of better understanding history and one's present state of being. Such activities in Romantic literature, he suggests, capture distinct emotional experiences that can be read

against the backdrop of legal, political, feudal, and early capitalist structures pressured to the point of disintegration, first by divisive impact of the French Revolution, next by seemingly interminable postrevolutionary warfare, and finally by Napoleonic European Restoration that appeared to defy all progressive conceptions of historical time. (1)

These historical realities are distinct to the nineteenth-century modern subject, and they are often confronted in Romantic literature: Writers' ways of thinking about historical experience and their relation to history and reality manifest in literature. For Pfau, these manifestations are "[f]ar from being ahistorical" (81), and formal-aesthetics of mood "dialectically relate" to historical experience (1-2). In this paradigm, individuals dramatize historical experiences of modernity in the virtual realities that they construct, and these dramatizations make legible historically-distinct emotional conditions energizing creativity:

[E]motion begins to reveal itself as a holistic and historically distinctive component in the unfolding story of modernity. When approached as a latent principle bestowing enigmatic coherence on all social and discursive practice at a given moment, 'mood' opens up a new type of historical understanding: no longer

referential, thematic, or accumulatively contextual. Rather, in its rhetorical and formal-aesthetic sedimentation...mood speaks—if only circumstantially—to the deep-structural situatedness of individuals within history as something never actually intelligible to them in fully coherent, timely, and definitive form. (7)

Here, Pfau's ideas of mood are similar to Berlin's notion of identifiable creative patterns. Mood becomes embedded at structural levels in "all social and discursive practice" of a historical period, and larger patterns can be read in ways that verify historical conditions of creativity. A historically-distinct, consensual mood energizes artistic creativity.

We need to take seriously the notion that paradigms of Romantic moods are found within Moore and Williams's *Promethea*, Carey and Gross's *The Unwritten*, and Gaiman's *Sandman*, and to do so, it is important to note how Pfau acknowledges that different manifestations of paranoia in the Romantic period have had lasting influences on creativity and are found in Popular Culture:

[P]opular culture of the past two decades has been filled with conspiratorial narratives—many of them revolving around late capitalism's transnational corporations scheming to conceal the presence of alien organisms within the community of the "human." In an update on earlier, strictly political conspiracies...popular cinematic culture of the 1980s and 1990s dramatizes paranoia as a condition experienced by individuals or groups who feel their very status as "human" to be under siege. From Ridley Scott's *Alien* films to James Cameron's *The Terminator* bonanza, from *Blade Runner* to *X-Men* and *The X-Files*...conspiracies shrewdly conceived and robotically executed by abstract

forces of global capital ultimately target for elimination the very idea of our “essential” humanity. (82)

Here, Pfau argues that formal aesthetics of paranoia are legible in our contemporary moment in the ways artists create narratives that *imagine* humankind coming under pressures of the nonhuman and losing a “fabled, mythic past” of order and unity (83), and he comments on the way “that the anxiety over [how] such prospects should specifically play itself out in the medium of film and cyberpunk fiction warrants closer attention” (82). Paranoia also warrants closer attention in the comics medium, but we do not need to limit the concept of paranoia to “late capitalism” or another other type of paranoia. There are many different forms of paranoia that emerge in Romantic literature, and these forms are both secular and religious, utilitarian and spiritual, individual and collective.

If we extend Pfau’s paradigm to read paranoia to *Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea*, it suggests that Gaiman’s, Carey and Gross’s, and Moore and Williams’s narrative activities intersect with Romantic narrative activities in the ways they incorporate personal ways of thinking about an interpretive urgency to resist pressures of historical forces and that resistance is possible through imaginative creativity. For Pfau, such an aspect “manifests itself as a fundamental psychological climate...in a *structure of discourse*” (6 Pfau’s emphasis); paranoia becomes a psychohistorical pattern of a larger, historically-distinct discourse of which traditional literature, film, and other art forms are a part. This project includes comics creativity within this discourse: Narratives that *imagine* literature’s capabilities to sustain the integrity of human consciousness (*Sandman*), develop human integrity (*The Unwritten*), and awaken humankind to truths and knowledge (*Promethea*) reveal themselves as part of a larger psychological climate

energizing creativity in our contemporary moment; they contain different forms of paranoia, and they become embedded in larger, historically-distinctive structures of discourse. With this paradigm, we can read not only a greater literary history of comics but, also, how comic book aesthetics contain structures of a historical mood.

Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams use the aesthetic space of comics to reinterpret literary history's relationship with humankind, and each chapter in this project is a case study that argues for a more formal interpretation or hermeneutic of narrative and historical representation in *Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea*. The importance in such a methodology rests in the ways that the artists' personal faith in imaginative creativity manifests in the narrative ways that the artists reimagine literary history and take initiatives to establish their story's relationships with literary history. By isolating each narrative, we can first discuss what happens when examining the artists' Romantic faith. In Chapter 1, I explore Gaiman's Romantic faith by constructing a paradigm to read his artistic motives for building the author G. K. Chesterton into "the heart" of *Sandman*—within Morpheus's realm of The Dreaming (*Doll's House* 197). Chesterton appears in the series as the character Fiddler's Green (*Dream Country* 197, 199), and the author's place in the mythology suggests that Gaiman reflexively elevates Chesterton above all other authors in the narrative. Chesterton is a privileged part of *Sandman*: His pride of place among the authors represented is concrete; it is not speculative. In this vein, I explore how Gaiman ascribes value to the author in at least two ways: He reflexively signals creative import, and he ironically constructs an intimate relationship with Chesterton's ways of thinking about literary history and the redeeming roles of artists to "reenchant" the world by writing fantasy literature.

In Chapter 2, I highlight Moore and Williams's intersections with early twentieth-century ways of thinking about magic, creativity, and Kabbalah in *Promethea*. Namely, I focus the artists' mythology as a personal vision of the Christian Kabbalist or hermetic imagination. In the story, the mythical figure Promethea is the patron of a realm from which all imaginative creativity emanates: The Imateria. This space/place is constructed as "the imagination" (*Book I* 125 Moore's emphasis), and it becomes the highest plane of the material world in the Kabbalist Tree of Life. In this frame of knowledge, The Imateria becomes humankind's connection to God, and artists assume responsibilities to become extensions of the divine. As the Imateria's patron, Promethea becomes a mythical vehicle to convey ideas that imagination and creativity restore unity, renovate reality, and awaken humankind to truths and existences beyond the material world. She fulfills these duties by harnessing the powers of story and energizing an imaginative revelation. The specular function of the artists becomes foregrounded when Moore and Williams *write and draw themselves into the comic book's panels* as individuals to whom Promethea gifts imaginative powers to tell the story, that is, *Promethea* (*Book 5* 127). Moore and Williams's Romantic faith manifests in the narrative when they construct their storytelling as channeling a promethean force capable of elevating humankind.

In Chapter 3, I focus how Carey and Gross's Romantic faith emerges in *The Unwritten* in the ways that they reconstruct literary history as an always already ongoing process in which authors are energized by and contribute to the growth of an organic system of stories that is linked to human integrity. The mythical figure Leviathan symbolizes this story system, and the logic of the narrative is that human integrity

depends on the imaginative storytelling for which this figure is responsible. In the story, authors have waged war with a secret society, named The Unwritten, that polices and manipulates the power of storytelling for political power and influence, and works of fantasy, mythology, legend, folklore—in short, works of imagination—become weapons that authors use to liberate humankind and contribute to Leviathan’s growth. This chapter provides a springboard to discuss structures of paranoia in comic books: Carey and Gross’s mythology becomes less stable. Where Gaiman’s and Moore and Williams’s mythologies imagine fictive patterns of the ways literature provides stabilization, *The Unwritten*’s mythology is one in which meaning proliferates and becomes unstable. They recreate authors as participants in an ongoing literary war with The Unwritten, and the artists’ self-reflexive aesthetics suggest that the story dramatizes a creative process in which the artists’ commit to tapping into creative powers to develop the human imagination through storytelling.

In *The Unwritten*, the character Wilson Taylor dramatizes the artists’ paranoia in how he discovers a way to tap into Leviathan’s power, and in an act of rebellion against The Unwritten, he not only authors what becomes an international best-selling fantasy series about a boy-wizard and his adventures at a magic academy—the *Tommy Taylor* series—but he also *brings to life* the boy-wizard to combat the cabal. In terms of Pfau’s ideas about paranoid structures of discourse, Carey and Gross’s ways of thinking about storytelling’s capabilities to develop and guard the human imagination rebounds on the artists: They are engaged in imaginative storytelling—that is, creating *The Unwritten*. The specular function suggests that the artists commit to fulfilling the ideas of

storytelling that their narrative foregrounds: developing the human imagination in an ongoing confrontation with historical forces of tyranny and oppression.

In the Conclusion of this project, I focus how *The Unwritten*, *Promethea*, and *Sandman* are narratives that sustain ideas of an interpretive urgency to create art and participate in an ongoing historical process to solve problems of modernity. Pfau's criteria suggests that this narrative activity intersects with formal domains of Romantic paranoia: "'paranoia' in my account names a situation of extreme interpretive agitation and urgency" (*Romantic Moods* 80-81). In this framework, a narrative in which a writer diagnoses paranoia—in our cases, the urgency to create art to combat historical forces—"quickly rebounds on [the] observer who ventures it as a hypothesis about the formal-aesthetic peculiarities of someone else's discourse" (79). Based on this formalist approach, Gaiman's, Carey and Gross's, and Moore and Williams's interpretations of literary history and the roles of imaginative storytelling rebound on the artists. As Pfau writes, "[T]he colloquial phrase 'It takes one to know one' unwittingly throws into relief...the observer's (still contingent) affinity with the observed" (80). Representing an urgency to create art confirms the writers' own illusion of urgency to create art: Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams confirm their own sense of historical urgency in their characters' sense of urgency to energize imaginative creativity; paranoia drives their creative processes.

What matters to comics studies is that in Pfau's paradigm, the formal aesthetics of paranoia that gathered energy in the Romantic period have persisted in imaginative creativity: "the anxious perception of history as a welter of uncontainable and malevolent forces" (77). Like Berlin's readings of creative patterns, Pfau reads paranoia as a creative

pattern that defines the Romantic period: “One way of gauging the temper of a particular period, and thus establishing a fixed chronological span such as the 1790s *as* a period or as a more compressed ‘hot chronology’...is to identify a dominant rhetorical or formal-aesthetic pattern” (77 Pfau’s emphasis). He goes on to argue that structures of paranoia “[remain] formally unchanged” (78), that formal-aesthetics defining paranoid narratives “prove elementary to any paranoid vision” with the ways that writers repeatedly confirm and reconfirm their interpretations of history (83). Pfau’s methodology becomes a helpful way not only to read these aesthetics in *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* but, also, a helpful way to read a greater literary history of myth-making in comics.

Pfau identifies four distinct interpretive structures of paranoia in Romantic literature (83-4), and the Conclusion of this project identifies how Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams follow at least three of them: redefining the medium of representation, reevaluating modes of knowing, and rethinking linear time (83). The first paradigm involves the ways that *Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea* establish relationships with literary history. The artists recreate historical events—the lives of authors, purposes driving their creativity, and the function(s) of their work throughout history—and they incorporate narrative elements from literature. With these elements, they construct frames of knowledge that redefine the form of comics in at least two ways: They relocate standard value systems of reading literature to comics, and the artists’ specularly constructs their creativity’s relationships with literary traditions.

When Pfau’s concepts of paranoia meet Michael Saler’s concepts of artistic compensation, disenchantment, and rechantment, we can construct a framework to read Pfau’s second and third paradigms of paranoia in *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The*

Unwritten. Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross reevaluate and rethink the linear history of comics as part of an ongoing process of human creativity by building mythological worlds that redefine relationships between comics creativity, literary history, and modernity. Saler argues that in literature, video games, comics, etc., we still find an embedded purposiveness in imaginative world-building that we see in the worlds of Tolkien, Lovecraft, and Conan Doyle: to restore humanity's lost sense of wonder and order—to "reenchant the world."

Saler identifies artistic purpose in imaginary worlds of our contemporary moment as challenging prevailing ideas about modernity's collective state of mind: disenchantment. In this vein, a sense of artistic responsibility to "reenchant" the world defines artistic intent: Reenchantment becomes "an act of fellowship, an involvement with and concern for others rather than mere escapism" (18). Artistic creativity, in this frame of knowledge, becomes a compensatory practice of sociability. Pfau's paradigm can build on and offer an alternative reading to Saler's ideas. For Pfau, authors are interpreters who are "unable and / or unwilling to recognize the condition of [their] own interpretations as constructs, fictions, and imaginary narratives" (78). In this paradigm, "reenchantment" becomes a fiction, an imagined artistic purpose whose aesthetics can be traced to early nineteenth-century Romantic literature. We can build on Saler's notion of compensatory imaginary worlds, then, by reading the ways that Gaiman's, Moore and Williams's, and Carey and Gross's Romantic faith is a fictive construct, an imaginary narrative. Pfau writes, "Such a 'subject'...constructs the order of reality in which it wants to live" (78).

Whereas Saler traces contemporary imaginary world-building to the early-twentieth century, we can go beyond this period to examine Gaiman's, Carey and Gross's, and Moore and Williams's intersections with aesthetics of an earlier age of disenchantment—the Romantic Age. During this time, authors used literature as a complementary virtual space to explore personal and collective historical experiences. In this vein, the artists fulfill Pfau's second paradigm of Romantic paranoia: In the virtual space of comics, Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams reimagine and reevaluate literary history and comics' relationships with it. When considering their intersections with Romantic paradigms, we can read how the artists transform literary history into myths and ironically integrate their creativity within these models. In doing so, we can read how they follow Pfau's third symptom of paranoia: Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams rethink the linear history of comics in relation to literary history by representing inherited creative responsibilities. In mainstream fiction studies, these aesthetics typify what Camus describes as a “distinctive Vertigo mood” (156). My Conclusion, therefore, demonstrates two important aspects of this project: It explores how we can build upon the current discourse of comics studies by extending Pfau's methods of reading mood to *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* and, also, to the larger discourse of mainstream fiction.

CHAPTER ONE

DREAMING KIN:

NEIL GAIMAN'S *SANDMAN*, G. K. CHESTERTON, AND ROMANTIC FAITH

Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* is a fruitful starting point to begin exploring how comic book writers reimagine the literary past and establish narrative relationships with it. Such activities open comics to literary-based inquiry—to questions about artistic motives for re-presenting literary texts and figures—and beginning with *Sandman* provides this project essential foundations for building a critical model that helps us better understand how the activity of transforming literary history into myths in comics intersects with larger, historically-distinct literary projects. In *Sandman*, the title character Morpheus, also known as Dream, is a deity who presides over a realm called The Dreaming, a space/place that connects all consciousness into one shared dream-world. Throughout the narrative, Gaiman highlights the relationship that this deity has with literary history, for his realm is constructed as the place from which all imaginative creativity emanates. The logic follows how every story ever “dreamed” has come from The Dreaming. Every book in existence, as well as every non-existent book “dreamed” but never composed, is housed within Morpheus's castle, in The Library of Dream: “Every book that's ever been dreamed. Every book that's ever been imagined. Every book that's ever been lost. Millions upon millions of them” (*The Kindly Ones* 23). Throughout *Sandman*, we as readers learn that Dream is responsible for maintaining his realm and stimulating the human imagination. He does so by energizing literary creativity not only to ensure humankind's futurity but, also, his own. His existence depends on dreamers and, more importantly, on dreaming authors.

In this chapter, I argue that understanding the importance of literature to Dream is necessary to understand the importance of literature to Gaiman's creative process in the *Sandman* series. Gaiman not only translates literary history into a dream-based mythology, but more specifically, he uses this mythology to convey personal ideas about fantasy literature's influence on humankind's state of being. In other words, Gaiman conveys personal ideas about fantasy literature's contingent relationship with human integrity throughout history by using Dream as an artistic symbol of imaginative creativity and power. What becomes important is that this way of thinking about literature can be traced to an author who appears in the story: G. K. Chesterton. Chesterton participated in early twentieth-century literary practices that not only energized ways of thinking about fantasy literature's redeeming characteristics, but he also participated in larger creative projects that attempted to revive Romanticism's ideas about imaginative literature's relationship with human history and its capabilities to regenerate humankind's relationship with the sacred world. The Romantics are notorious for "inaugurating the concept of the cardinal role of art" in human activity (Abrams 212), and succeeding generations of artists inherited and updated this historical model. In this frame of knowledge, a more formal hermeneutic of *Sandman* in relation to literary history can open lines of literary-historical inquiry to comics studies: We can demonstrate how Gaiman's ideas about literature intersect not only with Chesterton and other early twentieth-century authors who inherited Victorian ideas about literature but, also, Romantic ideas that the Victorians inherited.

Gaiman's ways of thinking about literature in *Sandman* can be grounded in what William Buckler describes as a "persistent Romantic faith" in literary creativity (37).

This faith is defined by beliefs in imaginative literature's vital role in humankind's state of being, and with this frame of knowledge, we can demonstrate what nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literary studies can offer *Sandman*'s critical narrative for better understandings of Gaiman's artistic identity, creative processes, and the connections that comics can have with historically-distinct discourses. The importance of using hermeneutics in comics studies is that such a critical engagement reveals hitherto unsuspected narrative intersections between comics and traditional literary texts, and with *Sandman*, we can demonstrate how to open up lines of literary-historical inquiry to the discourse of comics studies. To read, properly, the connections between Gaiman's creativity and early twentieth-century literary projects, we can orient to questions of "why" and "how" Gaiman absorbs Chesterton into his mythology and establishes an artistic relationship with him.

Gaiman elevates Chesterton into a powerful symbolic figure in *Sandman*: He transforms the author into a mythical dream-entity named Fiddler's Green, and this entity resides in Morpheus's realm. Gaiman chiefly focuses the Lord of Dreams as the source of all imaginative creativity, but he also constructs an intimate relationship between Morpheus and Chesterton. In prevailing criticism, Chesterton is an author whose reputation is largely based on strong commitments to advocate and defend fantasy literature, and with this understanding of Chesterton's identity, we can consider how the author's presence in the narrative affects Gaiman's creative process on two levels: when reconstructing historical moments of literary composition and, on another, self-reflexive level, when composing *Sandman*. Specifically, I propose that by comparatively reading Chesterton's ideas about fantasy literature with *Sandman*'s representation of William

Shakespeare writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we can better understand Chesterton's structural influence on the narrative—how his presence not only indicates the ways that Gaiman thinks about Shakespeare's purpose in writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but, also, how Gaiman thinks about his own creativity's purpose.

The *Sandman* issue titled “A Midsummer Night's Dream” (Issue #19) recreates the play's purpose: Morpheus channeled the play through Shakespeare with one specific goal—to sustain the existence of the *fae* in the human imagination. In the story, the *fae* are leaving the mortal world, never to return, and it spurs Morpheus to maintain Faerie in the minds of the world's dreamers: “They shall not forget you. That was important to me: that King Auberon and Queen Titania will be remembered by mortals, until this age is gone” (*Dream Country* 74). The logic is that Dream sees Faerie dreams—Faerie tales—as serving an important function for maintaining the integrity of human consciousness and for sustaining The Dreaming. In this frame of knowledge, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* fulfills some psychological, imaginative need of humankind. In terms of literary history, what matters with representing this creative purpose is that it is a historical anachronism: Gaiman's ways of thinking about fantasy literature and the importance of the *fae* to humankind did not emerge during the time of Shakespeare's England; they emerged in England during the early-twentieth century, with writers such as Chesterton, J. R. R. Tolkien, and (among others) C. S. Lewis.

Gaiman's ways of thinking about the power of fantasy literature in *Sandman* emerges with artists whom he praises as shaping him as a writer:

Chesterton and Tolkien and Lewis were...not only the writers I read between the ages of six and thirteen, but they were the authors I read over and over again; each

of them played a part in building me. Without them, I cannot imagine that I would have become a writer, and certainly not a writer of fantastic fiction. I would not have understood that the best way to show people true things is from a direction that they had not imagined the truth coming, nor that the majesty and the magic of belief and dreams could be a vital part of life and writing. (“A Speech I Gave Once”)

Gaiman’s personal beliefs about fantasy literature—the beliefs in its “majesty” and potential to become a “vital part” of one’s life—are found within *Sandman*’s representation of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The play is constructed as containing an artistic power vital to humankind’s state of being. In terms of literary history, such beliefs intersect with early twentieth-century literary creativity, in the works of a writer who “instructed” and “built” Gaiman to be an author of the fantastic, in an author who appears in *Sandman*—in Chesterton.

Isaiah Berlin’s ideas about creative patterns in art can help us better understand how we can ground Gaiman’s ways of thinking about *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in Chesterton’s work. Berlin explains how artistic creativity is shaped by dominant patterns in human thought during periods of time and in certain spaces/places: “Whenever you look at any particular civilisation [*sic*], you will find that its most characteristic writings and other cultural products reflect a particular pattern of life which those who are responsible for these writings – or paint these paintings, or produce these particular pieces of music – are dominated by” (2). In this vein, Gaiman’s ideas about the *fae* and Shakespeare’s purpose in writing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* intersect with dominant patterns of thought and creativity that first appear in the early-twentieth century. Because

of Chesterton's presence in *Sandman*, it is logical to turn to him for a basis to understand Gaiman's ways of thinking about Shakespeare and, more broadly, fantasy fiction—including his own. In establishing narrative relationships not only with Chesterton through Fiddler's Green but, also, with the character Morpheus, we may read how Gaiman uses the characters as imaginative instruments to construct a value system for reading imaginative creativity and its relationship with human history. Where common criticism poses Shakespeare as Gaiman's "gold standard" (Castaldo 95), Gaiman's personal commentary, when coupled with the relationship between Morpheus and Fiddler's Green, certainly suggests that Chesterton becomes another standard for Gaiman throughout *Sandman*.

The keys to understanding Gaiman's intersections with early twentieth-century ideas about fantasy rest in how he forms personal relationships with Morpheus and Chesterton in the narrative. To establish an understanding of Gaiman's relationship with Dream, it is necessary to examine character construction, the narrative's aesthetics of dreams, and how literary history is represented in the story. Morpheus is part of a family of mythological deities called The Endless. They are greater than gods, and they personify what are represented as seven fundamental human experiences: Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair, and Delirium (once called Delight). Each deity presides over a realm beyond the "real" world from which they can influence human activities, and when it suits their purposes, they can walk among humankind. From The Dreaming, Morpheus assumes the responsibilities to regulate activities beyond the waking state of consciousness and within the minds of all the world's dreamers. What is more important to Gaiman's connections with the character, though, is that Dream is

responsible for all forms of storytelling. In *Sandman*, the activity of creating new dreams is commensurate with creating new stories. As Stephen Rauch writes, “*Sandman* is a story about stories, and Dream the personification of story-telling” (53). Here, we see that Dream becomes an emblematic persona—a mythical vehicle through which Gaiman comments on the values of literature. To borrow Buckler’s words, Morpheus becomes a “spokesman” (38) for Gaiman’s Romantic faith.

Morpheus has many titles that connect him to literary history, including The Prince of Stories, and his brother Destiny addresses him as “the prince of those symbols and shapes that mean other than they seem, of metaphor and allusion” (*Brief Lives* 164). Dream and dream-material are explicitly connected to storytelling and literary devices, and one of his responsibilities is to create new dreams and gift them to humanity. Morpheus says, “[P]oets and dreamers are my people” (*Fables & Reflections* 117), and the logic throughout the narrative is that authors become extensions of his power. As Julie Myers Saxton writes, “It is not coincidence that he is called Lord Shaper...for he directs the poet’s pen to shape unknown things, and in his realm, stories are made” (24). One way that Morpheus fulfills his responsibility to sustain The Dreaming is by imparting the power of dreams to storytellers, and in doing so, he maintains the integrity of human consciousness. Ironically, Gaiman is engaged in storytelling while writing about the responsibilities and importance of storytelling. Morpheus’s responsibilities to impart new dreams parallels Gaiman’s sense of artistic responsibility to impart new “dreams,” or stories, to humankind. This parallelism suggests that Gaiman writes within a self-reflexive mode of narration, that a specular function of the author is at play. In this framework, Gaiman not only converts the authorial imagination into a source of

mythology in *Sandman*, but he also constructs his own artistic identity, as powered by d/Dream. *Sandman*, in this framework, becomes a personal myth: Gaiman's concerns about storytelling are placed within the symbol of Dream.

In addition to converting the authorial imagination into a dream-based mythology, the second key for understanding the literary history of Gaiman's narrative practice is in the way he constructs a personal relationship with Chesterton while elevating the author into a mythical figure. In the story, the dream entity named Fiddler's Green is visually represented as Chesterton (*The Doll's House* 64), and to reinforce the connection between Chesterton and the character, a photograph of the author, accompanied by his signature, is reproduced (208). Moreover, Gaiman constructs this entity as "the heart" and center of The Dreaming (*Doll's House* 197)—at the heart and center of a dream-world that symbolizes from where storytelling emanates, including his own. By visually representing Chesterton in this character, not only does Gaiman pay homage to the author, as much scholarship is wont to read the character, but it is also a way to represent how the author resides in the core of the mythology with which Gaiman connects his creativity. In this way, Gaiman deliberately connects his storytelling with Chesterton to symbolize a creative force of narrative. It is no coincidence that both writers engage a particular advocacy of fantasy literature. More than that, not only do both writers advocate for fantasy fiction, but they also look to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and construct it as part of a creative energy that maintains humankind's unity. These intersections generate critical opportunities for exploring Gaiman's connections to Chesterton's ways of thinking about fantasy literature and, more broadly, literary history.

In *Sandman*'s critical narrative, we have relative ease to explore the Chestertonian "heart" of Gaiman's storytelling, for it is a relatively overlooked dynamic. David Bratman describes Fiddler's Green as "a wonderful homage" (43), and Ben Indick describes the character as representing "one of [Gaiman's] favorites" (81). Fiddler's Green becomes the "standard mythological motif [of the guardian]" in Rauch's comparative study of *Sandman* and Joseph Campbell's Monomyth cycle (55). There are many possibilities for the critical oversight of the character's importance to Gaiman's creativity, but in any case, it is an opportunity to bring to light an understanding of Gaiman's effort to construct intimacy with Chesterton—with his identity as a writer of fantasy literature. Moreover, Gaiman deliberately builds Chesterton into the core of his mythology as a creative force of storytelling, as opposed to recreating his place in literary history, which he does with Shakespeare. Chesterton is a privileged part of *Sandman*: His pride of place among the authors represented in *Sandman* is concrete; it is not speculative. Reading Chesterton's privileged place in *Sandman* opens doors to better understanding not only his influences on Gaiman's ways of thinking about Shakespeare and his own storytelling, but it also helps us (re-)read and better understand Chesterton and his participation in larger creative projects of Modernism. In short, Chesterton plays an integral part in the *Sandman* mythology, and Gaiman enthrones him in *The Dreaming*; but more importantly, the narrative opens up space for curious readers to better understand how Chesterton's world-views were energized by early twentieth-century literary projects.

The importance of thinking about the place of Fiddler's Green in *The Dreaming* and Gaiman's representation of literary history rests in how Chesterton energized ways of

thinking about fantasy literature's capabilities to develop the human mind. In "The Ethics of Elfland," for example, Chesterton writes,

I am concerned with a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by the mere facts....

[F]airy tales founded in me two convictions; first, that this world is a wild and startling place, which might have been quite different, but which is quite delightful; second, that before this wildness and delight one may well be modest and submit to the queerest limitations of so queer a kindness. But I found the whole modern world running like a high tide against both my tenderesses.

(89, 105)

Here, Chesterton explains what fantasy did for him when many post-Darwinian, post-Freudian sciences began to have a strong influence in Western culture. For Chesterton, the new sciences' prominent influence had unhealthy consequences on humankind's perspectives of the natural world: "I found the whole modern world talking scientific fatalism.... In fact, according to them, nothing ever really happened since the beginning of the world. Nothing ever had happened since existence had happened; and even about the date of that they were not very sure" (106). Where he constructs such modern sciences as unhealthy for the human mind, Chesterton refers to the "many noble and healthy principles" that "come from being fed on fairy tales" (88).

We must always bear in mind that Chesterton's criticism—foregrounding fantasy as a mode of writing capable of maintaining humankind's awareness of the active and vibrant wonders of the world—contributed to the elevation of fantasy in the public imagination. With *Sandman*, a more formal hermeneutics of narrative in relation to

literary history suggests that Gaiman takes initiatives to connect with Chesterton's ideas. Gaiman's basic concept of the imagination and storytelling are captured when Morpheus expresses sentiments towards the differences between empirical science and fairy tales: "Things need not have happened to be true. Tales and dreams are the shadow-truths that will endure when mere facts are dust and ashes, and forgot" (*Dream Country* 74). What matters to *Sandman* is that by transforming Chesterton into a mythological figure, hermeneutics suggest that Gaiman encourages readers to understand the intimate relationship that he constructs between his story and Chesterton's ways of thinking about fantasy literature's capabilities to inspire wonder.

Where current scholarship reads *Fiddler's Green* as a mere homage, hermeneutics creates opportunities to build upon the discourse; this methodology establishes an understanding that Gaiman deliberately builds Chesterton into *The Dreaming* and invites readers to follow and understand the relationship that he establishes with his ways of thinking about fantasy literature. In prevailing criticism of *Sandman*, though, we meet the difficulty of identifying Gaiman's intersections with earlier patterns of literary creativity, because the critical narrative tends to limit his creative practice to postmodern notions of metafiction and hybridity. The distinction between these two terms is that metafiction describes narrative activities where a writer "draw[s] attention to the artifice of storytelling" while engaged in storytelling (Dowd 104), and hybridity describes a process in which a writer pieces together a "medley of references" from prior works and various mediums to create a new composition (Sanders 5). Chris Dowd, for example, extends the concept of metafiction to *Sandman* and Gaiman's larger body of work, describing his creative processes as literary dissections:

For Gaiman, metafiction is a surgical tool. He throws slabs of mythology, fairy tale, and horror onto the autopsy table and cuts into them like a mad scientist, turning them inside out to see how they are built. And then he beckons us closer to have a look at the carcass and shows us something we could have never seen otherwise. (104)

In this vein, metafiction becomes an activity of narrative deconstruction. Similarly, Rauch describes *Sandman* as a “‘metanarrative,’ a story about stories [...that] emerges as a hybrid text, with oral and written elements, in a blending of myth and folklore. More than that, Dream is, simply put, the reason we tell stories” (118). Here, Rauch reads *Sandman* as an artistic hybrid that brackets together various storytelling traditions, and like Dowd, he also suggests that Gaiman uses Morpheus in a mode of metanarration to create interactions with creative sources that he imitates. These studies typify a critical consensus of *Sandman* that positions Gaiman using Morpheus as a vehicle for postmodern storytelling.

Cyril Camus’s study of Gaiman’s narrative practice of “integrative fiction” (148) offers an alternative entry-point into *Sandman*’s discourse, and he opens doors to new ways of rethinking creative process and the literary history of mainstream comics. Camus constructs a framework to trace Alan Moore’s and Gaiman’s narrative designs to late 1960s and early 1970s fantasy literature, and such an engagement provides a literary-historical foundation on which we can build better understandings of the artists’ narrative connections with a greater literary history (beyond postmodernism). It is worth noting that Camus, too, acknowledges how the “importance of intertextuality and metafiction in [their] narrative practice has often led commentators to call Gaiman and Moore

‘postmodern’ comics-writers” (150). In a more productive vein, however, Camus sidesteps this critical consensus, broadly examines the artists’ narrative designs, and traces them to a common literary ancestor: Phillip José Farmer’s Wold Newton stories.

Before examining its connections to Farmer’s Wold Newton stories, it is necessary to examine details about *Sandman*’s publication history for better understandings of what narrative practices Gaiman uses to absorb and connect with the literary past. When *Sandman* debuted in 1989, it appeared as a monthly serialized publication, and its original run of 75 issues is published as a ten-volume set of graphic novels. In addition to various *Sandman* spin-off titles written by Gaiman, such as *Death: The High Cost of Living*, *The Dream Hunters*, and (among others) *The Books of Magic*, there are various spin-off titles *not* written by Gaiman, such as Jill Thompson’s *Little Endless Storybook* and (among others) DC Comics’s ongoing *Lucifer* series.³ In 2013, Gaiman also revisited *Sandman* with artist J. H. Williams III, and they published a six-issue prequel titled *Sandman: Overture*. As the subtitle suggests, the events in this narrative arc are structured to precede and, also, lead into Morpheus’s first appearance in “The Sleep of the Just,” the first issue of the original series. In August 2018, Gaiman debuted *The Sandman Universe*, a one-shot comic that introduced four separate titles with four teams of artists.⁴ In short, a large body of work emerges from *Sandman*; all the artists considered in this project are connected to it; and the title was introduced during a remarkable time of artistic innovation in the American comic book industry.

In comics history, *Sandman*’s importance rests in how it was a flagship fantasy series that emerged alongside a creative wave of mainstream comics in an era called “The Dark Age of Comics.” This Dark Age designates superhero titles published from about

1981 until 1992. Alex Romagnoli and Gian Pagnucci characterize this period as a time when artists aesthetically turn comics in on themselves. Meaning, it is a time when artists begin using modes of self-reflexivity and narrative deconstruction to explore, test, and experiment with characters and genres with “adult-oriented value systems” (119). With these value systems, instead of the “perfect worlds” (120) that superheroes inhabited in the Golden, Silver, and Bronze ages of comics, we get stories like Moore’s *Watchmen*, where the narrative explores questions of what would happen if superheroes were introduced to the real world, which becomes disastrous and apocalyptic; and we get Frank Miller’s *The Dark Knight Returns*, a psychological exploration of an older Bruce Wayne who comes out of retirement to save Gotham City, during which he faces a Superman whose ideals of Truth, Justice, and the American Way are compromised by the interests of his employer: the U.S. Government. Social and political commentary as well as self-reflexive modes of creativity that rethink genre, identity, and the place of superheroes in American culture define this turn to different value systems in comics. The emergence of these aesthetics in the medium are important to *Sandman* in the ways that Gaiman takes them up to experiment with genre and explore artistic identity within a fantasy series connected to the DC Universe of which Batman, Superman, and (among others) Wonder Woman are a part. What distinguishes Gaiman’s turn to “adult-oriented value systems,” though, is largely based on a turn to literary value systems—as with many British artists during this Dark Age.

Where Romagnoli and Pagnucci focus on the aesthetic innovations in mainstream comics during the 1980s and name this period the Dark Age, Greg Carpenter names this period the “British Invasion.” Although he acknowledges that not “all of the innovative

work was coming from British creators,” Carpenter argues that the ’80s were a time when Moore, Gaiman, and Grant Morrison came to America from the United Kingdom and “brought a combination of respect, audacity, and ambition necessary to transform the artistic standards of the medium” (7). With such creative ambition, these writers brought a passionate love for traditional literature to the industry, and in their work, we see how they construct narrative relationships between the popular form of comics books—a medium usually considered “lowbrow”—and “highbrow” literature. What this project adds to the discourse is that one of the artists’ primary concerns is to show the relevance of their creativity to the literary imagination, and in their work, they take initiatives to connect their work both to comics history and literary history. From their creativity, Carpenter argues, we see a massive influx of preexisting literary ideas, devices, and designs across the industry.

Carpenter highlights Moore, Gaiman, and Morrison as forerunners in a larger creative project that gave artistic legitimacy to mainstream comics in America, and he likens their impact to “Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson, elevating the English language into a vehicle for poetic drama. They are Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley, defining Romanticism with both their poetry and their lives” (9). These comparisons to some of the greatest writers in literary history give some heft to the artists’ iconic status in the American comic book industry: Their contributions provided foundations on which their contemporaries and succeeding generations of mainstream comic book artists could build—and on which they are still building, nearly 30 years later. What matters with *Sandman* is that the story put Gaiman on the map as one of the most significant and influential writers in the industry, and although his love for literature energized much of

his creative process, the beginnings of his successful career can be attributed, largely, to his mentor: Alan Moore.

The importance of Gaiman's professional relationship with Moore cannot be overstated nor underestimated for better understandings of his creative practice in *Sandman*. The narrative designs that Moore brought to the industry energized Gaiman's creative process and, more broadly, patterns of creativity that persist both in their work and in other titles, including *Promethea* and *The Unwritten*. In this vein, Camus's contribution to the discourse is at least twofold: Where Romagnoli, Pagnucci, and Carpenter broadly examine narrative practices in the industry during the '80s and early '90s, Camus focuses the details of Moore's professional and narrative influences on Gaiman as well as their shared literary history. Camus first examines the relationship that Gaiman developed with Moore as a "contemporary influence" (148). He covers many details of their professional relationship, but he nicely condenses it in one statement: "Moore's *Swamp Thing*...rekindled [Gaiman's] interest in comics in his adulthood, and Moore was then led to personally teach him how to format a comics-script, and gave him some feedback on his first attempts" (148). For Camus, the importance of Moore's mentorship rests not only in having a better understanding of how he taught Gaiman how to write comics but, also, how examining this relationship reveals the writers' shared literary history in what is known as the Wold Newton Universe (WNU) (148).

Gaiman's *Sandman* and Moore's *Saga of the Swamp Thing* are structurally similar to Farmer's Wold Newton stories in the sense that they bring together preexisting literary characters into one shared imaginary world. In the WNU, Farmer brings together literary and pulp fiction characters ranging from Edgar Rice Burroughs's Tarzan and Lester

Dent's Doc Savage to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and H. Rider Haggard's Allan Quatermain. To provide logic for their relationships with each other, Farmer takes the historical event of the 1795 Wold Cottage meteorite and fuses it with structures of science fiction. He, then, designs a "genealogical framework according to which various characters from popular literature were relatives" (150). Camus goes on to cite how Gaiman and Moore explicitly express their interests in creating their own Wold Newton worlds, and the key to their own designs rests in their mythologies.

Moore's connections to the WNU are first found in the introduction to *Book I* of the *Saga of the Swamp Thing* series. In it, he describes his creative scope and addresses the breadth of material from which he draws:

The continuity-expert's nightmare of a thousand different super-powered characters coexisting in the same continuum can, with the application of a sensitive and sympathetic eye, become a rich and fertile mythic background with fascinating archetypal characters hanging around, waiting to be picked like grapes on the vine....

Imagine for a moment a universe jeweled with alien races ranging from the transcendently divine to the loathsome Lovecraftian. Imagine a cosmos where the ancient gods still exist somewhere and where whole dimensions are populated by anthropomorphic funny animals. Where Heaven and Hell are demonstrably real and even accessible, and where angels and demons alike seem to walk the earth with impunity. (qtd. in Camus 149, 150)

Here, we see Moore's ideas about creating a mythology where characters from a broad array of artistic creativity exist.⁵ This creative scope matters to *Sandman* in at least two

respects: On one hand, Camus addresses how Moore's work "was then, if not a direct inspiration for Gaiman's, at least the work of a *forerunner*, of which Gaiman was very much aware since *Swamp Thing* had...a tremendous impact on Gaiman's work in general, and particularly on *Sandman*" (150 Camus's emphasis). Throughout *Sandman*, we as readers see the mythical figure Morpheus interact with characters from various cultural mythologies, including Greco-Roman, Norse, and Egyptian gods; characters from sacred texts, including the Hebrew Bible, Kabbalah, and the Bible; from the DC Universe, including John Constantine, Etrigan, Scott Free (Mister Miracle), Lyta Hall, and The Justice League; and (among others) characters from traditional literature, including the *fae* from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It is this creative scope where it may be logical to read how Moore's appropriation of Farmer's Wold Newton design for the mythic background of *Swamp Thing* became a creative model for Gaiman when he wrote *Sandman*.

On the other hand, Camus's research shows us what happens if we delimit the critical narrative from postmodern notions of metafiction and hybridity, and if we take Camus's study further, we can read how Gaiman and Moore base their mythologies on the WNU not only to bring together preexisting literary characters but, also, literary authors. Fiction and historically-based literary history become integral and complementary parts of their myths. For Camus, the WNU provided a literary blueprint that could be relocated within the comics medium, but going further, Gaiman and Moore could use this blueprint to build relationships with authors of the literary past. We can pursue better understandings of Gaiman's creative process in *Sandman* by moving Camus's framework beyond postmodern notions of metafiction and hybridity, and by

making such a methodological step, we can focus the literary authors of the past that appear in *Sandman* and explore how the story helps us read Chesterton's place in the narrative.

Julie Sanders's and Helen Vendler's research can help us better understand aesthetic consequences and motives for absorbing authors of the past into a story. Sanders works from Graham Allen's ideas about intertextuality, and she suggests that in processes of relocating preexisting literary materials into a new medium, the "systems, codes, and traditions established by previous works of literature" form a "structuring relationship" with narrative (3, 5). In this framework, the presence of literary elements within a new medium indicates an artist's personal relationship with the literary past. This frame of knowledge suggests that readers may identify variation in modes of thought between original conception of literary materials and their reconstruction. Sanders suggests that these literary presences become opportunities to traverse the intentional fallacy: "[T]he creative import of the author cannot be as easily dismissed as Roland Barthes's or Michel Foucault's influential theories of the 'death of the author' might suggest" (3). In this vein, texts that incorporate preexisting literary materials enable readers to identify the artist's production of meaning. Understanding this production of meaning cannot fully take place unless readers cooperate in following and understanding the artist's initiatives to reconstruct the literary past with a personal vision and establish personal relationships with the systems, codes, and traditions of the literary past—whether they praise or condemn them. If we extend this scope to *Sandman*, two critical opportunities arise: We can explore how Gaiman both makes Chesterton's and Shakespeare's identities "original" by constructing their relationships with Morpheus, and we can explore how he establishes

personal relationships with what he reimagines as the tradition of their creativity: creating dreams that benefit humankind.

Where Sanders stops at texts and their relationships with other texts, Vendler discusses what happens when writers use aesthetic spaces not only to reimagine artists of the past but, also, to establish personal, intimate relationships with them (57). She writes, “The contemporary artist goes to the masterpieces of the past seeking an intimate presentness of instruction, colloquy, sympathy.... Yet the present-day artist must resist the temptation to slide into inert imitation” (66). Here, Vendler explains how the qualities of instruction, colloquy, and sympathy are not so much oriented to imitating an artist’s prior work, as with postmodern notions of metafiction and hybridity, as much as they “[send] out a ray of social imagination” (63). In this vein, contemporary artists encourage readers to understand how they use artistic spaces to imagine intimacy with prior artists—to identify with and receive instruction from “kindred spirit[s]” (67). Writing about *Sandman*, B. Keith Murphy discusses how “Gaiman respects the reader’s intelligence, and he tests the limits of that intelligence” (18). Vendler’s ideas can take this notion one step further by highlighting how Gaiman assumes that his “range of reference” (59) with the literary past can be the reader’s own range of reference. If we extend Vendler’s perspectives on writers forming social relationships with past artists and Sanders’s ideas about creative import to *Sandman*, we can focus Chesterton’s place in the story and follow the formal characteristics that Gaiman encourages us to understand.

The first key to understanding how Gaiman establishes and sustains intimacy with Chesterton is found in *The Doll’s House* (Volume 2), the volume in which the character Fiddler’s Green first appears. *The Doll’s House* picks up where *Dream* is almost finished

rebuilding The Dreaming and follows the events of *Preludes & Nocturnes* (Volume 1)—wherein Dream escapes a 72-year imprisonment, discovers that his realm lay in ruins, and recovers items that empower him. Within “Part One,” Gaiman uses the ruinous state of Morpheus’s realm to his narrative advantage; it creates opportunities to build items into the story. Particularly, he creates four spaces, and each space plays a role in establishing both narrative and personal relationships with the artistic past. For example, Morpheus assigns his assistant and library caretaker, Lucien, to complete a census of the realm. When completed, Lucien reports: “Four of the major arcana are gone, sire. They are not to be found in The Dreaming” (*Doll’s House* 38). These entities include: Brute and Glob, The Corinthian, and Fiddler’s Green (40). What becomes most important for our endeavor is the way that these characters operate on two levels of narration. On one level, *The Doll’s House* follows Morpheus as he retrieves these entities and completes the reconstruction of his realm, but on another level, we as readers follow Gaiman’s process of constructing an imaginary world and using these characters as instruments to indicate a range of imaginative content. The broader narrative of *The Doll’s House* is driven by Morpheus reasserting control over rogue dreams and bringing them back to The Dreaming, but at the same time, Gaiman uses the characters as imaginative vehicles to assert control over narrative and establish connections with creative forebears.

For example, the two nightmare creatures, Brute and Glob, are from Jack Kirby and Joe Simon’s Silver Age superhero version of Sandman, a.k.a. Hector Hall, another important character in *The Doll’s House*. When Gaiman received his assignment to write *Sandman*, DC Comics’s Editor Karen Berger⁶ instructed him to create a new Sandman character. In an interview with Alex Amodo, Gaiman comments,

When Karen asked what I wanted to do next, I had suggested a *Sandman* graphic novel, featuring the old Simon and Kirby 1970s incarnation because there were a few things that I thought were really interesting. I liked the idea of a character who lived in dreams, who had no objective existence. So, later, she said, “Well what about that Sandman idea?” I said, Okay. She said, “Great, but make it a new one”.... I figured I should just reduce it to the basics, and what I got when I reduced it to the basics was Dream. (qtd. in Murphy 15)

What Gaiman created was an anthropomorphic dream—Dream, aka Morpheus—and he had to connect the story to the DC Universe of which Simon and Kirby’s superhero version of Sandman was already a part. In this vein, Gaiman uses Brute and Glob in a self-reflexive mode of narration to pay tribute to his predecessors and take control of his assignment. The Corinthian similarly functions as a narrative instrument on two levels. On one level, the character is another rogue nightmare, a “flawed creation” that inspires serial killers during Dream’s imprisonment (*Doll’s House* 161). Its absence from *The Dreaming* creates a narrative urgency for Morpheus to regain control over dreams. On another level, Bratman discusses how this character’s narrative role in leading a band of incompetent sociopaths serves as a way for Gaiman to establish the story’s connections with horror writers: “By courageously goofing off with very dire material, Gaiman is in the company of a distinct category of great humorous horror writers such as John Bellairs and Joss Whedon” (44).

The final missing dream-entity, Fiddler’s Green, is our principal focus. Otherwise known as “Gilbert” (after Gilbert Keith Chesterton), Fiddler’s Green enters the scene as another dream gone rogue. Rauch correctly describes the character as “something

between a person and a place” (33). It is a “place” in the sense that it appears in *The Dreaming* as a fertile, lush-green dreamscape, which maintains its connection to maritime folklore, and it is a “person” in the sense that during Morpheus’s 72-year absence, it leaves *The Dreaming* in the form of a man: Chesterton. Most importantly, Fiddler’s Green is regarded as “the heart” of *The Dreaming*, as the heart of a space/place connected to Gaiman’s creativity, and when Morpheus catches up with him, he requires the entity to take up his position once again. Whereas Morpheus punishes Brute and Glob by sentencing them to “The Darkness” for the “next few thousand years” (96) and “uncreates” *The Corinthian* (160), the Dream Lord tells Fiddler’s Green, “I cannot find it in my heart to punish you for leaving. Not now. However, it is time to take up your appointed position” (199). The importance of this moment rests in the ways Gaiman uses this character to build Chesterton into the core of his imaginary world. This moment effectively establishes what Vendler calls an “intimate presentness” (66) with past artists that Gaiman maintains throughout the series: Gaiman builds Chesterton into the heart of his imaginary world.

Gaiman builds Chesterton into a world where stories are born, and this world, ironically, is a world from which *Sandman* is born. From this point forward, as Gaiman maintains a personal relationship with Morpheus in “creating a dream”—creating a story—he also maintains a personal relationship with the heart of *The Dreaming*: Chesterton. Gérard Genette, from whom Sanders works, describes such a narrative design as a “movement of proximation” (qtd. in Sanders 20), and with Vendler’s ideas about writers establishing relationships with past artists, we can read the character Fiddler’s Green as Gaiman keeping Chesterton within proximity to Morpheus, to embrace him as a

kindred spirit of storytelling and as an energizing force of his own creativity. They become “dreaming kin.” If we think about the place that Chesterton occupies in *The Dreaming*, then we open doors to better understandings of Gaiman’s imagined intimacy with him. This intimacy suggests that Chesterton plays an energizing force of Gaiman’s narrative practice and artistic identity. What happens to Chesterton’s identity as a Catholic author, however, becomes a concern of ethical import.

The ethics of importing Chesterton into *Sandman* concern the process of secularizing a Catholic writer and absorbing him into an invented mythology. Within Sanders’s framework, contemporary artists may “authenticate” and “revere” their references to “‘authoritative’, culturally validated, texts...[or adopt] a posture of critique, even assault” (4). If we extend this framework to *Sandman*, it suggests that Gaiman reveres and authenticates his creativity’s relationship with Chesterton and, in the process, secularizes the author. As Bratman notes about Chesterton’s presence, “At the end of [*The Doll’s House*] we find out who, or what, [*Fiddler’s Green*] really is; but I would say that the fact that something is obviously amiss here from the beginning is enough to obviate any criticism that this wonderful homage is a misappropriation in a non-Christian story” (43). Where Bratman sees the character as an homage, Alison Milbank’s discussion of Chesterton’s creative practice helps us better understand Gaiman’s process of secularizing the author in *Sandman*. In this vein, we can explore Gaiman’s social motives for establishing a relationship with him.

Milbank approaches Chesterton’s ideas about fantasy literature from the vantage point of his Catholic faith. She explains that part of his artistic identity is based on theological ambitions in a mode of “Catholic and realist praxis and ethics” (xv). In this

theological framework, Chesterton's literary creativity becomes two things: a "riposte" to modern ideas of disenchantment (xiv) and a virtuous form of gift-giving, or charity. First, Milbank characterizes how Chesterton's ideas about fantasy literature challenge Max Weber's famous declaration, in 1917, that we live in a "disenchanted world"—a world bereft of magic and wonder by an increasingly secularized and rationalized culture. Milbank's reading is based on Chesterton's understanding of fantasy as a mode of writing capable of "mak[ing] more luminous the simple realities of our own world" (xiii), and she continues to describe how many early twentieth-century fantasy writers, including Chesterton and Tolkien, "quite rightly refut[ed]" the idea that the world is disenchanted (8). In their work, they sought to create an "intellectually engaged" form of reenchantment to restore humankind's sense of wonder: writing fantasy literature (9).

For Chesterton, the intellectually engaging aspect of fantasy functions through the literary trope of magic. Chesterton suggests that the trope of magic plays a regenerative role within the human mind. In "Ethics of Elfland," for example, Chesterton explains his ideas about wonder and beauty, and he writes of magic and its relationship with the real world:

These subconscious convictions are best hit off by the colour and tone of certain tales. Thus I have said that stories of magic alone can express my sense that life is not only a pleasure but an eccentric privilege....

[This] world does not explain itself. It may be a miracle with a supernatural explanation; it may be a conjuring trick, with a natural explanation. But the explanation of the conjuring trick, if it is to satisfy me, will have to be better than the natural explanations I have heard. The thing is magic, true or false. (115, 117)

Here, Chesterton explains that the magic in fantasy literature is not irreconcilable with empirical sciences, and he suggests that fantasy offers more than secular, reason-based sciences: It offers humankind an explanation of the magic to perceive in the world. It offers “the test of the imagination” (90) and the belief in the “remote possibility of a miracle” (93). For Chesterton, magic is also all around us, and fantasy literature helps us remember that it is there: “All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy [*sic*] only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget” (97).

Milbank continues to discuss how Chesterton’s ideas of magic found their way into later fantasy writers’ work, particularly Tolkien’s Middle-earth. She writes, “There is... a more potent and universal magic in Tolkien’s world by which the whole material cosmos is infused with a kind of enchantment, as if it had a radiance: a ‘lumen’....[It] is a property of everything in the novel: wood, stone and iron as in the traditional fairy-tale (which of course need have no actual fairy to guarantee its ‘fairy’ status)” (42-43). In this world, Milbank argues, readers are encouraged to understand the connection between the imaginary (magic) and the real (the wonders of the natural world), and the artist seeks to “find new ways to restore language as a signifying medium of the real world: namely, by the fantastic” (29). This framework suggests that creative process is energized by a sense of responsibility to write an intellectually-engaging fantasy capable of restoring humankind’s sense of wonder, and the trope of magic becomes a way that the fantasy writer translates the wonders of the natural world into fiction.

The second point in Chesterton's artistic model is that literary creativity becomes a commitment to an ideal of artistic creation; it becomes a virtuous activity energized by Catholic ideas of sacrifice, gift-giving, and charity. By committing to the idea of restoring a sense of the world's wonder, this model suggests that artists become mediating gift-givers between humankind and the divine: "In Chesterton's view, everything is waving madly at us to indicate its divine origin and its storied character. Mediation [or authorship] is therefore not a distancing from God but an enabling of this realization of divine purpose" (Milbank 11). Here, Milbank explains that Chesterton's ideas about literary creativity are based on faith in a process where the artist invites readers into a method of gift-giving whose origins are divine: By imparting stories to humankind, the artist assumes the responsibility to channel the divine. In this sense, stories are undergirded or enchanted by the idea of their divine origin. For our purposes in connecting Gaiman's narrative practice to Chesterton, we must always bear in mind that Chesterton and other modernist writers energized and developed many ideas about the fantasy author's redeeming creativity, and *Sandman*'s frames of knowledge indicate an inheritance of this literary model with its ideas that the history of storytelling is undergirded by a greater power of d/Dream. Gaiman's relationship with Morpheus, though, suggests that he bases the narrative on a secularized Chestertonian faith.

Gaiman's faith in imaginative literature differs from Chesterton's faith in the ways that *Sandman*'s ideas of storytelling are undergirded by secular ideals of dreams. This intersection, however, helps us better understand where the secular and the sacred meet in this faith in imaginative literature. The distinction rests in how Chesterton's ideas are rooted in Catholic ideas about literary creativity, and Gaiman writes an imaginative

myth driven by a universal, secular embodiment of dreams—Morpheus—that represents the powers of storytelling, including his own. In *Sandman*, as Gaiman writes a story about a character who gifts dreams to humankind through storytellers, he is also engaged in this method of gifting dreams, of gifting stories, and he absorbs authors of the past into the narrative to embrace them as participants in artistic ideals of maintaining the integrity of human consciousness and experience. Where Gaiman is engaged in a secular form of fantasy, though, we can trace this practice to literary activities of the early-twentieth century that helped shape Chesterton's ideas about fantasy literature. Chesterton's influence on Gaiman is important, but it is much less important than the ways in which Gaiman helps us reread Chesterton's place in early twentieth-century literary practices. In this frame of knowledge, we can better understand Chesterton's place in literary history: His Catholic ideas about the virtues of storytelling as a form of gift-giving intersect with Victorian and Romantic ideas of artists fulfilling moral obligations to exercise and empower humankind through imaginative creativity.

Exploring Chesterton's place and identity in *Sandman* helps expand on Milbank's scope of Chesterton: We can read his place within a larger picture of Victorian and Modernist projects, for such projects become a continuum of Romantic ways of thinking about imaginative creativity. Michael Ingleby discusses how Chesterton is "someone with much to offer areas quite removed from religious matters as conventionally articulated. Once we separate Chesterton's observations on a range of phenomena from the question of his faith, he becomes at once a more amenable and more challenging figure within critical discourse" (7-8). In this vein, where Milbank explains that "the late Victorian period suffered a loss of confidence in the Romantics' conception of the

religious basis of language” (29), Ingleby’s ideas about separating Chesterton from his faith help us see Chesterton’s creativity in the contexts of late-Victorian and early-Modernist literary endeavors that attempted to revive Romantic ways of thinking about the role of artists and imaginative literature in human experience. It was in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that we see attempts to revive Romanticism’s faith in imaginative letters. Buckler argues that the

literary experiment which the Victorians undertook with the urgency of a desperate hope was the salvation of imaginative letters....The sense of hieratic intensity was already there: a sacred pungency had been created by Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley and by the flow from Germany that was released into England by Coleridge and, in a more strictly literary fashion, by Carlyle.... It is a poetic faith that, allowing for the secularization and deflation of language, persists right through Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, and Lowell as the archetypal Romantic faith. (4, 37)

The keys, here, are the idea of secular faith in imaginative creativity that the Romantics energized and how we find this faith persist not only through Victorian literature but, also, Modernist literature. It is a faith defined by ideas about artists’ capabilities to restore humanity’s relationship with the sacred and to unite a fractured and fragmented world with art. Art becomes a secular religion of modernity to the Romantics, and Buckler demonstrates how many Victorian and Modernist writers bear an “aesthetic imperative” (5) to be “both innovative and relevant” to what the “Romantics had done so conscientiously and so well” (37). A problem we meet with connecting Chesterton to this literary project is how much scholarship tends to separate him and other early twentieth-

century fantasy writers both from “high Modernism” and the Modernist endeavor to salvage imaginative literature in the popular imagination.

We can extend Buckler’s ideas that the early Modernists sought to “redefine miracles” within “new functional modes” (38) to fantasy writers such as Chesterton, Tolkien, and Lewis as much as we can extend these ideas to poets such as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and W. B. Yeats. Michael Shallcross, for instance, explains that Chesterton both functions within and outside Modernism. Shallcross challenges prevailing criticism’s ideas about Chesterton’s identity in literary history in the ways that it imagines him “blundering his way around a hyper-refined aesthetic realm” (3). Shallcross seeks to recuperate Chesterton by examining the author’s parodic exchanges with Eliot, Katherine Mansfield, and (among others) James Joyce, and he concludes that Chesterton’s work is not as aesthetically intolerant and irreconcilable with “high” Modernism as we are led to believe (3). Shallcross chiefly focuses on parody as providing a social lubricant for Chesterton’s participation in Modernism, and we can build on his work by considering Chesterton’s ideas about fantasy literature in respect to the persistence of Romantic faith in Modernist literature. What matters for our purposes is that we must bear in mind that *Sandman* gets us here: Gaiman encourages readers to follow and understand his artistic motives for including Chesterton, and curious readers may be led to better understandings of Chesterton in literary history.

Modernism is a place in early twentieth-century literature where secular and sacred beliefs often meet. Buckler identifies how during this time, emerging poetic modes provided “new foundations” for the “old” beliefs of Romanticism (37), and we also see these beliefs in fantasy literature. If we extend Buckler’s ideas about the persistence of

Romantic faith through early twentieth-century to fantasy literature, it suggests that not only does this faith in imaginative creativity persist right through Chesterton, Tolkien, and Lewis but also, by extension, through Gaiman. *Fiddler's Green* is an instrument Gaiman uses to identify his creative process with a Chestertonian faith in fantasy literature, and it is a secular faith defined by ideas of a writer's capabilities to gift wonder to the world through imaginative creativity. In this vein, we can use Chesterton's ideas about magic and imaginative creativity to read both Gaiman's ideas about dreams and Shakespeare's imaginative creativity as he represents it in *Sandman*.

For Chesterton, fantasy literature is an aesthetic space where the real and imaginary can meet. It is a "mode of exploring the real through the imagination" (Milbank 146). In creative processes, an artist can use the trope of magic and mythical creatures as literary devices to layer narrative with symbolism, ascribe meaning to the world, reintroduce readers to it "as if it were seen for the first time" (34). Chesterton explains his ideas about the trope of "magic" in elfland: "The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, 'charm,' 'spell,' 'enchantment.' They express the arbitrariness of the fact and its mystery. A tree grows fruit because it is a *magic* tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched" ("Ethics of Elfland" 94 Chesterton's emphasis). Here, Chesterton suggests that magic is metonymic for the wonders and inner workings of nature, and he continues to use this logic to describe nature's processes of transformation: "When we are asked why eggs turn to birds or fruits fall in autumn, we must answer exactly as the fairy godmother would answer if Cinderella asked her why mice turned into horses or her clothes fell from her at twelve o'clock. We must answer that it is

magic” (93 Chesterton’s emphasis). Milbank explains that Chesterton’s ideas about magic characterize a process in which the fantasy writer uses magic to “make strange” the real world, or change “the shape of the universe” as it passes through readers’ minds (38). This is a process of transforming “real things” into fiction (xv), and we find this creative process in Gaiman’s mythology of the authorial imagination—his transformation of literary history into myth, into the power of d/Dream.

Where Chesterton sees fairy tale authors as using the language and images of magic and fairies to ascribe value to and “reenchant” the world, Gaiman uses the language and image of d/Dream to mythologize the authorial imagination and ascribe value to the creative process of storytelling. Moreover, the language and figure of d/Dream also establishes Gaiman’s personal relationship with this artistic model. Just as magic becomes the “property of everything” in Chesterton’s and Tolkien’s worlds, Morpheus’s power of dreams becomes the property of all storytelling in Gaiman’s world, including his own. When readers pick up *Sandman*, they are “picking up a dream,” and interspersed throughout *Sandman*, Gaiman draws readers’ attention to this idea: “You must never forget that this is a dream” (*The Wake* 81). Milbank’s ideas suggest that Gaiman “makes strange” all of literary history with the idea of the transformational powers of d/Dream.

Milbank explains how many Modernist writers use a “mythic method” to construct frames of reference with the past: “Modernist writing reaches back to assert the influence of earlier culture on the present through the ‘mythic method,’ while simultaneously stressing the gap between modernity and the past through ironic juxtaposition” (ix). If we extend the idea of the “mythic method” to *Sandman*, it suggests

that we find this ironic juxtaposition between the past and present carried out in the ways that Gaiman reimagines literary history through Morpheus while establishing the character's relationship with past authors. Most notably in *The Dreaming*, we see this ironic juxtaposition in the way Gaiman creates narrative proximity between Morpheus and Chesterton, and the intersections between the writers' ways of thinking about fantasy literature culminate in Gaiman mythologizing Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, where Milbank's concerns rest with the ways Chesterton and Tolkien committed to restoring the world as enchanted through myth, our hermeneutic framework suggests that Gaiman's mythologization of the authorial imagination intersects with Romantic myth-making.

Like Gaiman, many Romantics sought to explain the power of literature with artistic symbols and images. Berlin explains that the only way of explaining such power "was by means of myths...because myths embody within themselves something inarticulable, and also manage to encapsulate the dark, the irrational, the inexpressible, that which conveys the deep darkness of this whole process" (121). In the process of myth-making, Romantic authors elevate literary works as forces or artistic energies thrust into the world that affect everyday life. Berlin writes,

All art is an attempt to evoke by symbols the inexpressible vision of the unceasing activity which is life....That is how *Hamlet*, for example, becomes a myth, or *Don Quixote*, or *Faust*. What Shakespeare would have said about the extraordinary literature which has accumulated around *Hamlet*, what Cervantes would have said about the extraordinary adventures which Don Quixote has had from the early

nineteenth century onwards, I do not know, but at any rate these works were converted into rich sources of mythology. (122)

In Romantic processes of converting literature into sources of mythology, literary characters and authors become symbols of creative energies or of some other principle of artistic power. Gaiman intersects with these poetics in the ways that he converts Chesterton into a source for the *Sandman* mythology. If we couple Vendler's ideas about the ways contemporary artists construct intimacy with past artists with Berlin's ideas about Romantic myths, it suggests that Fiddler's Green symbolizes a Chestertonian force energizing Gaiman's creativity and ways of thinking about imaginative storytelling. This symbol helps us ground Gaiman's ways of thinking about Shakespeare in *Sandman*.

Many *Sandman* studies concentrate on Shakespeare as Gaiman's "gold standard" of authorship (Castaldo 95), and common criticism reads how Gaiman uses him as a reflexive character in the development of narrative. Joan Gordon, for example, examines how Gaiman "uses Shakespeare as a vehicle for his own experience of writing" (81). Annalisa Castaldo also argues that Gaiman "creates Shakespeare as the human mirror of Dream, suffering loss and bowed under responsibility as Dream is" (103). Julia Round smartly reads how the *Sandman* issue "A Midsummer Night's Dream" exploits the darker aspects of Shakespeare's play, and she determines that *Sandman*'s larger narrative has a "basis in the play's text and performance legacy" (32). Saxton similarly engages a comparative reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Sandman*, and she identifies larger intersections between theme, character, and space/place: "Although [Gaiman's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'] makes the most transparent references to Shakespeare's play, elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be seen throughout the series, and not

just for backdrop or mythological context” (22). In my prior work, I also build a framework to examine how Gaiman constructs an autobiographical simile between his process of writing the intended final issue of *Sandman*, titled “The Tempest,” and Shakespeare writing his supposed final play, *The Tempest* (Katsiadis 67).

A reason why many scholars gravitate to Gaiman’s representation of Shakespeare rests in how *Sandman* tracks the Bard’s development as a playwright throughout the series: In “The Men of Good Fortune” (Issue #13, Volume 2), Shakespeare is an aspiring playwright who enters a two-play contract with Morpheus in exchange for the power of dreams; in “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (Issue #19, Volume 3), Shakespeare has completed his first play for Dream, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and he and a troupe of actors perform it for Morpheus and patrons from Faerie that appear in the play; and in the series’ finale, “The Tempest” (Issue #75, Volume 10), Shakespeare completes the contract with Dream by finishing his final play, *The Tempest*. In *Sandman*’s Shakespeare, though, what becomes important is not only how Gaiman reimagines Shakespeare’s plays to indicate a range of creative import and imaginative content but, also, the way Gaiman interprets Shakespeare wielding the dream-power of fairy tales. In short, Gaiman mythologizes Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* as enchanted or energized by d/Dream; the logic of the narrative elevates the play as a creative force that contains the power of d/Dream—the power of art. In *Sandman*, Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* fulfills some psychical, imaginative need of humankind, and what matters is that this ways of thinking about *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* corresponds with “the heart” of The Dreaming, with Chesterton.

In Gaiman's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," we as readers first see Shakespeare meet with Dream while traveling through the downs of Sussex with Lord Strange's Men (*Dream Country* 55). Morpheus asks, "You have come, then, Will Shekespear [*sic*]. It is all ready?" Shakespeare replies, "I wrote it as you told me, lord. It is the best that I have written, to this date" (55). Sarah Annes Brown notes how Gaiman's interests in the "relationship between the 'real' world and the worlds created in dream or fiction" are clear "in his imaginative responses to Shakespeare" (165). For our purposes, in Gaiman's representation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, his interests are the relationships between fantasy literature and human activity. During the performance of the play, Morpheus reveals to Titania and Oberon that he channeled the play through Shakespeare with the goal to sustain the memory of the *fae* in the human imagination. Morpheus tells Auberon and Titania:

During your stay on this Earth the faeries have afforded me much diversion, and entertainment. Now you have left, for your own haunts. And I would repay you all for the amusement and more: They shall not forget you. That was important to me: that King Auberon and Queen Titania will be remembered by mortals, until this age is gone. (*Dream Country* 74)

Here, Morpheus emphasizes the importance to sustain the *fae* in human memory, and this emphasis functions in at least two narrative ways: First, Gaiman represents Shakespeare as empowered and guided by Dream to preserve the memory of Faerie. The logic follows that there is a universal artistic power connected to the image of the *fae*, the importance of which is only sustained in dreams—in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. For Dream, "the faerie have afforded [him] much diversion and entertainment," and for humankind, A

Midsummer Night's Dream contains the gift of “shadow-truths that will endure when mere facts are dust and ashes, and forgot” (74). This belief in the truths and knowledge that fairy tales and dreams contain is an inherited model that we can trace from Gaiman to Chesterton’s ideas about Shakespeare and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Chesterton writes, “*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a psychological study, not of a solitary man, but of a spirit that unites mankind....The sentiment of such a play, so far as it can be summed up at all, can be summed up in one sentence. It is the mysticism of happiness” (*Soul of Wit* 131, 133).

Secondly, Gaiman’s self-reflexive mode of narration suggests that he theorizes Faerie’s importance in the minds of the world’s dreamers *while he is writing fantasy literature* filled with artistic images and symbols of the *fae*, gods and goddesses, and many other creatures from myth, fairy tales, and folklore that contain the power of dreams. When coupled with the emphasis on the *fae*’s importance to humankind, Gaiman’s two levels of narration reflexively connect his story to an imaginative tradition based on faith in the power of fantasy—in the power to populate the human mind with forms of beauty and wonder. This faith in the power of fantasy literature emerges with Chesterton and other fantasy writers of the early-twentieth century whom Gaiman describes as “building” him as a fantasy writer. Structuring Fiddler’s Green into the heart and center of *The Dreaming* suggests that Gaiman inherits this belief system from Chesterton: It is a way for Gaiman to identify and define his own ways of thinking about writing fantasy—as bearing the potential of benefitting humankind’s state of being—and he uses the figure of Dream to construct an imagined relationship with the powers that Shakespeare once wielded. By representing the creative purpose of Shakespeare writing

A Midsummer Night's Dream, Gaiman connects with the creative purpose in “A Midsummer Night's Dream”; he seeks to preserve something that the *fae* offer, to celebrate, pay tribute, and construct his own participation in an ideal of authorship, in an ideal of fantasy writing. We can begin tracing Gaiman's way of thinking about fantasy in *Sandman* to Chesterton, and further, it can be traced through literary history and identified with the Romantics' faith in the sacred role of art.

By exploring Gaiman and Chesterton, comparatively, it helps us better understand that *Sandman's* literary history is not limited to postmodern narrative practices, that there is much more to explore in the narrative to understand, properly, the literary history of its designs and ideas about imaginative literature. A key to unlocking Gaiman's production of meaning in *Sandman* rests in making the case for a hermeneutics of the narrative in relation to the literary presence of Chesterton at the core of the *Sandman* mythology. Within this framework, we can better understand that Gaiman's narrative practice is not limited to postmodern notions of metafiction and hybridity, but that he uses Fiddler's Green to establish intimacy with Chesterton and celebrate the literary tradition of which Chesterton is a part. Moreover, the value system that Gaiman uses to reinterpret literary history intersects with Chestertonian ideals of imaginative creativity—ideals defined by the potential of fantasy literature to restore meaning to human life by renewing humankind's sense of wonder. The mythology of *Sandman*, in this vein, creates an aesthetic experience that intends to facilitate readers' return to better ways of perceiving the world and seeing meaning within it.

Hermeneutics suggests that Gaiman uses myth to establish his story's relationship with Chesterton and Shakespeare to celebrate his participation in a particular ideal of

authorship. However, there are other artists who transform literary history into myths in comics, and hermeneutics bears different consequences on them. In *Promethea*, for example, Moore and Williams construct imaginative creativity as a promethean force capable of awakening the imagination from inertia. In *The Unwritten*, Carey and Gross construct imaginative storytelling as an organic system connected to humankind's integrity and liberty. These ideas of imaginative creativity—its capabilities to *awaken* the imagination or to *liberate* it—are similar in their historical scope yet quite different from Gaiman's ways of thinking about dreams (or stories) *sustaining* the human imagination. These differences in Romantic faith are inevitable outcomes from the fact that myths do not remain static and fixed, nor can artists' perspectives of the imagination and creativity be stereotyped into any one particular artistic model or symbolic system. Each artist constructs a myth in which a persona of imagination—Morpheus, Promethea, and Leviathan—plays out a certain action and function. In the following chapters, I explore the diversity of Romantic literary history in *Promethea* and *The Unwritten*.

CHAPTER TWO

“IMAGINATION’S BLAZE IN MANKIND’S DARK”:

PROMETHEA, THE HERMETIC IMAGINATION, AND MODERN ENCHANTMENT

The emphasis in the current chapter, Chapter 2, is on Alan Moore and J. H. Williams III’s *Promethea*, but before turning to this series, it is necessary to recollect critical structures from my Introduction and Chapter 1 to better understand Moore and Williams’s creative processes and the narrative’s literary-historical similarities and differences with *Sandman* and *The Unwritten*. In the Introduction, I begin this project by challenging prevailing criticism in comics studies that positions nonfiction comics as the “strongest” genre in the field (Chute 452). I argue that if we avoid constructing generic boundaries, we can open lines of inquiry that explore aesthetic interstices between nonfiction comics and mainstream fiction as well as intersections between mainstream comics and literary history. In the Introduction, I consider aesthetic interstices between historical models in early nineteenth-century Romantic literature and historical representation in comics titles that are published under DC Comics’s Vertigo moniker: Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman*, Mike Carey and Peter Gross’s *The Unwritten*, and Moore and Williams’s *Promethea*.

Sandman, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea* intersect with nineteenth-century Romantic myth-making in the ways that the artists transform literary history into mythologies. In these reimaginings, Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams construct mythical figures—Morpheus, Leviathan, and Promethea—that convey ideas about artistic creativity as a force driving human history and experience, and the artists use these figures as vehicles to connect their creativity with different forms of the

authorial imagination. Each narrative draws attention to larger imaginative traditions and creative responsibilities on two levels of narration: On one narrative level, the literary history for which Morpheus, Leviathan, and Promethea are responsible becomes contingent with human history, and the artists not only dramatize artistic efficacy throughout human history but, also, establish narrative connections with preexisting literary texts. On another, self-reflexive level, the artists' narrative connections establish their personal connections with forms of the creative imagination that appear within their stories. In this vein, my Introduction suggests that it is necessary to understand the forms of imagination that Morpheus, Leviathan, and Promethea represent in order to better understand the forms of the authorial imagination that energize Gaiman's, Carey and Gross's, and Moore and Williams's creative processes. In this framework, the artists' mythologies become personal mythologies, and not only do their narrative activities intersect with Romantic creativity and value systems for reading history but, also, their ways of thinking about literary history and their relation to it. This approach suggests that comics are connected to larger, historically-distinct literary projects that are seldom explored in comics studies, and the importance in understanding comics' connections with larger literary discourses rests in the ways that we can draw from literary-critical histories to better understand a greater spectrum of formal aesthetics at play in comics narratives that reveal verifiable conditions energizing comics creativity.⁷

For Isaiah Berlin, Romantic myths are personal vehicles for artists to convey personal understandings of the roles of artists throughout human history. He argues that Romantic myths became energized by ideas of constructing new artistic images and

symbols that would serve modern culture in ways similar to how the images of Zeus and Apollo served the Greeks or how Odin and Thor served Germanic peoples:

[The] Greek images are dead for us, for we are not Greeks. That much [Johann Gottfried] Herder had taught them. The notion of returning to Dionysus or Odin is absurd. Therefore we must have modern myths, and since there are no modern myths, because science has killed them, or at any rate has made the atmosphere unpropitious to them, we must create them. As a result there is a conscious process of myth-making; we find, in the early nineteenth century, a conscientious and painful effort to construct myths – or perhaps not so painful, perhaps some of it could be described as spontaneous – which will serve us in the way in which the old myths served the Greeks. (122)

This frame of knowledge suggests at least two important conditions of the nineteenth-century imaginative poesis: Many Romantic authors understood myths as conveying powerful ideas through artistic images and symbols, and these authors promoted ideas about how modern culture needed new myths that would set and sustain guidance for human understandings of reality. It is within these myths that the image of the artist ascends in the popular imagination as a figure committed to such creative, heroic responsibilities.

An alternative to Berlin's ideas about how myth-making is "painful" or "spontaneous" is to read the ways that artists express commitments to assume creative responsibilities to modernize literature, energize the human imagination, and regenerate humankind's relationship with the sacred world through myth-making. Despite a limited framework, Berlin's ideas about Romantic models are useful to read *Sandman, The*

Unwritten, and *Promethea*'s intersections with Romanticism in the ways that he suggests that these models have had lasting effects on succeeding generations' modes of myth-making and ways of thinking about the role of artists. In this frame of knowledge, this project argues that Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams intersect with these models in different ways: Gaiman creates a mythology in which artists *sustain* the integrity of human consciousness; Carey and Gross construct a myth about artists' responsibilities to *develop* the imagination and elevate human integrity; and Moore and Williams construct a mythology in which artists assume responsibilities to *awaken* humankind to existences and truths beyond the material world through imaginative revelation. These differences in the imagination's forms do not so much pose problems as much as they intersect with the differences in Romantic mythologies.

It is important to keep in mind that Romantic myths are as diverse as they are consensual, but many authors had one thing in common: They "gave literature and the arts a prominent...place in their metaphysical systems" (Abrams 192-3). M. H. Abrams suggests that Romantic authors use myths to represent ideas about their role in humankind's movement towards "an unknown or inexpressible *something*," whether it be a darker vision, such as an apocalypse, or a recovery of some mythical past (193 my emphasis). Berlin clarifies how Romantic uses of myth conveyed these ways of thinking:

When [the Romantics] asked themselves how...one could begin to understand reality, in some sense of the word 'understand,' how one might obtain some kind of insight into it...the only way of doing this was by means of myths, by means of those symbols which I have touched on, because myths embody within themselves something inarticulate, and also manage to encapsulate the dark, the

irrational, the inexpressible, that which conveys the deep darkness of this whole [historical] process, in images which themselves carry you to further images and which themselves point in some infinite direction. (121)

In this model, myths serve as vehicles for making life, the mysteries of the universe, and the artist's place within it intelligible. If we comparatively read this creative model with Gaiman's *Sandman*, Carey and Gross's *The Unwritten*, and Moore and Williams's *Promethea*, it suggests that the artists intersect with Romantic myth-making in two competing ways: They use the comics medium to transform the authorial imagination into mythology, and they construct mythical figures as artists gifting dreams, imagination, and mystical energies to humankind through imaginative literature: Morpheus, Leviathan, and Promethea become personal archetypes of the artists; they serve Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams as mythical vehicles to reimagine the literary past and establish personal relationships with it.

Hermeneutics of comics in relation to Romantic myth-making bears different consequences on Moore and Williams's *Promethea* than what we saw with Gaiman's *Sandman* in Chapter 1. Moore and Williams maintain an essential Romantic faith, as described by Buckler, in ideas about imaginative literature's abilities to develop modes of "apprehension that [yield] 'the sensuous incarnation' of 'ethereal and transcendent truths'" of which Wordsworth speaks (Buckler 38). They also maintain the Romantic image of the heroic artist, in which the hermeneutic distance between the mythical hero and the artists becomes blurred, and the hero takes on a historical function. *Promethea*'s differences from *Sandman* and, as will be seen, *The Unwritten* rest in the ways that Moore and Williams connect their creativity to a different form of the imagination

altogether: Rather than the literary imagination, it is grounded in a hermetic value system of thinking about the imagination and creativity—a system defined by Kabbalist ideas about the *sefirot*, the divine emanations of God or, rather, what we call “God.” To establish a frame of knowledge to read this dynamic and its literary history in Romanticism, it is important to examine narrative details of the series for better understandings of Moore and Williams’s creative process and ways of thinking about the authorial imagination.

Promethea first appeared in August 1999 as a monthly serialized publication, which was then republished as a five-volume set of graphic novels. The series follows a young woman named Sophie Bangs, who discovers the ability to assume the persona of the mythical heroine Promethea while researching the figure for a college term paper. In the story, Promethea is the spirit of a little girl who “wanders into the imaginations” of artists who have “enough enthusiasm for the character” (*Book 1 24*), and throughout literary history, these artists create stories that become extensions of her power and purpose to elevate human integrity through the “magical” powers of story (*Book 1 24*). Once their time on earth is finished, they take up residence in The Immaterial, a space/place from which all imaginative creativity emanates. Moreover, Moore and Williams subsume *Promethea*’s ideas about magic and imagination within a personal version of a Kabbalist system of knowledge of which they become a part; the character Promethea becomes a mythical vehicle through which they explore the Tree of Life, Tarot, and (among others) Astrology. In the story, these frames of knowledge highlight history as contingent with magical powers of artistic creativity, and the world needs Promethea to reenergize the human imagination and regenerate humankind’s relationship

with sacred worlds beyond material reality. A more formal interpretation of narrative, or hermeneutic, suggests that understanding the heroic character of *Promethea* and the series's narrative system can help us better understand Moore and Williams's aesthetics, their literary-historical intersections with Romanticism, and their personal ideas about imaginative creativity.

Criticism of *Promethea* has already addressed Moore's debt to Romanticism generally and William Blake specifically. The few sustained readings focus on *Promethea*'s structural intersections with Blake via the use of image and text (Green 175), the character *Promethea*'s intersections with the Romantic hero Prometheus, and the narrative's intersections with "dark" Romantic visions of apocalypse (McGillis 200). The critical narrative, though, only contains a few scattered comments on the ways that Moore and Williams draw upon ideas from the hermetic imagination, and current scholarship is all but oblivious to this form of the imagination in its literary-historical contexts (McGillis 206; Wolk 245). If we explore Moore and Williams's system in relation to literary history, it suggests that we can better understand Moore and Williams's connections to creative projects of which the hermetic imagination is a part: namely, the early twentieth-century project to "reenchant the world." The hermetic imagination, however, intends a distinct and distinctly different form of enchantment than what we saw in the Chestertonian imagination in *Sandman*. Moore and Williams's differences from Gaiman do not cause problems for my hermeneutic framework as much as they provide opportunities to better understand two equally important aspects: the greater literary history of myth-making in comics and the endurance of early twentieth-century literary practices within the medium. Not only do their differences in imaginative

principles suggest that there are many opportunities to explore a greater literary history of comics but, also, to better understand from where the hermetic imagination comes, what historical conditions energized it, and its lasting effects on contemporary creativity.

The few scattered comments about *Promethea*'s narrative connections to the hermetic imagination emerge from discussions about Moore and Williams's ambitions to elevate the medium by invoking a Romantic ethos and moving the narrative from the formal domains of the superhero genre and into a space of Kabbalist "magic." In this imaginative space/place, magic is synonymous with imagination and creativity. Tracee Howell, for example, describes *Promethea* as a "slippery hero-narrative in disguise...[and] a tribute to magic in literary romanticism" (384). Roderick McGillis concurs, writing,

[Promethea] appears at first glance to be a version of Wonder Woman; however, this Amazon is quite unlike Promethea. Promethea is not one but several women who take their place in various times. The implication is that Promethea is not an individual, but rather she is a function, or better yet, a state of mind....Douglas Wolk notes that the latest incarnation of Promethea, Sophie Bangs, can invoke the physical presence of the mythical heroine "by acts of imagination and creativity." "Imagination and creativity" invoke Romanticism in all its anti-Enlightenment glory. (205)

Here, McGillis takes Wolk one step further by addressing the ways that Moore and Williams initially lead readers to believe that they are going to experience a superhero narrative but, then, move the story into something else.

McGillis's and Howell's perspectives on *Promethea* initially leading readers to believe that the series is a superhero narrative emerge from the ways Moore and Williams encourage readers to follow and understand their efforts to establish the story's connections with the genre's conventions. Alex Romagnoli and Gian Pagnucci write about the meanings attached to superhero images: "Superhero literature is one of symbolism where the emotions, values, and desires of the characters are usually embodied in a highly visual way. Captain America is the All-American superhero, so he wears a stylized American flag as his suit. This is blatant, but it is also effective for a medium, comics, that relies on the visuals to communicate" (96). In *Promethea*, this formal domain is established, blatantly, for readers before they even open the book, on the cover of the first issue. When readers pick up *Promethea* #1, titled "The Radiant, Heavenly City," they see an image of Promethea, and the visual cues of the comic center attention on her. Promethea stands in a ray of white light, dressed in a golden breastplate, winged headband, and tassets that are decorated with an Egyptian ankh. She is armed with a Caduceus and wears a white cape bordered with the Grecian Key pattern. She gazes upward, drawing attention to her name, written in gold: PROMETHEA. Two images of gods, the Egyptian god Thoth and the Greek god Hermes, look upon her from both sides. Her image separates two frames: One frame depicts a little girl on a desert dune, and the other depicts a modern teenage girl cowering from a shadow creature, called a "Smee." Attentive readers will recognize that this cover is textbook superhero iconography: Right from the get-go, before opening the book, Moore and Williams deliberately locate readers within a formal domain with certain expectations. However, as McGillis smartly suggests, Moore and Williams extend the superhero genre's formal

domains into a space of imagination and creativity: *The Immateria*. McGillis examines *Promethea* with “Blake as ground zero” for his analysis of Moore’s larger body of work (201), and he passingly mentions that the series “rests on the foundations of what [Moore] might call ‘magic,’ the latter-day Romanticism of the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley” (206). Here, critical opportunities arise: Howell’s and McGillis’s perspectives on *Promethea*’s connections to the superhero genre, Romanticism, and the Golden Dawn’s ideas about magic create space to expand the discourse on *Promethea* specifically and comics studies generally by exploring the hermetic imagination and its place within larger creative projects of modernity.

In relation to the Golden Dawn, Moore and Williams’s myth-making becomes an extension of early twentieth-century efforts to revive Romanticism’s ways of thinking about the role of artists to elevate humankind’s state of being throughout history. Moore’s comments about *Promethea* recall this endeavor in an interview with Susanna Clarke:

Promethea raised some interesting ideas, particularly about current American culture, which seems to be about restricting ideas and the number of things that people can actually think about, in an almost Orwellian way. So we were saying, look, you don’t have to be an atheist or a born-again Christian or a Muslim or in any other isolated and absolute position, but there is this huge palette of human possibilities that you can explore. It’s probably a more constructive way to use your mind. It gives you a greater reverence for almost every aspect of existence. It’s very similar to the Romantic position. William Blake was a Romantic, he was also an occultist and a visionary. It’s all the same territory.

Here, Moore's commentary not only captures his personal faith in the transformational power of imaginative creativity; he also describes an iconoclastic approach to myth-making that recalls Blake's position, in *Jerusalem*, about the will to "Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's. / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create" (460). In this frame of knowledge, Moore and Williams intend to offer an alternative system of knowledge about the world in *Promethea*—one that seeks to cultivate a "greater reverence for almost every aspect of existence." The Promethea myth becomes their personal archetype of artists and their belief in art's abilities to facilitate humankind's "greater reverence" of the world: Moore and Williams use the character not only as a vehicle to explore the Kabbalist Tree of Life but, also, to construct a new artistic image that will serve modern culture in the ways that superheroes served prior generations.

The character Promethea intersects with the Romantic hero in the sense that they preserve an older heroic construct and develop it into something that "evolves out of the spirit of the age" (Reed 31). Moore and Williams preserve the heroic identity of superheroes and evolve it in much the same way that Romantic authors preserve the heroic identities of classical heroes and evolve them. In this framework, Blake's and, by extension, the Golden Dawn's influences on *Promethea*'s narrative are important to better understand Moore and Williams's creative purposes to extend new conventions to superhero fiction and exercise readers' imaginations. Both their form of imagination and creative purposes can be traced through literary history to the larger literary project to reenchanted a disenchanted modernity. Before we can make such a methodological step,

though, we meet two difficulties in tracing *Promethea*'s aesthetics to early twentieth-century activities of the Golden Dawn.

First, prevailing criticism reads *Promethea*'s journey through Tarot and the Kabbalist system as a rebellion against the superhero genre and its (alleged) aesthetic limitations. Such criticism reads *Promethea* in terms of her namesake, the titan Prometheus. McGillis follows this line of inquiry and identifies the intersections between *Promethea* and Percy Shelley's Prometheus, from *Prometheus Unbound*:

Romanticism took an intense interest in Prometheus, the messianic hero who helps humans despite Zeus's strictures against Prometheus's philanthropic endeavors. Prometheus is one manifestation of the Romantic hero: strong, self-sacrificing, self-conscious, and fiercely independent.... We see him as representative of victorious humanity in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. In this great visionary work, Prometheus is the human form divine. What Moore and his collaborators, J. H. Williams III and Mick Gray, perform is a masterstroke of updating, making Prometheus female and undifferentiated. (204, 205)

Here, McGillis comparatively reads the character *Promethea* with Shelley's archetype for the rebellious artist, and this reading recalls Geoffrey Hartman's description of the titan Prometheus: "To create a truly iconoclastic art, a structure-breaking art, to change the function of form from reconciliation and conservation to rebellion, and so to participate in the enormity of present experience—this is the one Promethean aim still fiery enough to inspire. It is the psychic state of art today" (364). McGillis extends this state of mind to Moore and reads *Promethea* as the artist's rebellion against superhero narratives. This understanding is logical: From his early 1980s debut in mainstream comics—with titles

such as *Miracleman*, *V for Vendetta*, and *Saga of the Swamp Thing*—Moore and his creative teams have been notorious for creating stories that consciously deconstruct narrative conventions and carry artistic ambitions to rebel against established aesthetics of superhero fiction to show the greater potential of the medium. The critical consensus is to read Moore’s *œuvre* as a rebellion.

A more productive line of inquiry, however, is to explore the intersections between Moore and Williams’s ways of thinking about Kabbalah, magic, and storytelling with the hermetic imagination. Michael Saler, for instance, explains how the Golden Dawn emerged alongside various artistic responses to the burgeoning “scientific and secular trends of modernity” during the early-twentieth century (10). Charles Coulombe argues that this form of the imagination becomes “commonplace throughout fantasy literature. Exiled from mainstream Christian theology, academic philosophy, and the sciences, it has nevertheless subsisted, and even thrived” (354). Saler’s and Coulombe’s frames of knowledge suggest that contemporary artists become extensions of literary projects that can be traced from our contemporary moment and to the early-twentieth century. I take these ideas one step further by discussing the ways that the hermetic imagination emerges within the project of reenchancement and endures up through the twentieth century and into Moore and Williams’s comics creativity: There is certainly room to explore the ways that Moore and Williams’s *Promethea* is an extension of this larger, historically-distinctive discourse, and comics’ relation to this discourse of enchantment remains relatively unexplored in current scholarship. Not coincidentally, it is also here where we meet the second difficulty in grounding *Promethea* in prior literary

traditions: The critical consensus is based on ideas about Moore and Williams's conscious resistance to literary-historical inquiries.

Chapters 1 and 3 provide frameworks for reading Gaiman's and Carey and Gross's modes of historical representation: The artists invent personal mythical figures, use them as vehicles to reimagine historically-based moments of literary composition, and establish relationships with historically-based literary traditions. *Promethea's* differences rest in the ways that the artists deliberately detach the narrative from literary history by fabricating a literary tradition. For example, in *Sandman*, Gaiman uses Morpheus as a vehicle to reimagine William Shakespeare's literary career, and in *The Unwritten*, Carey and Gross use the mythical figure of Leviathan to reimagine the history of storytelling, from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* up through J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and their Inklings circle. Gaiman and Carey and Gross concretely connect with a historically-based literary history. The difficulty with *Promethea* is that Moore and Williams's myth-making is similar to Gaiman's *Sandman* and Carey and Gross's *The Unwritten* in the sense that the artists invent a self-reflexive, mythical archetype of artists. However, *Promethea's* differences rest in the ways that Moore and Williams construct a literary genealogy for the mythical heroine that has no roots in actual literary history, and in the critical discourse, this narrative activity allegedly prevents us from grounding the story in the work of prior artists.

For example, Moore's preface to *Book 1*, titled "The Promethea Puzzle: An Adventure in Folklore,"⁸ details what appears to be a scholarly account of Promethea's literary history. This preface is an example of fabrication, of forgery, a hoax: Moore invents a fictitious imaginative tradition and passes it as historically-based. It begins by

recollecting Promethea's first alleged appearance in a late eighteenth-century fairy tale by Charlton Sennet: "[S]ome fifty lines into his epic sentimental fantasy *A Faerie Romance*, New England poet Charlton Sennet (1751-1803) makes his first mention of a character [Promethea] who has since then evolved into a fascinating literary mystery in her own right" (*Book I iv*). Moore continues to trace the character's literary history up through various imaginative traditions, including newspaper comic strips, pulp fiction, and comic books, until the trail disappears. He ends the preface and signs his name:

So today, Promethea is in limbo – or perhaps Misty Magic Land – with her adventures no longer before the public. Given the popularity of simplistic post-modern characters such as the inexplicably celebrated Weeping Gorilla, perhaps it's simply that times have moved on, and that there is no longer a place for the romantic fantasy and play of the imagination that Promethea represents. We can only hope that she is merely resting in some corner of the Realm of Faerie, or of Hy Brasil, and that in the future, she'll turn up in a new guise, some fresh twist to her puzzling history, a genuine piece of American folklore in action, of poetry in motion. – Alan Moore. (*Book I v*)

At least two aspects are at play, here, in this "literary history." First, what seems to be a scholarly account of Promethea and her impact on literary creativity is, in fact, part of the fiction: The character's literary history does not exist in the real world, the reader's world. The texts in which she appears and the artists who created stories about her are no more real than the fictional characters in the story itself: The preface is a false document, so the general consensus in scholarship suggests that *Promethea* resists literary-historical

approaches that comparatively explore influence, response, intertextuality, adaptation, appropriation—call it what you will.

Second, Moore's closing remarks interpret the current state of imaginative creativity, and the logic of these remarks is rooted in a nostalgia for humankind's loss of meaning(s) carried by playful imaginative characters. Conversely, throughout the series's five volumes, Moore and Williams plaster images of a character called the Weeping Gorilla on billboards throughout cities, on characters' tee shirts, and (among other media) comic books. Moore and Williams encourage readers to read this character both as a symbol of humankind's state of mind and as a sharp contrast to the ideas that *Promethea* carries. In its first appearance in *Promethea*, for example, a thought balloon reads, “*Choke* Modern life makes me feel so alone!” and a character, Stacia, defends the “genius” of a “pointless” text (*Book 1 7*). Through Stacia and the *Weeping Gorilla* comic's popularity, Moore and Williams encourage readers to understand the larger cultural state of mind in the comic, and we as readers are consistently encouraged to understand this state of mind's relationship with our world. Moreover, Moore and Williams subsume the narrative within Kabbalist frames of knowledge, and this dynamic encourages readers to become aware of the need for a figure to awaken the human imagination from a state of melancholy and meaninglessness—the need for *Promethea*, who embodies meaning, illumination, imaginative activity, and joy. *Promethea* is the patron spirit of The Imateria, a space/place from which all imaginative creativity emanates; she represents the force that playful imaginative storytelling carries. As framed in Moore's preface, the ascendance of the Weeping Gorilla and *Promethea*'s absence in the popular imagination suggest that humankind has lost some dynamic of an imaginative

vitality that connects humankind to higher states of mind. In the story, only the “magical” image of *Promethea*—the living embodiment of imagination—can restore what humankind has lost; only an artist can reenergize the human imagination.

The difficulty in pursuing a hermeneutics of *Promethea*’s literary history rests in how prevailing criticism situates the series’s preface as a typical Moorean activity that challenges artistic and scholarly communities through narrative deconstruction and misdirection. Howell reads the preface as Moore’s “vital critique” of postmodernism’s influences on humankind’s state of being, academic culture, and artistic creativity:

While one certainly expects story at the start of *Promethea*, it may indeed take readers some time and/or research (it did me) to realize that Moore’s author’s preface, this ‘history’ is itself also fiction....

[It] reads like academic prose, like a professorial account that both provides a helpful overview of *Promethea*’s impact on literary culture and bemoans the loss of this mythic figure in current fiction....In placing himself there, as a character mourning the loss of real meaning amongst postmodern literary culture, Moore at once satirizes the postmodern and destabilizes the same universalist meaning that twentieth-century postmodern approaches to textual study sought to challenge.

(385, 386)

Here, Howell explains that Moore uses the preface in at least three ways: They use it to misdirect, deliberately, their readers from common reading strategies, such as comparative studies with source-texts, and they use it to critique, simultaneously, postmodern ideas about the impossibility of shared meaning as well as prior ways of thinking about the possibility of shared meaning. It is in this way, she argues, that Moore

and Williams control the ways that readers experience the text, perceive meaning in human existence, and ascribe new meaning to reality through the “magical” powers of imagination.

Howell concludes that *Promethea* is a form of “textual anarchy” (383) that deliberately challenges literary-critical “analytical tools, our steely knives of cold logic, our sure foundations of genre and disciplinary fields, our technical terminologies” (382). In this frame of knowledge, Moore places academics “at our own crossroads...right from the get-go” (386). She continues to elaborate how *Promethea* is a “monstrous” text that “in [Jeffrey Jerome] Cohen’s words ‘quite literally incorporates [our] fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy’” (387). The logic is that academic readers experience fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy from the ways in which the text resists the kinds of critical reading strategies that typically lead to better understandings of texts. She concludes that *Promethea* encourages us to “abandon all boundaries, to dissolve categorization and read with *différance*” (393). In other words, the text encourages us to submit to the proliferation of meaning, to the impossibility of shared meaning, and to Moore and Williams’s “monster” (*Promethea*) that “resists any one critical approach or univocalist reading” (384).

An alternative to Howell’s favor of the ideas of the “monstrous” and *différance* is to examine the ways that the effect of citing and translating the *Promethea* mythology, within the text itself, energizes the proliferation and growth of meaning for readers. Instead of *différance*, Jacques Derrida’s ideas about myth and translation help us read *Promethea* without the fear and anxiety of the monstrous. In this vein, Moore and Williams grow the *Promethea* myth’s meaning by translating it into different genres, time

periods, and artistic mediums within the story. In doing so, Moore and Williams simultaneously create an imaginative freedom from which they can draw certain aesthetics and create a greater, shared meaning of the world defined by ideas about imaginative creativity's redeeming characteristics. If there is one idea around which the narrative revolves, it is that our world is an imagined construct, and it is in need of the heroic creativity that Promethea represents: "The world is our systems, our politics, our economies...our *ideas* of the world....Promethea is imagination...War, all war and conflict, is naught but the failure of imagination" (*Book I* 129). Instead of the deferral of meaning, we have the proliferation of shared meaning.

The keys to better understanding Moore and Williams's motives to create such a scope of the world and the imagination's place within it rests in the activities of growing the Promethea myth and moving the story into a realm of the sacred—into the formal domain of the hermetic imagination. As Derrida writes, "The sacred text assigns the task to the translator, and it is sacred *inasmuch as* it announces itself as transferable, simply transferable, to-be-translated" (132 Derrida's emphasis). Here, Derrida explains the ways that a myth offers itself to translation for a "holy growth" of its language and meaning (131). This framework suggests that Moore and Williams's mythical figure Promethea becomes, on one hand, a source of translation and, on the other hand, the reader's translation of the *Promethea* myth. To borrow Derrida's words, Moore's preface to *Promethea* "surrenders [the text] to translation, which devotes itself to the sacred" (133). In this frame of knowledge, the series surrenders itself to translation to generate the meaning that the character Promethea embodies, and Moore and Williams devote the myth to the hermetic imagination.

Hermeneutics of *Promethea* in relation to literary history suggests that the series demands a readerly and critical engagement with the hermetic imagination, and this chapter demonstrates that the series can be better understood by reading its intersections with early twentieth-century literary practices that energized ways of thinking about art as a form of magical incantation. Howell suggests that Moore and Williams move the story from the domain of superhero fiction and into something else that cannot be traced: into “the stuff of human imagination and creativity itself” (384). Derrida’s framework for reading myth provides an alternative means to read and better understand Moore and Williams’s narrative movement into a domain that extends the superhero genre and into a domain where imagination and creativity are sacred. This reading opens lines of inquiry to trace Moore and Williams’s ways of thinking about imagination and creativity to the early twentieth-century literary project of which the *Golden Dawn* was a part: the reenchancement of the world. If we think about *Promethea* as an extension of this project, it suggests that the narrative does not resist a literary-historical engagement: We can, in fact, trace Moore and Williams’s ways of thinking about creativity through literary history to the hermetic form of imagination and beyond—to Romanticism. The importance in understanding this literary history rests not only in how it provides a means to ground Moore and Williams’s ideas in prior literary movements nor in how it suggests a greater literary history of comics; it, also, provides insight into the conditions energizing Moore and Williams’s creativity.

Prevailing criticism of Moore and Williams’s *Promethea* is cursory in its treatment of the text in relation to larger, ongoing creative projects of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We can better understand the hermetic, “magical” world-view of

Promethea and its place in the project to reenchant the world by slow, patient historical method. To do so, we must first cover details about the hermetic imagination's literary history and the historical conditions from which it emerged. Michael Saler's ideas about contemporary fantasy literature are a good starting point, because they create opportunities to better understand Moore and Williams's creative processes and purposes. His main discussion is driven by the idea that contemporary fantasy writers engage in forms of creativity that were first energized by the "'big bang' of imaginary worlds [that] flared into existence" at the end of the nineteenth century and into the early-twentieth century (20). It is during this time, he explains, that burgeoning scientific fields and perspectives of the natural world, such as evolutionary biology, chemistry, and psychoanalysis, began to take a large hold on culture and the modern subject's ways of thinking about the world and one's place within it. Joshua Landy describes this shift in Western culture:

At one time we considered rainbows mysterious phenomena, divine perhaps in origin (Iris's scarf, God's covenant), but then science came along and taught us about prismatic refraction. We used to believe that the cosmos had—as its etymology suggests—an intrinsic, humanly apprehensible order, with the earth firmly set at its center; after Copernicus, we thought differently. And though we fondly imagined for a while that we were placed on earth for a purpose, we now know that our evolution involved a considerable degree of contingency, and might just as well not have happened at all. (102)

Landy and Saler argue that it was in the early-twentieth century when empirical sciences and reason demystified, secularized, disillusioned—in a word, "disenchanted"—much of

the Western world's sense of mystery and wonder. A new sense of Enlightenment began to occupy corners of the West and in the human mind where once religion and myth dwelled: "[Science] has removed the persuasion that there is something beyond what is offered by the evidence of our senses; it has uprooted the conviction that things are what they are, and where they are, for a reason; it has eradicated mystery, order, and purpose—and in their place, it has put nothing at all" (103).

Saler and Landy's ideas about "disenchantment" describe a collective state of mind that has a "God-shaped void" (Landy and Saler 2), which allegedly directly results from the "disappearance of stable and shared meanings that allegedly distinguished the premodern, enchanted world" (Saler 19). Saler, however, argues that where religion and myth once dwelled in the human mind, artists sought to compensate for this void: "The modern West has been called 'disenchanted,' but that is a half-truth. It can be equally deemed an enchanted place, in which imaginary worlds and fictional characters have replaced the sacred groves and tutelary deities of the premodern world" (3). Here, Saler begins to explain that early twentieth-century fantasy writers became part of a larger reactionary discourse to modernity's alleged disenchantment, and we find that such artists committed to ideals of compensating for humankind's disenchantment through imaginary world-building. This framework suggests that secular artistic images and symbols began to populate the human imagination and become just as "integral to lived experience" as mythical and religious figures (4). Imaginary worlds, such as Tolkien's Middle-earth, Lewis's Narnia, and (among others) H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos, reconciled empirical science and imagination, and Saler argues that these worlds invited readers to accompany fictional characters, often highly idyllic, throughout their journeys. Saler

argues that artists intended readerly experiences to become imaginative exercises that facilitate intellectual transfers from readers' understandings of fictional worlds to their understandings of the real world.

Within Saler's framework, imaginary worlds of the popular literary marketplace became tools of communication, sociability, and reenchantment. The logic follows how imaginary worlds facilitated readers' experiences to participate in "sites for the collective discussion of fictions and their relations with the real....[D]iscussions about imaginary worlds often segued into discussions about the real world. Public spheres of the imagination provided playful spaces in which controversial views about society were debated critically yet with mutual respect" (18-19). More important to this framework is the idea that these spheres of imagination promote understandings of the real world as an imaginary construct and challenge

normative interpretations of reality....Imaginary worlds could help their visitors realize that something as seemingly natural as the nation, for example, was in important respects an 'imagined community' brought to life through many of the same social mechanisms used to maintain the virtual existence of Middle-earth or the Starfleet Federation. (19)

Within these communities, individuals often question the validity of sociocultural and sociohistorical constructs within imaginary worlds, and the logic is that these inquiries encourage one to question the real world and their own identity as a construct and to pursue greater understandings of them: By imaginatively inhabiting fictional worlds, readers become "reenchanted" to the mystery and wonder of the real world and one's place within it. The relevance of Saler's framework to *Promethea* is in how the sense of

artistic responsibility to facilitate such imaginative exercises and to reenchanted modernity overpoured into various creative activities, beyond science fiction and fantasy.

Saler's framework is helpful to better understand the creative project to which Moore and Williams's narrative activities in *Promethea* are connected. Along with his discussion of the enchantments of science fiction and fantasy, Saler briefly addresses alternative forms of the imagination and enchantment that emerged during at the turn of the twentieth century. As the popular literary marketplace invited readers to inhabit multiple imaginary worlds, Christian esoteric interests in Kabbalah, Tarot, and (among others) ritual "magic" gained popularity. They became alternative models of enchantment and alternative responses to the "scientific and secular trends" of the early-twentieth century (10):

Turn of the century occult movements, new religions such as Christian Science, and adherents of more secular "mind cure" strategies likewise highlighted the centrality of the imagination and its interior worlds. They maintained that the imagination played a significant role in effecting both spiritual and somatic changes; for some, it even afforded access to existent "Other Worlds" populating the astral plane. (43)

Here, Saler suggests that Western occult movements, such as the Order of the Golden Dawn and (among others) Helena Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, emerged alongside fantasy writers as allies in the project of reenchanted. With as much zeal as fantasy writers, members of these societies pushed against the disenchanted thesis and promoted a world full of meaning, wonder, and power. The logic of the Golden Dawn, for example, follows how such meaning may become intelligible through the "growth of expansion of

consciousness by way of symbolic modalities” (Coulombe 348). In other words, these views promoted how the material world is full of symbols that conceal various levels of meaning and higher planes of reality, and these higher realities could be made intelligible by practicing elaborate symbolic interpretations, also known as “magic.”

The hermetic imagination conveys ideas about the ways that the world is full of meaning, and that words and images contain mystical powers that can make higher realities intelligible and, in turn, elevate human integrity. Such reservoirs of knowledge provided artists an imaginative plenitude from which to draw and construct personal symbolic systems, such as W. B. Yeats’s *A Vision*. Charles Coulombe concludes that the hermetic imagination endured in the work of artists who inherited Yeats, Maude Gonne, Arthur Machen, and Charles Williams: Their world-views, he argues, have now “come to be commonplace throughout fantasy literature” (354). It is well known that these writers, Yeats particularly, also inherited Victorian and Romantic forms of imagination.⁹ I would add that we also see these writers maintain the Romantic image of the artist: In the hermetic world-view, the figure of the magician becomes synonymous with the artist, and it ascends as a figure bearing responsibilities to wield the “magical,” creative powers of the mind and to facilitate humankind’s access to worlds of meaning and wonder. When coupling Saler’s ideas about rechantment and Coulombe’s ideas about the lasting effects of the Golden Dawn, it creates opportunities to better understand what earlier literary projects energize Moore and Williams’s ways of thinking about imaginative creativity that we find in *Promethea*.

Salser’s focus on fantasy literature’s social efficacy and Coulombe’s interests in the endurance of the hermetic imagination in contemporary fantasy literature lend to the

idea that reenchancement is an ongoing project of modernity to which Moore and Williams are connected. We can expand on the discourse of enchantment by going beyond the early-twentieth century to examine an earlier age of disenchantment that energized twentieth-century writers' ideas about art and the image of the artist: the Romantic Age. As we saw in the Introduction and Chapter 1 of this project, William Buckler offers one way to trace the "archetypal Romantic faith" in imaginative creativity from our contemporary moment, back to the Modernists, through the Victorians and, finally, to the Romantics (37). Buckler's ideas about this essential faith and Isaiah Berlin's ideas about Romantic narrative activities create opportunities to explore how Moore and Williams create a mythical system of art in *Promethea* and use the hero as a self-reflexive vehicle to explore their personal ideas about the sacredness of art.

Edmund Wilson offers another way to better understand how this Romantic faith energized the work of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century writers who are connected to larger creative projects. Particularly, he focuses Yeats's creation of a symbolic system in *A Vision*, and this system becomes a model against which we can compare Moore and Williams's narrative activities and their ways of thinking about (and devotion to) "magic." McGillis opens *Promethea*'s discourse to exploring these intersections: He argues that Moore's work "rests on the foundations of what he might call 'magic' ...in the way Yeats's poetry rests on secret or kabbalistic [*sic*] material" (206). Wilson's framework can help construct a hermeneutic that leads to better ways of reading not only Moore and Williams's literary history but, also, how they adopt the hermetic system of the Golden Dawn, demand readers to cooperate and understand their personal vision of the universe, and intend to achieve "ultra-Romantic effects" (12, 18) of

ascribing new levels of meaning and importance to the readers' world. In *Promethea*, this restoration of meaning depends on what is constructed as the sacred powers of story, of imagination: In the hermetic world-view, artists become magicians bearing responsibilities to wield this "magical" power and raise human consciousness.

Before we can read Moore and Williams's personal version of the hermetic imagination, it is important to understand how Romantic faith is part and parcel to its literary history. Wilson begins his discussion of Yeats in relation to a group of artists "who, in certain ways, carried Romanticism further" than the Romantics themselves: the French Symbolists (11). He explains that the rigor of the Romantic age—its poetic declarations and its revolutionary energy—found its way into their work. Wilson's ideas about the emergence of the Symbolists and their influences on late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century writers complement Saler's ideas about the ways writers embraced the imagination and made it compatible with reason, or made compatible "the spiritual with [the] secular" (13). However, where Saler argues that fantasy writers in this period "freed [themselves] from the religious and utilitarian strictures of Coleridge's era" (31), Wilson's explanations are helpful to better understand the movement of Romantic aesthetics and ways of thinking through the Symbolists, to Yeats and other Modernists,¹⁰ and up through our contemporary moment. He writes,

It was the tendency of Symbolism—that second swing of the pendulum away from a mechanistic view of nature and from a social conception of man—to make poetry even more a matter to the sensations and emotions of the individual than had been the case with Romanticism...

Such a language must make use of symbols: what is so special, so fleeting and so vague cannot be conveyed by direct statement or descriptions, but only by succession of words, of images, which will serve to suggest it to the reader. The symbolists themselves, full of the idea of producing with poetry effects like those of music, tended to think of these images as possessing an abstract value like musical notes and chords. But the words of our speech are not musical notation, and what the symbols of Symbolism really were, were metaphors detached from their subjects. (17, 18)

Here, Wilson suggests that the Symbolists' ideas about the acoustic image are rooted in Romantic conceptions of the meanings artistic images and symbols convey and how they impress upon the human mind. Compare to Berlin's explanation of the Romantic doctrine of symbolism:

The first great doctrine [of the Romantics]...is the doctrine of symbolism. Symbolism is central in all romantic thought: that has always been noticed by all critics of the movement....But if you ask, for example, in what sense a national flag waving in the wind, which arouses emotions in people's breasts, is a symbol, or in what sense the Marseillaise is a symbol, or, to go a little further, in what sense a Gothic cathedral built in a particular way, quite apart from its function as a building in which religious services occur, is a symbol for the particular religion which it houses or in what sense sacred dances are symbols, or in what sense any kind of religious ritual is a symbol, or in what sense the Kaaba Stone is a great symbol to the Moslems, the answer will be that what these things symbolize is literally not expressible in any other way....The romantic doctrine was that there

is an infinite striving forward on the part of reality, of the universe around us, that there is something which is infinite, something which is inexhaustible, of which the finite attempts to be the symbol but of course cannot. You seek to convey something which you can convey only by such means as you have at your command, but you know that this cannot convey the whole of what you are seeking to convey because this whole is literally infinite. (99-100, 101)

Within Berlin's and Wilson's frameworks, the Romantics energized certain ways of thinking about how artistic symbols make intelligible aspects of the self, the universe, and one's place within it, all of which are otherwise ineffable. My point is that the Symbolists inherited these doctrines from Romanticism, and many Modernists were "instructed" in Symbolism's doctrines and their ways of thinking about artistic creativity (Wilson 23). This inheritance finds its way into *Order of the Golden Dawn* and, by extension, into the comics medium—into Moore and Williams's *Promethea*.

Yeats is a fruitful starting point to better understand Romanticism's movement from the Symbolists, into the early twentieth-century hermetic imagination, and into our contemporary moment. Coulombe writes, "For Yeats Magic and Poetry were near synonymous.... Whether he was dealing with fairy-lore or mystic visions, the conviction that this world both symbolises [*sic*] and conceals greater realities was ever obvious in his work" (349). Generally, Yeats's work becomes pervaded by ways of thinking about "reintegrat[ing] the Christian Mysteries into Man's Art and conception of reality" (250). It is in this way that Yeats becomes a part of the larger cultural project to reenchant the world. In *A Vision*, specifically, he constructs an elaborate mythical system with artistic images and symbols that convey his ways of thinking about the imagination, its relation

to a larger cosmos, and his place within it. On one hand, if we read *Promethea* in relation to Yeats's world-view, it suggests that Moore and Williams intersect with the larger literary project of reenchancing the world. On the other hand, in addition to his well-documented connections to the Golden Dawn, Yeats's literary activities provide a model for reading the ways that the hermetic world-view and its symbolic systems energize Moore and Williams's creative process: They construct a personal vision of the cosmos of which their own creativity becomes a part.

Yeats's ideas about ritual magic are put into practice in *A Vision*, just as Moore and Williams's ideas about magic are put into practice in *Promethea*. According to Neil Mann, the hermetic ideas about magic from which Yeats draws "[make] philosophy and doctrine into drama and symbol in order to create ceremony."¹¹ Yeats's and, by extension, the Golden Dawn's philosophy is concerned with raising one's consciousness by invoking artistic images and symbols that act upon the human imagination. Similarly, Moore and Williams draw attention to ideas about elevating one's consciousness through the "magic" of imagination, intersecting with Yeats's ways of thinking about the powers of imagination: Their imaginative creativity's concerns lay in elevating humankind's state of mind through literary creativity. We can take this notion one step further by comparatively exploring the systems that Yeats constructs and that Moore and Williams explore with the character *Promethea*.

Yeats's ways of thinking about magic and creativity in *A Vision* become organized according to a larger structural system that he invents. This system is "worked out with geometrical diagrams and set forth in terms of such unfamiliar conceptions as *daimons, tinctures, cones, gyres, husks and passionate bodies*" (41 Wilson's emphases).

Coulombe and Mann demonstrate how this system becomes heavily influenced by Yeats's affiliation with the Golden Dawn in the ways that its geometry corresponds to Kabbalist symbols in the Tree of Life. An important distinction between *A Vision* and *Promethea*, though, is that Yeats *invents* a new system from preexisting systems, such as Kabbalah, Tarot, and (among others) Astrology, while Moore and Williams invent the mythical figure Promethea to *explore* preexisting systems: *Promethea* is a new creation that is more a superhero narrative than the invention of an artistic system; the character's journey through the paths to the ten *sefirot* in the Tree of Life is structured by systems that were already there. This difference does not pose a problem as much as it helps us read and better understand Moore and Williams' aesthetics and creative process: Moore and Williams intersect with Yeats in drawing from the hermetic imagination, and they explore the Kabbalist and Tarot systems with comic book conventions. In this vein, not only can we better understand how Moore and Williams extend the formal domains of superhero narratives into the hermetic imagination, but we can also better understand the artists' motives for this movement in relation to the larger project of reenchancement.

The ways that Moore and Williams become attached to the project of reenchancement is in the ways that they intersect with Yeats's notion of the "mystical life."

Yeats writes,

Now as to Magic. It is surely absurd to hold me 'weak' or otherwise because I chose to persist in a study which I decided deliberately four or five years ago to make, next to my Poetry, the most important pursuit of my life. Whether it be, or be not, bad for my health can only be decided by one who knows what Magic is and not at all by any amateur. If I had not made Magic my constant study I could

not have written a single word of my Blake book, nor would *The Countess Kathleen* have ever come to exist. The Mystical life is the centre [sic] of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write. (qtd. in Coulombe 349)

Here, Yeats defends his interests in magic against not only the secular, scientific trends of modernity, but he also defends his studies against orthodox Christianity. Much like Blake's refusal to be "enslaved by another man's" system, Yeats proclaims that he "knew a Christian's ecstasy without his slavery to custom" (qtd. in Coulombe 349). Here, Yeats's "mystical life" intersects with the ideas driving Moore's creativity: "[Y]ou don't have to be an atheist or a born-again Christian or a Muslim...but there is huge palette of human possibilities that you can explore" (qtd. in Clarke). Moore and Williams's intersections with Yeats do not stop there: On one hand, they draw from the Golden Dawn's ideas about magic and creativity's abilities to raise human consciousness, and on the other hand, they subscribe to the order's roots in the Romantic image of the artist. The hermetic imagination maintains the Romantic image of the artist in the figure of the "magician." This figure assumes responsibilities to elevate human consciousness and integrity through the creation of modern, "magical" symbols. For Moore and Williams, that symbol is *Promethea*, the living embodiment of imagination.

Hermeneutics of *Promethea* in relation to the hermetic imagination suggest that Moore and Williams consciously extend the narrative conventions of superhero comics into the sacred with the mythical heroine *Promethea*. Instead of reading the narrative as both functioning within and outside postmodern ideas about the impossibility of shared meaning, the hermetic form of imagination suggests that Moore and Williams function within a formal space of meaning's proliferation and plenitude, where artistic symbols

are not absent of meaning but are approximate to the meanings they hold. The hermetic system of Kabbalah, to borrow Coulombe's words, "suggests a world of meaning" (354), and this meaning is defined by ideas about higher realities of which the material world and artistic symbols are only but shadows. If we couple these notions of restoring humankind's awareness of higher realities with Saler's ideas about reenchanted modernity, it suggests that Moore and Williams's commit to the responsibilities of the magus—of the artist—to raise readers' consciousness and ascribe new meaning to their world through imaginative creativity.

Moore and Williams position Promethea as wielding the powers of mystical images and symbols to raise human consciousness, just as a magician. In the story, art and magical incantation are synonymous: "Representing things with sounds or marks, as with art and language, was a handspring in consciousness allowing us wonderful new abilities. We didn't call it art, language or consciousness back then. It was all *magic*" (*Book 5* 165 Moore's emphasis). Moore and Williams first highlight the idea of artists being synonymous with the figure of the magician when the character Promethea journeys into a deck of Tarot cards. Upon reaching Card One (The Magician), Promethea's companions, the twin snakes of her Caduceus, explain:

The Fool to the Magician yields,

And from the vacant quantum fields

Erupts the Singularity

Of all tha 

The Magus represents the will

That made things happen, then, and still...

He's every artist, scribe or sage.

'Tis he that marks the empty page.

He is whichever seems least odd:

A Big Bang, or a Father God. (*Book 2* 137)

Moore and Williams establish the idea that artists become godlike in acts of imaginative creation in this “Magical” world view: They call forth into being *something* out of *nothing* and populate human minds with artistic images and symbols that create new meaning in one's life and one's understanding of reality.

The importance in understanding Moore and Williams's ways of thinking about the figure of the magician and the powers of art at the narrative level rests in the specular function of the artists at play within the series: Not only are Moore and Williams engaged in artistic creativity while writing about the “Magus's,” or artist's, creative responsibilities, but they also write and draw themselves into the story as characters (*Book 3* 47). The specular function of the artists positions Moore and Williams—to no one's surprise—as magicians tapping into the spiritual realm through imagination. Promethea comments on *Yesod's* meaning: “It's a Hebrew word, meaning foundation. I guess it implies that spirituality is founded on imagination” (*Book 3* 43). The specular function of the artists suggests that invoking the image of Promethea and exploring Kabbalah become artistic ideals of tapping into the sacred world, and using its imaginative content to take readers into realms of the sacred. This ideal is defined by ideas of art's magical power that awakens humankind to truths and existences beyond the material world. In the final issue (Issue #32, Volume 5), Moore and Williams position Promethea as addressing the readers, and her address indicates this creative purpose:

As readers, you are physical beings engaging in a DNA snake-dance with me, a fiction, your immaterial, lunar imagination....Promethea, like everything you've ever read or witnessed, is made only of light: The reflected light of this poster-comic playing over your eye. The light of imagination and play of meaning across your mind....Using language, we decode existence, make it lucid, cast light upon it. These marks on paper that you are reading are a program, running on the high-rez software of the human mind and its imagination (181, 182, 183)

This commentary suggests that Moore and Williams intend to use Promethea as a vehicle for raising readers' consciousness through imagination and creativity, thereby affecting the reader's view of the material world. These artistic ideals can be traced from *Promethea*, to the hermetic imagination of the Golden Dawn, through the Symbolists, and finally, to Romantic ideas about the powers of imaginative literature: Romanticism energized these ways of thinking about imagination, creativity, and the role of artists, and Moore and Williams recall them.

In *Promethea*, Moore and Williams dramatize their creative purposes as magicians through their archetype of the artist, Promethea. Her responsibility is to regenerate humankind's relationship with the sacred world through an apocalypse of the imagination. Sophie asks a prior version of Promethea, the newspaper cartoonist Margaret Case, "Uhh, but...the end of the world. That's a bad thing, right?" Case responds, "Is it? 'The world' isn't the planet or life and people on it. The world is our systems, our politics, our economies...our *ideas* of the world! It's our flags and our banknotes and our border wars. I was at Ypres. I was at the Somme. I say end this filthy mess *now*" (*Book I* 127-28 Moore's emphases). Here, Moore and Williams encourage

readers to think about apocalypse not in physical terms—as in mass destruction, chaos, and genocide—but in terms of imaginative revelation: “We have many names for this event. We call it ‘The Rapture.’ We call it ‘The Opening of the 32nd Path.’ We call it the *Awakening*, or the *Revelation*, or the *Apocalypse*. But ‘End of the World’ will do” (*Book 1* 127 Moore’s emphases). This “revelation” functions on two narrative levels: First, Sophie discovers that her task is to bring about the end of the world through imaginative revelation. On another narrative level, Moore and Williams’s specularly suggests that they intend to “end the readers’ world” with *Promethea*.

Moore and Williams’s vision of apocalypse in *Promethea* intersects with Romantic visions of apocalypse. Abrams writes of the Romantic period: “[F]aith in an apocalypse by revelation had been replaced by faith in an apocalypse by revolution, and this now gave way to faith in an apocalypse by imagination or cognition” (334). Prevailing criticism already traces Moore’s visions of apocalypse through his work to Romanticism, but my hermeneutic of *Promethea* in relation to the hermetic imagination offers an alternative to the discourse. McGillis, for example, reads Moore’s body of work as intersecting with “darker” Romantic visions of apocalypse. He writes,

Romanticism is an end time state of mind. It takes an interest in apocalyptic vision, but a particular kind of apocalyptic vision... The Romantic apocalypse delivers a vision of a renewed earth, a marriage of Heaven and Hell, a release of Promethean energies in an epithalamion such as we have in act 4 of Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*.... But another side of this vision exists, a dark Romantic apocalypse seen in a poem such as Byron’s “Prometheus” or in Mary Shelley’s novel, *The Last Man*. This secular vision is less optimistic than the work touched

by the euphoria of July 14, 1789; it reflects the pessimism rising from the failure of that revolution. This inverted apocalypse informs our contemporary sense of the end times, and Moore's work shares more with this vision than it does with the ecstatic visions of the Romantic renovated earth. (203-04)

Here, McGillis suggests that *Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*, and *Promethea* use an inverted model of Romanticism's celebratory visions of apocalypse. He is right to examine, comparatively, Moore's and Byron's Promethean characters, but the apocalyptic vision from Byron best suited to compare *Watchmen* and *V for Vendetta* is "Darkness": When writing his poem "Prometheus," an exiled Byron uses myth to create an autobiographical simile with the titan's exile, whereas "Darkness" paints a bleak apocalyptic vision:

The world was void,
The populous and the powerful was a lump,
Seasonless, herbless, treeless, manless, lifeless –
A lump of death – a chaos of hard clay. (69-71)

Moore's apocalyptic visions in *V for Vendetta* and *Watchmen* bear distinct connections to Byron's aesthetics of human destruction, division, death, and despair. For *Promethea*, though, it should go without saying that artists are not always aesthetically consistent, nor are they required to function, fundamentally, within any one formal domain. My hermeneutic of the hermetic imagination provides an alternative understanding for *Promethea*'s vision: It is what Abrams addresses as an apocalypse by "revolution of consciousness" (334), and it has more in common with Romantic visions of a restored unity, a renovated reality, and an awakening of the human imagination.

The revolution of consciousness that occurs in *Promethea* works on two levels of narration: On one narrative level, *Promethea*'s narrative foundations rest on the Kabbalist system of the Tree of Life, and this system becomes a landscape of artistic images through which Moore and Williams navigate with Promethea—from the material world, known as *Malkuth*, and its upper echelons in The Immaterialia, to the Godhead, known as *Kether*. When Sophie returns from *Kether*, she ends the world. She says, “A lot of people will hurt themselves. And yes. Yes, you deserve it....I love *all* of you so much” (*Book 5* 40 Moore's emphasis). Rather than recalling Byronic pessimism, Moore and Williams's aesthetics recall Shelley's idealism in *Prometheus Unbound*. It is not only important but hermeneutically appropriate to read this act in relation to the Romantic intents of the hermetic imagination. In the story, the mythical figure opens the 32nd Path to all of humankind: Promethea regenerates humankind's relationship with the sacred world, and the story illustrates a celebratory vision of what an apocalypse of the imagination would do.

On another level, this apocalypse by imagination synchronizes with Moore and Williams's intent to raise their readers' level of consciousness, and this creative purpose intersects with the project to reenchanted the imagination. Prevailing criticism already addresses the ways that *Promethea* becomes, in Moore's own words, a “protracted rant on magic” (qtd. in Howell 384). For example, in *Book 3*, Sophie-as-Promethea leaves the earthly, material world to find her friend Barbara, and she takes the 32nd Path to *Yesod*. Throughout her journey to *Kether*, Promethea passes through the ten *sefirot*, or divine emanations, in preparation for her final act of revelation. Wolk characterizes the “extended explanation of the Kabbala's [*sic*] Tree of Life” as “a lot of ungainly

expository dialogue....[T]he idea of it isn't to tell a story so much as to present a gigantic mass of arcane philosophy as entertainingly and memorably as possible" (249). More critical opportunities arise, here: The hermetic imagination suggests that Moore and Williams use the narrative not only to tell a story but, also, to teach their audience about the Kabbalist system; the exposition is not "ungainly" as much as it becomes a pedagogical exercise where, simultaneously, readers and characters learn about Kabbalah and the meanings in the world that the system encourages us to understand. It is in this way that Moore and Williams encourage readers to experience a new, different way of thinking about the world—a world not devoid of meaning but filled with meaning. Moore and Williams seek to *enchant* their readers through magic, through imaginative creativity.

Moore and Williams intend to achieve the effects of enchantment by intensifying the collaborative dynamic of image and text—artist and writer—to facilitate a distinct aesthetic experience: Readers follow Sophie on her journey to *Kether*, and when entering each *sefirot*, she or her companions explain the symbols that they find and the meanings that they convey. For example, Sophie and Barbara advance into the seventh, Venusian *sefirah*, called *Netzach*, and this space/place is pervaded by images and text that are "metaphorical representations" of the meanings that the symbol conveys (Wolk 249). *Netzach* is the realm of emotion, and Sophie interprets and explains its symbolism to Barbara: "It's emotion. Water is emotion, its element," Sophie says as they submerge into what appears as water on a physical level but is "water on a *symbolic* level, water as a symbol of *emotion*" (*Book 3* 88 Moore's emphases). Similarly, when they reach the *sefirah* named *Kether*, otherwise known as the Supreme Crown and the Godhead, the realm is saturated with white and gold images of various moments in time, space, and

mind: “Here in *Kether*, the Crown. Here in the first white spark of being...God is everything. Everything is God. God is all. All One. All God. All *Kether*. One perfect moment, when everything happens. Always like this. The white brilliance. The bay leaf and ambergris. Here we are again” (*Book 4* 111-13). Moore and Williams create 11 total chapters to explore the 10 *sefirot* and the “invisible” sphere, named Daath (*Book 4* 33), in the Tree of Life.

The pedagogical dynamic to *Promethea* is defined by artistic ideals of liberating the human mind from the world’s existing systems and restoring meaning to a disenchanted world: Moore and Williams dramatize these ideals through the narrative’s ideas about artistic creativity being a form of “magic” capable of raising readers’ consciousness. In an interview with George Khoury, Moore comments,

I’ve always believed that if you could write something intelligent in plain language, then that will raise people’s consciousness. You can give them an idea that they may not have already had. If you write in a form that they can understand and comprehend and accept. Then you may be, instead of producing a generation of morons as your audience, you might be able to wake people up a bit, raise their expectations, get them to demand more intelligent fare. Get them to actually realize that they have a right to intelligent material. Which I think would be good for everybody. If that were the case, if people were a little bit more demanding. If they didn’t just reward the same formulaic pap over and over again with their attention. (63)

Where prevailing criticism situates *Promethea* as resistant to literary-historical inquiries, hermeneutics suggests that Moore and Williams’s explorations of Kabbalah come from

literary projects of the early twentieth-century that attempted to revive Romanticism's faith in imaginative literature. For Abrams, it was all the more convenient that many Romantics elevated the role of the artist by giving "literature and the arts a prominent...place in their metaphysical systems" (192-93). Whether drawing from pagan mythology, Hermetic lore, Kabbalah, Christianity, Neoplatonism, or any number of symbolic systems, Romantic writers and succeeding generations draw from the designs and craft of these systems to elevate literature and the arts as powerful forces contributing to humankind's progress. Such models of history are defined by their ideas of a progressive movement toward an ideal of human perfection, whether this ideal be the recovery of an Edenic state of being, a reunion with nature, the recovery of some imagined Golden Age, a revelation or revolution, a regeneration of humankind's relationship with the sacred world, or any number of recuperative activities. In many Romantic models, it is the artist who assumes the responsibilities to make modern myths. Narratives revolve around ideas that represent a sense of responsibility to facilitate humankind's movement towards ideals through imaginative creativity. For comics studies, both the conscious process of myth-making and the elevation of literature is important because we find that Gaiman, Carey and Gross, and Moore and Williams are engaged in it: It suggests that a greater literary history of comics awaits exploration.

CHAPTER THREE

“AND OF ALL THESE THINGS THE ALBINO WHALE WAS THE SYMBOL”:

THE UNWRITTEN, LITERARY HISTORY, AND ROMANTIC ORGANICISM

Chapter 3 is this project’s final chapter, and it places Mike Carey and Peter Gross’s *The Unwritten* alongside Neil Gaiman’s *Sandman* and Alan Moore and J. H. Williams III’s *Promethea*. The critical impetus for including *The Unwritten* in this project is that the series is another narrative in which the artists transform literary history into mythology, and like Gaiman and Moore and Williams, Carey and Gross use self-reflexive aesthetics and elevate personal ideas about imagination and artistic creativity, including their own: The artists are engaged in imaginative creativity while creating a story about the virtues of imaginative creativity. These aesthetics create critical opportunities to explore comics’ intersections with a greater literary history that is seldom explored in comics studies,¹² but before turning to *The Unwritten*’s connections with literary history, we need to further concretize a logic for including the series within this project alongside *Sandman* and *Promethea*. In short, before we explore *The Unwritten* in relation to literary history, it is important to begin treating the series in its contemporary moment and in the medium in which it is published: mainstream comics. There are appropriate considerations to make about the medium’s aesthetics and traditions in which Carey and Gross participate, and they provide a logic for making the critical leap to explore *The Unwritten*’s literary history.

A fruitful starting point is to explore the series’s publication history, Carey and Gross’s creative relationships with Gaiman, and their tenure in DC Comics’s Vertigo Comics division. In Chapter 1, I construct a framework to read Gaiman’s creative

relationships with Moore and Moore's larger narrative designs in *Saga of the Swamp Thing*. Chapter 3 extends this framework to *The Unwritten* to read Carey and Gross's creative relationships with Gaiman and *Sandman*'s narrative designs. Particularly, Carey and Gross's tenure at Vertigo Comics is defined by their creative relationships with Gaiman and *Sandman*, and their career leading up to *The Unwritten* provides a backdrop to better understand the story's mythology. The artists first entered Vertigo, writing and drawing two *Sandman* spin-off titles: *The Books of Magic* and *Lucifer*. On one hand, Gross wrote and contributed artwork to *The Books of Magic* from 1994 until 2000.¹³ The title is a fantasy series about a boy-wizard, named Timothy Hunter, who is destined to become the world's greatest magician.¹⁴ Throughout his adventures, Tim meets Dream and Death of *The Endless* from *Sandman*, the Faerie host from William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and (among others) characters from the DC Universe, such as John Constantine and Phantom Stranger. *The Books of Magic* becomes part of the *Sandman* mythology.

On the other hand, Carey's first work at Vertigo was the *Sandman* spin-off series *Lucifer*, which debuted in June 2000. This title continues the story of the biblical figure as he last appears in *Sandman*: Lucifer Morningstar is a wingless angel who owns a piano bar on Earth after abandoning his responsibilities to Hell. Gross joined *Lucifer*'s creative team in issue #5, and the artists collaborated on the title until August 2006. The importance in understanding Carey and Gross's tenure at Vertigo rests in how the artists directly worked within Gaiman's larger narrative design of *Sandman* prior to *The Unwritten*. Moreover, this design is defined by the ways Gaiman brings together preexisting characters from comics and traditional literature within one imaginary world,

and we find Carey and Gross engaging these narrative activities in *The Unwritten*. In this vein, we can recollect critical insights from Chapter 1 of this project to help us read and better understand *The Unwritten*'s larger narrative designs and its literary history.

In Chapter 1, I address how prevailing criticism already emphasizes how *Sandman*'s narrative design can be better understood in relation to literary history, and in addition to Carey and Gross's work on *The Books of Magic* and *Lucifer* becoming an extension of this literary history, it is logical to read *The Unwritten* as one, too. For example, Cyril Camus traces Gaiman's creative scope to Philip José Farmer's Wold Newton Universe (WNU), and he does so by highlighting how the WNU and *Sandman* similarly bring together preexisting literary characters into one shared imaginary world (148).¹⁵ Gaiman also comments on *Sandman*'s design: "I had greatly enjoyed watching my friends Kim Newman and Alan Moore build their Wold Newton-descended worlds....It looked like fun. I wondered if I could try something like that" (qtd. in Camus 150). *Sandman*'s design brings together elements from various mythologies, theologies, traditional literature, and (among others) comic books. By comparison, Carey and Gross's *The Unwritten* brings together characters and imaginary worlds from various literary genres, including: fantasy fiction, fairytales, fables, epic, mythology, theology, and (among others) comics.

Carey and Gross create a Wold Newton-descended world around a story about a group of characters—Tom Taylor, Lizzie Hexam, and Richard Savoy—who experience the dissolution of the boundaries between fiction and "reality." Literary characters begin to cross over into the "real world," such as the Creature from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Tom, Lizzie, and Savoy gain access to various imaginary worlds,

including C. S. Lewis's Narnia and Lewis Carroll's Wonderland. The narrative follows a logic of how the "real" world and imaginary worlds simultaneously exist in different spaces/places, and when the boundaries between fiction and "reality" begin to dissolve, the story's structures of fantasy and mythology create narrative versatility for the artists to subsume dozens of elements from literary history. This frame of knowledge makes it logical to read *The Unwritten*'s larger narrative design as evolving from Carey and Gross's work in the *Sandman* universe. Camus's framework suggests that if we cannot say, with certainty, whether Carey and Gross's narrative activities in *The Unwritten* are directly influenced by their work on *The Books of Magic* and *Lucifer*, then (at worst) we can say that *Sandman*'s larger narrative design is the "work of a forerunner" (150).

Chapter 1 continues to explain what happens when we shift Camus's literary-historical framework from *Sandman*'s Wold Newton design to its mythological design: We can explore the ways Gaiman uses the mythical figure Dream as a personal vehicle to establish relationships with the literary past, with particular focus on historically-based literary authors, including G. K. Chesterton and William Shakespeare. If we similarly shift attention from *The Unwritten*'s Wold Newton design to its mythological design, we can explore the ways Carey and Gross use the mythical figure Leviathan as a vehicle to establish relationships with literature and convey distinct ideas about literary history and their own relation to it. *The Unwritten*'s Leviathan is a metaphysical white whale that energizes imaginative storytelling throughout human history, and we as readers are encouraged to read this figure as an artistic symbol for the powers of imagination—a benevolent force that pushes humankind forward and organically develops human integrity. The character Wilson Taylor explains: "For I knew, in some inexplicable way,

what it was I now faced [Leviathan]. Something like the angels—and yet as unlike them as it was possible to be. For they were only story made real, and this was the source of all story” (*Tom Taylor and the War of Words* 167). The logic of the narrative posits how this source of stories develops human integrity through the “magic” of storytelling, and the narrative draws attention to several authors who become extensions of Leviathan’s power throughout literary history, including: Oscar Wilde, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and (among others) Rudyard Kipling. On one narrative level, Carey and Gross invent a mythology that conveys ideas about the power of storytelling to set and sustain guidance for human understandings of reality. On another narrative level, the artists’ self-reflexive aesthetics suggest that the artists are engaged in storytelling while writing about the virtues of storytelling. These narrative activities make it appropriate to include Carey and Gross’s *The Unwritten* in this project and explore their intersections with Romantic literary history.

The Unwritten’s frames of knowledge make the series an appropriate choice to fit within this project’s hermeneutic of reading comics in relation to early nineteenth-century Romanticism in the ways that Carey and Gross transform literary history into mythology and elevate ideas about the roles that imagination and creativity play throughout human history. The character Tom Taylor describes Leviathan as “kind of—the collective unconscious, or something. *The Fictional Unconscious*. The minds of all the millions of people who read my father’s books. Or any books” (*Leviathan* 111). Here, Tom describes Leviathan as a living symbol for a collective literary psyche, and the narrative logic is that literary texts—and the imaginary worlds and characters therein—exist in a larger literary system that ensures humankind’s futurity. In the story, artists energize, and are

energized by, the development of this system, and this value system for reading human history intersects with Romantic models. The larger framework of this project suggests that Carey and Gross's narrative activities not only follow a certain pattern of creativity that Gaiman and, by extension, Moore energized in the mainstream comics industry, but that they also follow formal patterns that intersect with Romantic literary activities—namely, myth-making and giving imaginative literature a prominent place within a larger system.

A difficulty we meet in pursuing this line of thought, however, rests in the ways *The Unwritten*'s critical narrative, like *Sandman*'s and *Promethea*'s, tends to limit Carey and Gross's creative processes to postmodern notions of metafiction and pastiche. For example, Peter Wilkins describes *The Unwritten* as a "metafictional science fiction" series (225), and Essi Varis describes Carey and Gross's objectives to establish their story's relationships with preexisting literature as "amplif[ying] the pastiche-like quality" (3). Wilkins's ideas about metafiction describe how Carey and Gross create interactions with preexisting literary texts to signal creative influence. He writes, "*The Unwritten* plays with multiple styles and discourses to show the different levels of its own story as it moves Tom Taylor, the central character, in and out of different diegetic worlds from classic literature....Diegesis becomes a metafictional science fiction concept" (225). Here, Wilkins reads the ways that Carey and Gross reflexively create an inventory of literary influences as the narrative progresses. For instance, Carey and Gross take initiatives to connect Leviathan with a greater literary history of whale literature, including: Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*, Rudyard Kipling's "How the Whale Got His Throat," Rudolf Erich Raspe's *Baron Munchausen*, *Arabian*

Nights, and (among others) the Book of Jonah. In the *Leviathan* story arc (Volume 4), Carey and Gross blur the distinction between Leviathan and the whales that appear in these stories, as Moby Dick swallows Tom, and in the issue titled “In the Belly of the Beast” (Issue #23), Tom meets Raspe’s Baron Munchausen, Collodi’s Pinocchio, Sinbad, Jonah, and Kipling’s Hibernian Mariner (*Leviathan* 92). In Wilkins’s framework, these interactions are consciousness efforts for Carey and Gross to inventory creative influences and signal source texts for narrative events.

Varis similarly reads *The Unwritten* but in the vein of postmodern pastiche. She describes Carey and Gross’s self-reflexivity as a conscious piecing together of “intertextual particles,” and she extends W. G. Müller’s concept of “interfigural” to *The Unwritten* to describe a process where “intertextual particles of characters...[manifest] through characters” (4). In this framework, intertextuality manifests when characters interact with and acknowledge their own literary history. For instance, Carey and Gross encourage readers to cooperate and follow how the story connects with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in at least two narrative ways: The character Tom Taylor is a fictional literary character who was brought to life by his author-father, Wilson Taylor, and Tom’s “birth” into the real world takes place at the Villa Diodati in Switzerland. In this way, Carey and Gross encourage readers to understand the story’s connections to Mary Shelley’s novel *and* the history of the ghost-story competition that led to the novel’s creation: Wilson Taylor travels to the literary site as an author, and Wilson and Tom Taylor assume the roles of Victor Frankenstein and his Creature. Wilson says, “It doesn’t matter if all the world thinks I’m a monster, or a mad scientist, or what the Hell else” (*Tommy Taylor and the Ship that Sank Twice* 113). Tom also addresses the

Creature and himself as beings “made by some guy with a God complex” (*On to Genesis* 126). Intertextuality with *Frankenstein* manifests in these comments through the characters’ commentary. Varis speculates that such activities are Carey and Gross’s efforts to “[lure] mature readers and [gain] recognition as ‘proper’ art” (3). In this framework, artists depend on and encourage readers to understand a story’s references to traditional literary texts in an effort to elevate the medium. What is missing from the critical discourse is a better understanding of the ways Carey and Gross not only encourage readers to understand their narrative’s relationships with traditional literature: They also add another narrative layer by encouraging readers to understand these relationships through the story’s mythology, and this value system of reading imagination and creativity suggests something different than the mechanical ideas of postmodern metafiction and pastiche.

The Unwritten’s mythology highlights the idea of an *organic* system of stories from which new stories grow: This frame of knowledge suggests that Carey and Gross self-reflexively situate their creativity as *growing and developing from* preexisting literature. This value system for reading literary history and their relation to it suggests that Carey and Gross construct a way of reading and comprehending their creativity that is not mechanical but biological and personal, and their modes of comprehension intersect with late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Romantic ways of thinking about literary history and the author’s relation to it. This frame of knowledge suggests that we can delimit *The Unwritten*’s critical discourse from postmodern ideas and open comics to a greater literary history. At the same time, Romanticism’s literary-critical history offers opportunities to explore new, historical understandings of comic book

artists as part of larger discursive networks shared with traditional literature, film, and other art forms. In the larger scope of this project, Carey and Gross's connections to Gaiman and, by extension, Moore suggest that *The Unwritten*, *Sandman*, and *Promethea* collectively reflect a larger pattern of creativity happening within the comics medium, and these patterns share contiguous relationships with other forms of creativity. These patterns reflect particular ways of thinking about life, the world, and artists' place in it, and Romantic literary-critical history suggests that we can better understand the historical conditions of such comics creativity by reading and better understanding what energizes the artists' creative processes.

Comics studies is not irreconcilable with Romantic literary-critical methodologies. In the Introduction of this project, for example, I challenge Hillary Chute's ideas that privilege nonfiction comics as the "strongest" (452) and "most important" (459) genre in which artists re-present history. According to Chute, nonfiction comics artists "engage the horizon of history" and create "an intense level of self-reflexivity...in how they 'materialize'" personal and historical moments of trauma (457). The Introduction concludes that if we can explore how nonfiction artists create "intense self-reflexivity" when reinterpreting history, then we can similarly explore the ways that mainstream comics artists create "intense self-reflexivity" when reinterpreting history. The critical boundaries do not need to remain closed, static, and exclusive but can be open, porous, and interstitial. The Introduction of this project extends Chute's ideas to read the ways that Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross reinterpret literary history with a mode of "creative invention" that is "not the opposite of historical accuracy" (459). These artists reinterpret literary history with personal mythologies:

Sandman, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*. I then take Chute's ideas one step further and identify how Gaiman's, Moore and Williams's, and Carey and Gross's activity of reimagining literary history with personal mythologies intersects with earlier literary activities: nineteenth-century Romantic myth-making.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I build individual frameworks for reading Gaiman's and Moore and Williams's myth-making in relation to Romantic literary history, and in this methodology, I explore how the artists consciously use the mythologies of *Sandman* and *Promethea* to reimagine the literary past and establish personal connections with it. The current chapter, Chapter 3, similarly extends this framework to Carey and Gross's myth-making in *The Unwritten*, but we can find meaning in the series' differences: Where chapters 1 and 2 identify how Gaiman and Moore and Williams connect their mythologies with early twentieth-century literature and ways of thinking about imagination and creativity, Chapter 3 explores *The Unwritten*'s mythology and its intersections directly with Romanticism. This frame of knowledge makes it necessary to construct a different critical approach.

The key difference in how I treat *The Unwritten* is in reading the narrative's form of the literary imagination. Chapters 1 and 2, for instance, explore the intersections between *Sandman* and *Promethea* with forms of the authorial imagination from the early-twentieth century: the Chestertonian and hermetic imaginations. I argue that although these forms of imagination inherit ideas from the Victorians, who inherited ideas that Romantic authors energized, they become distinct to larger literary projects of the early twentieth-century and distinct historical conditions that gave rise to them. For instance, Joshua Landy and Michael Saler cite prevailing ideas about the early twentieth-century

state of mind: “‘The fate of our times,’ Max Weber famously wrote in 1917, ‘is characterized...above all, by the ‘disenchantment of the world’” (Landy and Saler 1). For Weber, “disenchantment” is a Western state of mind that allegedly arises from the early twentieth-century transition to secular, reason-based ways of thinking about one’s place in the world and the decline in religious and spiritual ways of thinking. Landy and Saler explain that this larger cognitive state becomes defined by ideas about a “God-shaped void” and an experience bereft of wonder (2).

Saler’s later research recovers how many early twentieth-century authors, such as J. R. R. Tolkien, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and (among others) H. P. Lovecraft, sought to compensate for this void through artistic creativity. In their works, many authors challenge and outright reject the “disenchantment” thesis by reconciling empirical sciences with mystery, fantasy, and wonder, and they expressed creative commitments to ideals of “reenchanting” the world. Chapter 1 explores what happens when we extend this framework to *Sandman* and read the ways that Gaiman uses myth to establish personal connections with the Chestertonian imagination, and Chapter 2 explores what happens when Moore and Williams use myth to establish connections with the hermetic imagination of the *Golden Dawn*. In both chapters, I conclude that *Sandman* and *Promethea* become extensions of modernity’s project to reenchanted the world in the ways that Gaiman and Moore and Williams establish narrative and personal connections with texts and authors attached to this project. In this way, the artists become participants in restoring the alleged “disappearance of stable and shared meanings” (Saler 19).

Carey and Gross’s form of the literary imagination, however, does not quite fit Landy and Saler’s framework, because *The Unwritten* intersects with a different form of

the imagination: organicism. The aesthetics of this form of imagination make it necessary to go beyond early twentieth-century criticism and draw from Romantic criticism to read and better understand Carey and Gross's ways of reading history. Charles Armstrong asks, "What has happened to organicism? What has become of the vitality and importance of this idea?" (1), and he continues to argue that

organicism is a heritage which has undeservedly lost its centrality in Western culture. The mechanisation [*sic*] and impersonality of modern society has blinded us to the value and importance of a more unified and contextual approach...and this has led to the demise not only of our environment but also of our modes of comprehension and our entire way of life. (1)

Organicism becomes a "dominating model for the Romantic world-view" (4), and this model describes a unified system in which language is a phenomena that affects humankind's lived experience. Artists assume privileged roles within this model in the ways that that express commitment to creative responsibilities.

Carey and Gross's *The Unwritten* is one answer to Armstrong's question of "What on earth has happened to organicism?" There is a difference between Romantic organicism and Carey and Gross's organic model, but is not so much a difference in the mode of thought as much as it is creative process. At the heart of *The Unwritten's* mythology is a value system for reading human history as an organic system in which imaginative literature and human integrity are directly linked. The rationale posits how artists create imaginary worlds, populate them, and the characters "live" in the minds of readers. As opposed to "for-real-true," they are "story-true," the character Lizzie Hexam informs Tom (*Leviathan* 28). At the mythological level, the figure of Leviathan

symbolizes this organic system, and this system highlights certain properties about the power of stories and their capabilities to develop the human imagination. Organicism becomes a metaphor for the artists' ideas about an inscrutable process of human history and art's purpose to help resist historical forces of tyranny and oppression.

Isaiah Berlin's ideas about Romantic organicism are helpful to read Carey and Gross's mythology as well as their artistic motive and purpose. He describes how many Romantics, such as Johann Gottfried von Herder, believed that "human groups grew in some plant-like or some animal-like fashion, and that organic, botanical and other biological metaphors were more suitable for describing such growth than were the chemical and mathematical metaphors of the...eighteenth-century popularisers [*sic*] of science" (61). He continues to explain how organic value systems for reading history make it necessary to examine a work of art with reference to the purposes of its maker(s):

From this [organicism] romantic conclusions do follow....[I]t clearly follows that objects cannot be described without reference to the purposes of their makers. The value of a work of art has to be analysed [*sic*] in terms of the particular group of persons to whom it is addressed, the motive of him who speaks, the effect upon those who are spoken to, and the bond which it automatically creates between the speaker and the spoken to. It is a form of communication, and if it is a form of communication then it has not got an impersonal or eternal value. (61-2)

In this frame of knowledge, *The Unwritten's* ideas about an organic system of stories creates opportunities to explore Carey and Gross's artistic motives in the ways that the artists assume ownership of the story through self-reflexivity: They create a narrative in which they reimagine all storytelling as connected within an organic system, and this

system includes their own storytelling. In short, the logic follows that the artists create narrative interactions between their characters and literary history, and they become a part of their own myth by “growing” *The Unwritten* from preexisting stories. The importance in understanding these narrative activities is at least twofold: First, they intersect with Romantic myth-making and Romantic models for reading history, and second, literary-critical history provides opportunities to read historical conditions that energize Carey and Gross’s creativity.

If we think about *The Unwritten* in terms of Romantic ideas about myths and creativity, it suggests Carey and Gross have more in common with Romanticism than postmodern notions of metafiction and pastiche. Berlin, for instance, explains how many Romantic authors expressed faith in mythology to make intelligible otherwise inscrutable, ineffable aspects of reality: “When they asked themselves how...one could begin to understand reality, in some sense of the word ‘understand’...the answer which they sought to give, at least some of them, was that the only way of doing this was by means of myths, by means of those [artistic] symbols” (121). Here, Berlin explains how many Romantics understood mythical figures as vehicles for conveying larger ideas about the universe and one’s place within it, and many Romantic authors, such as William Blake, the Schlegel brothers (August Wilhelm and Friedrich), and (among many others) Percy Shelley, made creative commitments to ideas about the urgent need for modern myths.

Berlin continues to explain how myth-making was at the “heart of the romantic movement,” and that we find a “conscious process of myth-making” in the early-nineteenth century (122). What becomes key, here, is how many Romantic authors

converted literary history into mythologies that elevated ideas about artistic creativity's redeeming characteristics, and we find this way of thinking in *The Unwritten*. M. H. Abrams takes Berlin's ideas about Romantic myth-making one step further and explains how the Romantics energized ways of thinking that "gave literature and the arts a prominent...place" in human history (192). He writes,

[T]he works of philosophy and literature of this age manifest conspicuous parallels in ideas, in design, and even in figurative detail....Such plots may be literal and realistic...or they may be cast in an allegorical and symbolic mode, or else in that type of invented myth, incorporating a philosophy of life and of history. (193)

Here, Abrams explains that much Romantic literature is defined by the ways artists' use aesthetic spaces to express larger ideas about literature and its relationship with history: Mythology becomes one of many vehicles for personal expression. It is well known that the subject of artistic creativity ascends in the Romantic imagination, and it is well known that succeeding generations of artists inherited Romantic ways of thinking about creativity. It is necessary to keep in mind, however, the ways that Romanticism is as diverse as it is consensual. There are many Romantic models that elevate imagination and creativity, but there are distinct and distinctly different ways of thinking about literature's role in human history: Blake's ideas about divine emanations, for example, are distinct from William Wordsworth's doctrine of immanentism, which are distinct from Percy Shelley's ideas about the Golden Age of Ancient Greece, which differ from Lord Byron's ideas about merging his state of mind with Nature's indifference to humanity, and so on. The same may be said about the differences in Gaiman's ideas about the power of

literature to *sustain* the integrity of human consciousness in *Sandman*, Moore and Williams's ideas about imaginative literature's capabilities to *awaken* humankind to existences and truths beyond the material world in *Promethea*, and Carey and Gross's ideas about organic systems *developing* the human imagination in *The Unwritten*. Specifically, Romantic organicism provides a backdrop for reading and better understanding the literary history of Carey and Gross's ideas about imagination and storytelling in *The Unwritten*'s mythology.

In *The Unwritten*, the mythical figure Leviathan becomes a vehicle to reinterpret literary history: It conveys a way of thinking in which all human activity affects and is affected by storytelling, whether a personal story shared with a friend, a political narrative, or popular fantasy fiction, like *Lord of the Rings*—or *The Unwritten* itself. The symbolic value of Leviathan intersects with Romantic organicism in at least two ways. On one hand, many Romantic authors, such as Friedrich Schelling, energized interpretive models for reading human history as a living “‘system-creature’ of sorts” (qtd. in Armstrong 15). Armstrong explains how such models “attempt to formulate the question of the whole” of human history (13). In this question of the whole, Schelling's model details an organic “system of fragments” (qtd. in Armstrong 44), and each fragment within the system is itself an organic whole—a “polyp” (40). The relationships these polyps bear with one another rest on their exchanges within the system, and art becomes a vital part in the larger “system-organism” of humankind. In such models, human integrity's development and freedom from political oppression and tyranny are linked to imaginative literature: “Friedrich Schlegel's understanding...made no strict separation between poetics and politics....[P]olitical freedom and cultivation of the arts are

explicitly linked” (40). In this frame of knowledge, artists assume creative responsibilities to liberate humankind from historical forces, and in turn, art elevates humankind’s state of being. If we extend this framework to *The Unwritten*, it suggests that Carey and Gross’s Leviathan intersects with Romantic models in the ways that the figure conveys understandings of literary history as a “system-organism” that represents a network of living fragments: The narrative logic follows that authors contribute to this system; readers continually respond to and invest in imaginary characters as pedagogical models; and as these characters evolve, humankind’s state of being evolves.

Hermeneutics of *The Unwritten* in relation to Romantic organicism suggest that we can verify historical conditions of creativity. Namely, Carey and Gross’s self-reflexivity suggests that they take initiatives to connect their creativity to a literary history defined by ideas about author’s creative responsibilities to resist political tyranny and oppression through imaginative creativity. In this framework, *The Unwritten*’s narrative aesthetics intersect with what Berlin and Thomas Pfau discuss as Romantic paranoia. Pfau makes the bridge between *The Unwritten* and Romantic paranoia possible by explaining how “popular culture of the past two decades has been filled with [paranoid] narratives....[P]opular cinematic culture of the 1980s and 1990s dramatizes paranoia as a condition experienced by individuals or groups who feel their very status as ‘human’ to be under siege” (82). Pfau’s framework can be extended to *The Unwritten* in the narrative ways that Carey and Gross imagine the figure Leviathan—the stories that exist in the minds of the world’s readers—to be under siege by a secret society, named The Unwritten. In the story, The Unwritten cabal have disempowered Leviathan’s influences on humankind throughout history by policing imaginative storytelling. The

story's logic suggests that *The Unwritten* police stories both to hinder the imagination's freedom and, at the same time, humankind's freedom. If we read the story through the story's mythology, the narrative becomes conspiratorial: Carey and Gross reimagine literary history as a historical conspiracy through symbolic figures—Leviathan and *The Unwritten*.

Berlin's ideas about Romantic myth-making and paranoia are helpful to read the intersections between the historical conspiracy in *The Unwritten* and Romanticism. He describes paranoia as a Romantic phenomenon that "obsesses the twentieth century to some extent" (106), and this phenomenon becomes defined by a larger creative pattern in which artists represent an urgency to liberate humankind from historical forces. Berlin continues to describe Romantic ideas about these forces:

There is a notion that although we individuals seek to liberate ourselves, yet the universe is not to be tamed in this easy fashion. There is something behind, there is something in the depths of the unconscious, or of history; there is something, at any rate, not seized by us which frustrates our dearest wishes. Sometimes it is conceived as a kind of indifferent or even hostile nature, sometimes as the cunning of history...some fearful hostile force lying in wait for us which trips us up when we are on the brink, as we think, of great success. (106, 107)

Here, Berlin suggests that paranoia becomes an interpretive act, one in which artists read and reread history to explore their own purposes to resist "hostile" historical forces. *The Unwritten* intersects with this narrative domain in at least two ways: Carey and Gross reconstruct literary history with a mythology based on ideas of imaginative freedom

(Leviathan) and imaginative oppression (The Unwritten). In this model, artists have something to fear, and this fear, in Berlin's framework, becomes a marker for paranoia:

[O]nce you get the notion that there is outside us something larger, something unseizable, something unobtainable, you either have feelings towards it of love...or of fear; and if you have feelings of fear, the fear becomes paranoiac.

This paranoia goes on accumulating in the nineteenth century...[and] it comes to an intense climax in all kinds of works in the twentieth century. (108)

This creative pattern that highlights fear extends to *The Unwritten* in The Unwritten's conspiracy to control imaginative storytelling throughout human history.

Berlin's ideas about the ways Romanticism often takes "crude forms" of paranoia (107) are also helpful to read *The Unwritten*'s paranoid aesthetics. In the story, The Unwritten cabal operates in the shadows of history, and they police artistic creativity. The narrative logic is that the society limits the human imagination and human creativity to accumulate political power and influence, and they do so by recruiting authors to write for them or ruining authors who pose a large enough threat to their control over humankind. On one narrative level, the narrative's self-reflexive connections to fantasy literature, such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, and J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, suggest that The Unwritten acts as a dark force against which the characters must fight. On the mythological level, however, the cabal conveys ideas about otherwise ineffable historical forces that prevent humankind's progress.

Berlin's ideas about myth-making and paranoia suggest that the cabal conveys Carey and Gross's personal ideas about historical forces over which we have little or no control; the organization represents an ineffable force functioning throughout human history—a will

that seeks to dominate human life—and many artists become soldiers and freedom fighters through imaginative works.

Although he reads *The Unwritten* within a postmodern frame of knowledge, Wilkins opens the discourse to comparative readings with Romantic myths and paranoia by exploring *The Unwritten*'s relationship with Melville's *Moby-Dick*. In the story, Tom gains entrance into Melville's story, and he and Wilson Taylor assume character roles on the Pequod: Tom plays Bulkington, and Ahab is visualized in the likeness of Wilson. Wilkins writes, "Both character transcriptions display a keen understanding of the novel. Authorial power is exactly what Ahab demands, and the curious uncertainty of Bulkington's status in the text fits Tom's unstable position in *The Unwritten*: he might disappear at any time" (225-26). Here, Wilkins describes the ways that Carey and Gross create narrative parallels between the character functions in *The Unwritten* and *Moby-Dick*, and he continues comparatively reading *The Unwritten* with Melville's novel to determine narrative consistencies. Wilkins concludes that Carey and Gross's creative process of connecting *The Unwritten* to preexisting whale literature is consistent with the ways Melville encourages readers to understand *Moby-Dick*'s connections with preexisting mythologies of sea creatures, including the biblical Jonah: "*The Unwritten* stays true to the novel's intertextual web by weaving itself into the network of whale literature into which Melville wove *Moby-Dick*" (226).

Although Wilkins reads *The Unwritten* in a postmodern vein, his framework generates critical opportunities to explore the series's aesthetic intersections with Melville's mythology and, in turn, Romantic paranoia. If we read *The Unwritten*'s Leviathan as an artistic symbol structured by Melville's mythical figure, it suggests not

only that Carey and Gross intersect with creative processes that we find in Romantic myth-making but, also, Melville's structures of paranoia. Berlin describes how it is within Romantic myths that we find a "view of great images dominating humankind...[and it] spreads into every sphere of human activity, and is by no means confined to art" (124). Here, Berlin describes a particular pattern of myth-making that the Romantics energized—a pattern defined by the ways Romantic writers construct artistic images and symbols that convey ideas about ineffable powers asserting their will upon humankind. Melville's *Moby Dick* represents such a figure, and just like the novel, Carey and Gross transcribe the ambiguity of who the antagonist is—Ahab or the whale. We can expand on Wilkins's ideas about narrative consistencies with *Moby-Dick* if we read Carey and Gross's *Leviathan* in relation to the figure Moby Dick *and* The Unwritten cabal in relation to Ahab.

In "The Whiteness of the Whale," for instance, Melville's character Ishmael describes what Moby Dick represents, and the aesthetics align with Berlin's description of the ideas that Romantic myths convey. Melville writes,

Aside from those more obvious considerations touching Moby Dick, which could not but occasionally awake in any man's soul some alarm, there was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him, which at times by its intensity completely overpowered all the rest; and yet so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it, that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me....

Bethink thee of the albatross: whence those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature....

[It] is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind....And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt? (151, 152, 156-57)

Melville's *Moby Dick* becomes—to use Berlin's words—representative of a “vast, domineering” figure which stands “we know not for what, but certainly for something inexpressible” (123). For Berlin, these artistic symbols become an artist's effort to make intelligible larger, ineffable ideas about some “energy, force, will, life, *étalage du moi*” (18). Many Romantic authors thought that the only way of making such ideas accessible was through myth. Berlin writes,

[M]yths embody within themselves something inarticulable, and also manage to encapsulate the dark, the irrational, the inexpressible, that which conveys this deep darkness of this whole process, in images which themselves carry you to further images and which themselves point to some infinite direction. For [the Romantics] the Greeks understood life because Apollo and Dionysus were symbols, they were myths, who conveyed certain properties, and yet if you asked yourself what it was that Apollo stood for, what it was that Dionysus wanted, the attempt to spell this out in a finite number of words...was plainly an absurdity.

(121)

Here, Berlin explains that many Romantics committed to ideas of modernizing literature and elevating human integrity by creating modern mythologies. If we extend this frame of knowledge to Melville, Ishmael's description of the whale creates a figure that conveys ideas about the ineffable powers of nature: The whale simultaneously becomes sacred, holy, sublime, and inscrutable: It becomes a force of Nature thrusting itself upon human life.

An important distinction to make between the whale's aesthetics in *The Unwritten* and *Moby-Dick*, though, is that where Melville constructs Moby Dick as a force of Nature, Carey and Gross explicitly construct Leviathan as a symbol for an organic system of stories. In this vein, Leviathan's narrative consistency with Moby Dick is only insofar as it contains the system of whale literature to which Melville attaches the novel. The mythology's consistency, likewise, is only insofar as Leviathan becomes a larger symbol like Moby Dick: It becomes a symbol of the organic power of art to shape and reshape human history. On another, self-reflexive level, Carey and Gross use Leviathan to convey their personal ideas about their own relation to this figure and an *imagined* history. In tandem with mythological consistency, Carey and Gross's model of human history—and artists' role in it—intersects with Romantic paranoia.

In *The Unwritten*, Leviathan is an artistic symbol that conveys ideas about humankind's connections to a larger, organic network of imaginative storytelling that is always already in development and always already connected to human integrity. The character Madame Rausch comments on this relationship: "There is a symbiosis between humanity and Leviathan. We need each other.... Those who live by the imagination will feel it first. But in the end without story without the ability to step sideways from fact into

hypothesis human life is untenable” (*The Wound* 48). The key, here, is the “symbiotic” relationship that humankind has with Leviathan—how the organic story-system that the figure symbolizes sustains humankind and how humankind sustains the system through storytelling. This mythology elevates literary history by suggesting that humankind’s integrity and futurity depends on an organic system of stories—a natural, holy force. At the same time, the system’s life-force depends on humankind’s freedom to create and invest in imaginative stories, and Carey and Gross maintain consistency with Melville’s mythology by constructing The Unwritten cabal as assuming the role of Ahab.

Madame Rausch’s commentary on Leviathan captures the larger conspiratorial plot of *The Unwritten*, and Berlin’s and Pfau’s ideas about Romantic paranoia suggest that this conspiracy makes legible the historical conditions of paranoia that drive Carey and Gross’s creativity. The characters Tom, Lizzie, and Savoy discover that The Unwritten cabal intends to kill Leviathan to monopolize global influence on the human imagination. In *Tommy Taylor and the War of Words* (Volume 6), a character named Mister Pullman wounds the mythical figure by stabbing Tom, and a quote from Ahab reads in the background, “From hell’s heart I stab at thee” (203). Throughout the rest of the narrative, the characters must learn to harness the powers of storytelling to heal Leviathan and prevent the domination of the human imagination. This interpretive urgency to save the source of imaginative storytelling intersects with Berlin’s ideas about how paranoia is a psychological experience that defines one of two dominant patterns of Romantic creativity: “[T]wo quite interesting and obsessive phenomena...are then very present both in nineteenth- and in twentieth-century thought and feeling. One is nostalgia,

and the other is paranoia of a certain kind” (104). Paranoia, he suggests, is the more pessimistic version of romanticism:¹⁶

the conspiracy of history, by which you always look for concealed enemies, sometimes for larger and larger conceptions such as economic forces, the forces of production or class war...or the much vaguer and more metaphysical notion of the cunning of reason or of history (as in Hegel), which understands its goal much better than we do and plays tricks upon us. (107)

Here, Berlin explains how many Romantic artists *imagine* “concealed enemies” and historical conspiracies, and this way of thinking highlights an *interpretation* of what “plays tricks on” humankind and prevents us from reaching higher potentials. The implication is that when authors construct such ideas about historical forces, they serve as an entry-point into verifying paranoia as a condition of creativity. Carey and Gross reimagine literary history in *The Unwritten*, and *The Unwritten* cabal becomes a concealed enemy exerting some kind of will: They symbolize a hostile force against which artists must fight.

Pfau takes Berlin’s ideas about paranoia one step further, and his framework helps us read and better understand how *The Unwritten*’s paranoid narrative rebounds on the artists. He describes how Romantic authors energized paranoia as “a formal principle organizing and compelling a particular narrative...[a] deep-structural logic and social connectivity” (80). In this frame of knowledge, paranoia becomes legible in productive tensions between individual feeling and reality: Paranoia becomes a “deep-structural logic” in the narrative ways that artists *imagine* hostile historical forces and *imagine* ways of resisting them (81). In both Berlin’s and Pfau’s frames of knowledge, paranoid

narratives become part of a larger pattern of creativity during the Romantic period that persists through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. If we extend these ideas to *The Unwritten*, such a methodological step suggests that paranoia manifests at the narrative level in the ways Carey and Gross *reimagine* the history of imaginative storytelling as a campaign to facilitate the growth of an imaginative system and resist political domination. In the narrative, this system is always already in flux, always already unstable in Leviathan's and *The Unwritten*'s production and proliferation of meaning; it is a tension in which stories are produced. Moreover, Carey and Gross's ways of thinking about literary history as an unstable organic system rebounds on them. Pfau writes about paranoid narratives: "[T]he colloquial phrase 'It takes one to know one' unwittingly throws into relief...the observer's (still contingent) affinity with the observed" (80). This frame of knowledge suggests that Carey and Gross construct a personal myth about artists' responsibilities to engage imaginative storytelling to liberate humankind, and the logic follows that the artists connect their own creativity with a narrative energized by paranoia.

The Unwritten's two levels of narration suggest that it is necessary to understand the principles of imaginative literature in the story to better understand Carey and Gross's personal ideas about imaginative literature. Pfau's framework suggests that the ideas about imaginative literature that *The Unwritten* foregrounds define the narrative as paranoid: "[P]aranoia is at once enigmatic and prolific, inscrutable in its origins yet copious in its manifestations. It appears as an oblique psychological condition but quickly rebounds on any observer who ventures it as a hypothesis about the formal-aesthetic properties of someone else's discourse" (79). Within this frame of knowledge, Carey and

Gross's myth about humankind's historical urgency to combat forces through imaginative creativity reflect personal ideas about the urgency to create art to combat historical forces. We must always keep in mind that these ideas are *imagined*; they are an *interpretation*.

The Unwritten's interpretation that creative freedom in storytelling facilitates the growth of an organic system that benefits humankind is illusory and, thus, a paranoid narrative in two distinct ways. On one hand, Carey and Gross reinterpret literary history with a personal mythology. They draw attention to certain stories existing within a system that they construct as benefitting humankind, and the logic is that imaginative storytelling assumes a redemptive, didactic role: artists create imaginary worlds, populate them, and the characters exist in the minds of readers, altering their ways of thinking about their world and their behavior. Lizzie's comments about the differences between "for-real-true" and "story-true" (*Leviathan* 28) suggests a logic where the fictional and real intersect: People invest in fictional stories and characters *as if* they were real, imagining what fictional characters would do in the everyday situations in which they find themselves. In the story, stories become pedagogical: Humanity endures because artists participate in an ongoing development of imaginative storytelling, and readers continually respond to and invest in characters as pedagogical models. On the other hand, these *imagined* ideals of storytelling's redeeming qualities ironically commit Carey and Gross to them. The importance in recognizing these artistic ideals rests not only in the ways they recall prior values of art in literary history but, also, how we can better understand comics' relationships with traditional literature by drawing from literary-critical history. In the story, humankind's state of being depends on the relationships

between stories, and Carey and Gross's creative process also depends on their personal relationships with literature to which critical histories are attached.

In the last chapter of *Apocalypse* (Volume 11), Tom Taylor defeats his enemies by using magic to pull his enemies into "the only story where the whale wins": *Moby-Dick* (161). In the final issue, Tom sacrifices himself in using the Pequod as bait to lure Leviathan and allow the whale to consume him and the last of *The Unwritten*: Mister Pullman and Madame Rausch (*Apocalypse* 161). Simultaneously, Tom fulfills his heroic purpose while the event marks the end of the narrative. The Romantic paradigms of organicism and paranoia suggest how in completing *The Unwritten*, Carey and Gross fulfill an artistic purpose to contribute to what they imagine as a greater, organic system of stories. Carey and Gross's self-reflexive style emphasizes a commitment to an ongoing imaginative tradition that we may ground with Romantic ideas of artistic creativity and literary kinship. As Abrams writes, "The remarkable thing is that the system of [post-Kantian] Romantic philosophy...is itself represented as a moving system, a dynamic process which is driven by an internal source of motion to its own completion" (173). Here, Abrams discusses how Romantic ideals of artistic creativity provide narrative impetus: As many Romantic authors construct ideals about artistic creativity, these ideals energize their creativity to narrative completion. This paradigm suggests that Carey and Gross construct their mythology not only as growing from a system that contains canonical and popular works, but upon completion, their mythology also contributes to the growth of this system.

At the narrative level, Carey and Gross place new characters in familiar fictional worlds and have them connect with familiar literary characters to reveal how their

personal ideas about preexisting storytelling traditions energize their own creativity. These values suggest Carey and Gross construct an artistic identity based on ideas of participating in an ongoing, organic development of imaginative creativity that facilitates the organic growth of imaginative thought and, it follows, humankind's state of being. Carey and Gross's narrative suggests a personal logic of how comic book creators inherit artistic responsibilities to participate in a "moving system"—an ongoing imaginative tradition. By establishing a hermeneutics not only of the narrative but, also, the mythology, we better understand aspects of *The Unwritten*'s literary history and the ways in which comics writers inherit and transmit models of artistic value, purpose, and identity.

Throughout this project, my point for comics studies is that we need to begin a conversation of a large body of work that is, to use Abram's phrase, "not defined by absolute innovation" but by a greater awareness of literary tradition and a greater artistic ancestry. Carey and Gross, Gaiman, and Moore and Williams recall Romantic values of imaginative creativity, artistic identity and responsibility, and they become fundamental parts of narrative structure and impetus in *The Unwritten*, *Sandman*, and *Promethea*. Their self-reflexivity suggests that they connect with the value systems of artistic creativity that appear in their mythologies: Artistic purpose and identity become legible in their frames of knowledge, and we can trace these purposes through literary history and locate their intersections with Romantic models and ways of thinking about creativity. Carey and Gross's *The Unwritten* embeds an interpretation of itself as part of an organic system, and this model suggests the artists' greater awareness of the narrative's connections to literary history and their potential to connect comics readers

with a greater literary history of storytelling. The symbol of Leviathan embodies these ideas: a living story-system formed and sustained by works that exist within a collective imagination of readers. In the story's nods to its creative import, the organic "body" of readers—that is, Leviathan—suggests a cross-cultural, collective synergy of human creativity that affects and is affected by human experience. In this vein, it is important to understand the narrative's core values of artistic creativity to better understand Carey and Gross's experiences when creating *The Unwritten*. These values elevate the idea that stories—the authorial imagination—have the power to shape reality. The narrative's value system for reading literary history indicate how Carey and Gross construct an artistic identity based on ideas of fighting for imaginative freedom and contributing to an imaginative system contingent with human integrity. With a greater number of comics artists giving pride of place to understandings of art that recall Romanticism, as well as the tendency of literary scholarship to recognize bodies of work with thematic and aesthetic similarities, we need to extend the argument of Romanticism's afterlife to comics studies. A larger conversation needs to happen, for "here be Romantics."

CONCLUSION

In comics studies, many scholars' concerns with classifying comics as literature focus on the image-text nature of the medium and the question of whether "comics possess the kinds of values that are especially important in great literature" (Meskin 220). These concerns motivate Aaron Meskin's move beyond generic distinctions to examine the ways artists use image and text to create narrative structures, including characterization, plot, theme, and (among others) artistic purpose. He concludes that these narrative conventions indicate the medium's diverse artistic ancestries, of which literature is a part. In this vein, many narrative conventions of comics descend from literature, and we can trace them to existing literary paradigms. For Julie Sanders, the presence of literary elements within other mediums relocates standard value systems for reading. Once relocated, Sanders suggests how these value systems form a "structuring relationship" with narratives, which indicates the artist's individual relationship with the literary past (5). Meskin's ideas about comics' literary ancestry and Sanders's ideas about value system relocation create opportunities to explore the ways comics artists draw from and intersect with literary paradigms. Such ideas energized this project's exploration of the ways that Neil Gaiman's *Sandman*, Alan Moore and J. H. Williams III's *Promethea*, and Mike Carey and Peter Gross's *The Unwritten* demonstrate a literary heritage that we can trace from our contemporary moment to early nineteenth-century Romanticism.

In *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*, the artists transform literary history with invented mythologies, and they use myth as a vehicle to absorb literary history and, also, establish personal connections with it. In Chapter 1, for instance, I explore how Gaiman's *Sandman* transforms literary history into a mythology about the power of

dreams: The title character, Morpheus, is a deity of dreams who is responsible for sustaining the integrity of human consciousness, and historically-based literary authors, such as William Shakespeare, become extensions of his power. In Chapter 2, I explore the ways that Moore and Williams's *Promethea* converts literary history into mythology with a personal vision of the Kabbalist Tree of Life: The mythical figure Promethea is patron of The Immaterialia, a space/place from which all imaginative creativity emanates, and the logic of the narrative is that storytelling awakens the human imagination and reconnects humankind with the sacred world. In Chapter 3, I read how Carey and Gross's *The Unwritten* is a mythology that conveys ideas about a larger organic system of storytelling that shares a symbiotic relationship with human integrity: We as readers are encouraged to read the mythical figure Leviathan as representing ideas about the power of imaginative storytelling. Each chapter demonstrates how the artists construct forms of the imagination that intersect with what William Buckler describes as a faith in imaginative literature that "persists right through Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, and Lowell as the archetypal Romantic faith" (37). Meskin argues that we may "appropriately appreciate the literary aspects of a comic book...in light of the norms and styles and concerns that attach to literature" (239), and in this frame of knowledge, Buckler's ideas about a persistent Romantic faith not only help open the critical discourses of *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* specifically but, also, comics studies generally. Literary-critical history creates opportunities to read comics in ways that both challenge prevailing ideas about comics creativity and, also, create opportunities to explore a greater literary history of the medium.

The importance in better understanding the narrative activities of transforming literary history into mythology and elevating ideas about the role of imaginative literature in human history rests not only in how *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* intersect with early nineteenth-century myth-making: The artists write stories about the power of writing stories, and this self-reflexivity also suggests that the artists convey personal ideas about literary history. Chapters 1 – 3 demonstrate what happens when we extend Romantic critical frameworks to *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*, and this hermeneutic suggests that these comic book series offer comics studies opportunities to explore a greater literary history of myth-making in comics than hitherto suspected. Prevailing criticism tends to limit studies in mainstream fiction to comparative readings with classical mythology. For instance, one obvious interest in comics studies is the figure of the hero, and superhero fiction has become a rich source for critical inquiries into the medium's intersections with classical literature. Critics have conditioned the perception of the superhero genre as a "modern mythology" by exploring the ways that many superhero artists have a long history of drawing from classical mythology's literary paradigms and intersect with the creative processes of classical authors. The logic follows how mythological figures from antiquity provide literary models for superhero narrative designs.

Alex Romagnoli and Gian Pagnucci explain how reading superhero fiction as a "modern mythology" helped energized the perception of the genre as worthy of academic inquiry and generated important conversations about the place of superheroes in modern culture:

Viewing [superheroes] through a mythological lens puts a unique spin on the cultural significance of the genre, as mythology transcends generations and audiences. Superheroes achieve this level of significance in culture through both their physical stature and their propensity for being moral compasses.... There are, of course, numerous mythological figures that are similar to superheroes in both stature and personality including Achilles, Hector, Odysseus, and Gilgamesh. While these characters are undoubtedly worthy of intense academic analysis, they all have one characteristic in common: they're thousands of years removed from their initial audiences. This point of contention is not intended to diminish the historical, cultural, and social significance of these classic characters. What this is intended to do is make a case for studying the modern-day representations of the ideals that these characters hold...[T]he tales of superheroes endure because they represent culture, society, values, hopes, dreams, fears, and humanity all wrapped up in colorful stories that can be effectively explored in any medium. (14, 17)

Within this framework, superheroes intersect with classical literary models in the ways that they recall classical ideals of virtue and heroism. In short, these ideas about superheroes posit how their images serve modern culture in ways similar to how mythical heroes served ancient cultures. The problem with such studies is not so much in exploring comics' intersections with classical literary history as much as the critical narrative tends to be limited: Comparative readings of comics and myth-making in other cultures and in more recent times remain relatively unexplored. The artists' creative processes in *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* intersect with creative processes that we find in Romantic myth-making, and this project argues for a more formal hermeneutics of these

comic book series in relation to the “values, hopes, dreams, and fears” in nineteenth-century myths.

Each chapter of this project draws from Romantic criticism to construct frameworks to read Gaiman’s, Moore and Williams’s, and Carey and Gross’s activity of transforming literary history into myths that elevate different forms of the literary imagination: the Chestertonian imagination in *Sandman*; the hermetic imagination in *Promethea*; and Romantic organicism in *The Unwritten*. Isaiah Berlin discusses how the activity of myth-making is “the heart of the romantic movement” (122), and literary history becomes a rich source for early nineteenth-century myths. M. H. Abrams describes how Romanticism’s “principal works of the imagination...gave literature and the arts a prominent—Schelling, in his central period, the cardinal—place in their metaphysical systems” (192-193). Abrams continues to explain how Romantic works of philosophy and imaginative literature intersect “in ideas, in design, and even in figurative detail” (193). Berlin’s ideas about Romantic myths and Abrams’s ideas about the place of art in Romantic ways of thinking provide a backdrop for reading and better understanding the forms of imagination that we find in *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*. This hermeneutic opens up not only the respective discourses of these series, but it also constructs a critical model for reading a greater literary history of myth-making in comics that is not irreconcilable with current comics criticism.

Ben Saunders’s ideas about avoiding aesthetic hierarchies and boundaries help open up comics studies to the medium’s greater literary history. Saunders explains how the “nascent academic field of comics studies is already divided from within, along lines that replicate the most basic division of the American comic-book market: the division

between genre works (dominated by but not limited to superhero stories) and what we might call ‘literary nonfiction’” (“Divisions...” 293). Here, Saunders responds to Hillary Chute’s ideas about nonfiction comics being the “strongest” and “most important” genre (Chute 452, 459), and these concerns about keeping lines of inquiry open along generic lines apply to the ways that prevailing criticism tends to limit comparative readings of mainstream comics to classical mythology. In this vein, my project invites comics studies scholars to open up the discourse and discover a plenitude of critical opportunities: We can delimit comparative readings of mainstream fiction from any one period of literary history or any one form of myth-making. This Conclusion, therefore, draws attention to the ways that current criticism provides models to explore the ways that Gaiman’s *Sandman*, Moore and Williams’s *Promethea*, and Carey and Gross’s *The Unwritten* intersect with Romantic myth-making. I conclude by highlighting how such a methodology offers literary studies and comics studies alternative ways to think about the transmission of literary history to comics and the historical implications of transmission when artists use narratives to validate the human imagination and human creativity as valuable: They affirm and reaffirm the value of their own craft, and this feature intersects with what Thomas Pfau discusses as an “emphatically *analytic* quality at the very core of paranoia” (84 Pfau’s emphasis).

Literary-historical intersections between superhero fiction and classical mythology have generated critical insights that explore the place of classical mythology in the popular imagination, classical mythology’s place in comics studies, and how comparative studies help us better understand creative processes not only in comics but, also, in classical literature. George Kovacs, for instance, reads the ways that many

superhero narratives draw from classical mythology and create new myths about figures that exist in the popular imagination, such as Thor and Hercules. These mythical figures exist in both the Marvel and DC comic book universes, and Kovacs's framework suggests that there are a variety of narrative consequences in relocating classical gods and heroes within the comics medium:

[W]hether a comic employs cosmetic borrowings to augment a narrative, appropriates a classical model to a different time or place, or realizes the ancient world as a setting for its story...[it] tells us something about the place of antiquity in the popular consciousness of our own cultural contexts. At their best, comics supply a new way of understanding the Greco-Roman culture and history that classicists have been engaged for centuries. (24)

The presence of these literary elements, Kovacs argues, signals not only how classical literature plays a generative role in comics creativity, but these presences also "supply us with new critical tools" (24) that help us better understand audience reception and creative process of classical literature.

C. W. Marshall takes Kovacs's ideas about creative process a step further by arguing that both comic book artists and classical authors similarly "adapt figures for their own narrative ends, are aware of what has gone before, and situate their own creative work in an ever-evolving continuum" (90). Comic book artists' creative processes, in this vein, synchronize with classical authors' creative processes in the ways that artists adapt superheroes, concurrently, with the "innovations to [mythical figures'] identit[-ies] in antiquity" (90). Creative process becomes defined by the ways that comic book artists frequently develop characters in ways that parallel classical literary

traditions. Marshall's ideas about synchronic creative processes and Kovacs's framework for reading the presence of preexisting literary elements create space to explore comic books in relation to other creative processes that we find in literary periods; each chapter of this project considers how the presence of preexisting literary elements affect narrative structure and purpose in *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*, and each chapter considers how these series "supply us with new critical tools" to reread and better understand the persistence of Romantic ways of thinking up through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century.

Chapter 1 explores Gaiman's artistic motives for incorporating the author G. K. Chesterton within *Sandman*, and I conclude that *Sandman* leads curious readers to better understandings not only of Chesterton's influences on Gaiman's faith in imaginative literature but, also, better understandings of Chesterton's place both in the literary history of modernism and in the larger literary project of reenchancement. Chapter 2 explores the ways that Moore and Williams draw upon ideas from the hermetic imagination in *Promethea*, and I conclude that this series invites curious readers to better understand the hermetic world-view as part of the project of reenchancement as well as an extension of a group of artists "who, in certain ways, carried Romanticism further" than the Romantics themselves: the French Symbolists (Wilson 11). Chapter 3 explores how Carey and Gross's ideas about the relationship between storytelling and human history in *The Unwritten* intersect with Romantic ways of thinking about human history as an organic system, and I conclude that this series becomes an extension of what Berlin describes as a Romantic phenomenon that "obsesses the twentieth century to some extent": paranoia (106). The forms of imagination in *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* have one

quality in common: They are part of narratives that stress an interpretive urgency to create art—an urgency seen in the ways that the artists use narrative to reevaluate historical conditions of modernity and posit how resolutions can be achieved within aesthetic realms.

Saunders's ideas about the limitations of reading, comparatively, comics and classical literature suggest that it is not enough to explore the presence of literary elements at narrative levels. His ideas are helpful to open lines of inquiry that explore historical conditions of creativity, and I quote him at length to avoid distorting his position:

These days, everyone knows that Superman is really Jesus Christ—sent to Earth by his heavenly father to be raised as a mortal among mortals, perform miracles, and model the ultimate virtue of self-sacrifice. Except, of course, there are also those who know that Superman is not Jesus at all, but Moses—a savior-figure who escapes deadly peril as a baby in a floating capsule, to grow up gifted with great powers and burdened with great responsibilities. But then, there are those who see Superman as an obvious incarnation of the Egyptian god, Horus—the mightiest member of a race of other-worldly beings, deriving his magical abilities from the sun, and following a parental directive to protect the people in his charge. And then again, there are those who say that since Superman's stories resemble Greek myths more than those of ancient Egypt, he's really closer to Hercules—a colorful adventurer, half-god, half-mortal, best known for his serial feats of impossible strength. (*Do the Gods Wear Capes?* 16)

Here, Saunders exposes a twofold problem when critics comparatively read superhero comics with literature from classical antiquity: First, he explains how the intersections between superheroes and ancient mythologies proliferate, and he concludes that scholars who claim a superhero for one tradition or another seem to have a vested interest in their own “conceptual categories” (17). I would add that it should also come as no surprise that artists who work on the same comic book title and create stories about the same character at different points in time draw from different mythological and religious traditions for creative processes. It is for this reason that it is not essential to examine a comic book’s intersections with the literary past unless we isolate a narrative and examine its literary-historical components.

The second problem that Saunders highlights is a natural limitation or logical conclusion to this proliferation of intersections between superheroes and classical and religious figures: They lead to Joseph Campbell’s ideas about the Monomyth Cycle, from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell’s Monomyth outlines “key elements of a heroic ur-narrative [that] repeat themselves across different civilizations and time periods” (Saunders *Do the Gods Wear Capes?* 16). Saunders argues that much myth-criticism in comics is heavily influenced by Campbell’s comparative methods, and he concludes that such readings become limited to understanding narrative structures with religion and mythology in mind while losing sight of the conditions of creativity and the historical terms of transforming literary materials. For example, he reads Superman’s 1938 debut, in *Action Comics* #1, within the context of its emergence in an increasingly secular modernity:

[Critics] who decode Superman in terms of a particular myth invariably gloss over the fact that he is very much a product of popular modernism—first emerging during an era famously associated with the collapse of traditional belief systems and a widespread crisis of faith....To insist on Superman’s origins in secular modernity is not to deny that his stories negotiate religious and mythical territory—of course they do. But so does T. S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland,” and the terms of *that* negotiation are notoriously complex. Rejecting the traditional critical prejudice against mass cultural forms, why should we assume that comic books are always simpler than poems when it comes to processing and transforming their primary materials? (17 Saunders’s emphasis)

Here, Saunders maintains the position that superheroes emerged as “fantastic, speculative, and distinctly modern expressions” (3), and his point is that to read them outside of their historical context is to miss important understandings of an artist’s creative terms. This reading suggests that there are important conversations to have about comics’ greater literary history, beyond classical mythology and beyond reading creative process as a form of imitation. Each chapter of this project avoids losing sight of the ways Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross negotiate preexisting literary elements within historically-distinctive conditions. It is for this reason that each chapter isolates narrative, examines the presence of preexisting literary-historical elements, and considers what happens when we read *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* as historically-distinct modern expressions.

In *Sandman*, for instance, Gaiman invites curious readers to explore his motives for absorbing the author Chesterton into “the heart” of the mythology, and hermeneutics

suggest that Gaiman becomes an extension of the larger project of modernity: reenchanted the world. In *Promethea*, Moore and Williams invite readers to follow Promethea through the *sefirot* in the Kabbalist Tree of Life, and they dedicate eleven issues for readers to explore ideas about the imagination's capabilities to awaken humankind to existences and truths beyond the material world. *Promethea*, in this way, becomes an extension of Western occult movements of the early-twentieth century that emerged alongside fantasy writers as allies in the modern project of rechantment. In *The Unwritten*, Carey and Gross encourage readers to understand how the history of storytelling is energized by an organic system of stories that is always already in flux, and in Chapter 3, I argue that this way of thinking about literary history recalls Romantic models of organicism and paranoia. My larger argument is that better understanding the form of imagination that each narrative constructs helps us better understand the forms of imagination with which Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross connect. These forms of imagination become the tools that the artists use to negotiate literary-historical materials in "mythical territory," and they help us better understand the historical complexity of their negotiations.

Thomas Pfau's paradigm of paranoia offers another way to better understand how the "religious and utilitarian strictures" of Romanticism from which twentieth-century authors allegedly freed themselves (Saler 31) are not as confining as they seem to be. When we extend Pfau's framework to *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten*, it suggests that the connections Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross establish with early twentieth century projects work on at least two levels: They become extensions not only of narrative activities energized by the Romantics but, also, the

historically-distinct psychological climate of that project. On one level, the artists invent personal mythologies and use them as vehicles to reinterpret literary history as a force driving human history. Narrative impetus in *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* becomes defined by ideas about the role of art in humankind's educational history and the artist's responsibilities to a historical system. On another level, this narrative activity fits Pfau's description of paranoia being a "formal principle organizing and compelling a particular narrative" (80). Each series becomes distinct and distinctly different in the connections that the artists make with the literary past and the forms of imagination that the mythical figures Morpheus, Promethea, and Leviathan represent. However, Pfau's framework becomes as versatile as there are differing forms of Romanticism and differing traditions on which Romanticism is an influence. Pfau suggests that one way of "gauging the temper of a particular period...is to identify a dominant rhetorical or formal-aesthetic pattern. The symptomatic and, potentially, evidentiary value of such a pattern increases to the extent that it can be traced across a wide spectrum of writings" (78). In this frame of knowledge, "symbolic representation" (81) manifests from a subject's productive tension with historical forces. Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross construct symbols that convey ideas about human history as driven by the imaginative creativity with which they are engaged, and Pfau's framework suggests that these narratives manifest from an "anxious perception of history" (79)—a perception that makes a historically-distinct mood legible as a condition of creativity across a broad array of comics creativity.

What does reading Romantic paranoia in comics offer critical discourse? Vertigo Comics's reputation in the mainstream comics community is defined by artists'

tendencies to incorporate preexisting literary elements within narratives, and they do so within either an original or preexisting “comics universe.” Michael Saler extends his concepts of a larger discourse of world-building to “the Marvel Comics’ Universe and the DC Comics ‘Multiverse’” (5), and Pfau can build on his ideas and help us orient to the presence of Romantic moods in these imaginary worlds at structural levels. In mainstream fiction, a comics universe is defined by teams of artists who simultaneously tell stories about characters existing in the same imaginary space/place but appearing across different publication titles. The exceptions to characters appearing in solo titles are crossover events (when the events and characters of one title appear in, affect, or are affected by the events of another title) and team narratives (when characters from multiple titles all appear in one title, i.e., *The Justice League*). Each character’s actions—whether in a solo title, a crossover event, or team narrative—can affect the entire comics universe.

What Cyril Camus does for the discourse is argue how Moore’s and Gaiman’s resistance to “mainstream superhero fiction” in the 1980s and early 1990s energized a distinctive mood in comics creativity, but he never identifies this mood beyond “dark fantasy” (156). Opportunities to expand on this aspect of the current discourse rest with Pfau’s paradigm of paranoia: By reading narrative ideas that contain an interpretive urgency to sustain (*Sandman*), awaken (*Promethea*), and develop (*The Unwritten*) the human imagination, paranoia becomes a legible, verifiable condition energizing creativity in comics. What is more, while concentrating on the intersections between *Sandman*, *Promethea*, *The Unwritten*, and Romanticism, we may also consider aesthetics of the titles as part of a larger discourse of mainstream fiction—as part of a larger discourse of

paranoia. Romagnoli and Pagnucci discuss the “larger issue of comic books and superhero stories as evolving mythologies” (2), and they make the case that mainstream superheroes “represent culture, society, values, hopes, dreams, fears, and humanity all wrapped up in colorful stories that can be effectively explored in any medium” (17). In this frame of knowledge, it is equally important to consider how Gaiman, Moore and Williams, and Carey and Gross convey ideas about the urgency to create art that stems from humanity’s “hopes, dreams and fears,” and the artists attach their narratives to mainstream comics universes—to the fans, the companies, the imaginary places, events, and superheroes therein. Considering the titles’ narrative connections to larger comics universes does not problematize a reading of mood as much as it strengthens it.

For example, the events in *Sandman* take place in the DC Universe (DCU), wherein Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Martian Manhunter, and (among others) John Constantine exist. One way that Gaiman attaches the narrative to this universe is in “Imperfect Hosts” (Issue #2, Volume 1 of the series), wherein the houses of Secrets and Mysteries appear (64). Not only has DC Comics owned the rights to incorporate these imaginary spaces/places within their stories since 1968, but they are spaces/places beyond reality that appear in multiple DC and Vertigo titles, including Moore’s *Saga of the Swamp Thing*, Jamie DeLano’s *Hellblazer*, and (among others) Peter Milligan’s *Justice League Dark*. It is also worth noting that Gaiman’s character Dream of The Endless still exists in and affects the DCU, and one of the figure’s more recent interactions was with Batman in the 2017 comic book series *Dark Nights: Metal* (Snyder and Capullo 29). There are many elements from the DCU to which *Sandman* is connected, but my point is that Gaiman clearly attaches the narrative to it, and not only

does this attachment affect *Sandman* on many structural levels of narrative, but the mythological worlds, characters, and literary events within *Sandman* also affect the DCU on a larger scale.

Carey and Gross's *The Unwritten* is a title published by Vertigo but is not directly attached to the DCU. However, Carey and Gross construct narrative connections to the *Sandman* spin-off title *The Books of Magic*, and they conduct a crossover event with another Vertigo title: Bill Willingham's *Fables*. As *The Unwritten*'s protagonist, Tom Taylor, moves through imaginary worlds, he enters Fabletown (*Orpheus in the Underworld* 169), which is an imaginary community in Willingham's series that contains characters from traditional fairy tales, folklore, and legend, such as Snow White, the Big Bad Wolf, and (among others) Prince Charming.¹⁷ The event not only connects *The Unwritten* to a larger comic book universe but a comic book universe defined by its connections to traditional literature. In this way, just as in *Sandman*, *The Unwritten* is connected to larger creative projects in comics—a larger public discourse. Likewise, Moore and Williams's *Promethea* is set in the same comics universe as *Tom Strong*, another ABC title Moore wrote with artist Chris Sprouse at the time. The events of *Promethea: Book 5*—wherein Promethea fulfills her duty to usher in an apocalypse of the human imagination—affect and are affected by the characters in *Tom Strong*.

With each title connected to a larger comics universe and, therefore, a larger discourse, *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* offer us opportunities to explore what Pfau discusses as a historically-distinct “cognitive event” that becomes legible in discursive structures (31). Pfau writes, “Emotions thus are not ‘owned’ by an individual...but, instead, are experienced as a [historical] dynamic or mood” (31). Here,

Pfau discusses how emotions are not individually distinct but are part of a historically-distinct network. This framework suggests that structures of paranoia contained within *Sandman*, *The Unwritten*, and *Promethea* transfer to titles in their respective comics universes. In this vein, we can consider how crossover events not only entail characters from one title crossing over into other titles but, also, historically-distinct formal patterns of representation crossing over into other titles. With this understanding, this project creates space for developing lines of historical inquiry in terms of mood not only for *Sandman*, *Promethea*, and *The Unwritten* but, also, for the larger discourse of mainstream fiction. Tracing aesthetics of historical representation in comics to the early twentieth century and beyond creates opportunities to identify mood as a formal-aesthetic paradigm. In this way, mood can be identified as a formal-aesthetic paradigm in comics creativity. Mood warrants closer attention in comics studies as an integral part of the medium's formal structures.

Notes

1. A period designating mainstream comics from the mid-1980s to the present.
2. I only name Gaiman as the artist of *Sandman* because he works with multiple artistic teams, whereas Mike Carey and Peter Gross as well as Alan Moore and J. H. Williams III work together for the entirety of their stories' runs.
3. Mike Carey took the helm of Vertigo's *Lucifer* series in its June 2000 debut, and Peter Gross joined the creative team in issue #5. They were to stay on the title until August 2006.
4. Nalo Hopkinson writes *The House of Whispers*; Kat Howard writes *The Books of Magic*; Si Spurrier writes *The Dreaming*; and Dan Watters writes *Lucifer*.
5. To reveal Gaiman's interests in integrative fiction, Camus cites the introduction to "A Study in Emerald," a short story which brings together Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos:

As a boy I had loved Philip Jose [*sic*] Farmer's Wold Newton stories, in which dozens of characters from fiction were incorporated into one coherent world, and I had greatly enjoyed watching my friends Kim Newman and Alan Moore build their own Wold Newton-descended worlds.... It looked like fun. I wondered if I could try something like that. (qtd. in Camus 150)

From here, Camus extends Gaiman's ambition to create a Wold Newton-descended world to *Sandman* and, also, to Gaiman's larger body of work, both in and out of comics (151).
6. Karen Berger can be largely credited with the Vertigo line of comics. As Editor, she recruited most of the British artists during the 1980s and early 1990s, including Alan

- Moore, Neil Gaiman, and Grant Morrison. Carpenter writes that she became “one of the key players in the British Invasion” (51).
7. According William Buckler, Romantic ideas about imaginative literature have persisted up through the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century (37). Isaiah Berlin also describes the Romantic era as “the greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West that has occurred, and all the other shifts which have occurred in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries appear...in comparison less important, and at any rate deeply influenced by it” (1-2). He continues to explain how it is within this time period that certain patterns of creativity emerged from distinct modes of thought.
 8. In its original single-issue print, “The Promethea Puzzle” appears in the final pages of Issue #1, titled “The Radiant Heavenly City.”
 9. See, for instance, W. B. Yeats and Edwin John Ellis’s *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*.
 10. Wilson writes, “Yeats, the ablest of the *fin de siècle* group who tried in London to emulate the French, managed to make Symbolism flourish....Eliot in his earliest poems seems to have been as susceptible to the influence of the Symbolists as to that of the English Elizabethans. Joyce, a master of Naturalism as great as Flaubert, has at the same time succeeded in dramatizing Symbolism by making use of its methods for differentiating between his various characters and their varying state of mind. And Gertrude Stein has carried Mallarmé’s principles so far in the directions of that limit where other lungs find air unbreathable as perhaps finally to reduce them to absurdity” (21).

11. It is important to distinguish Yeats's ideas about "magic" from the "magic" of popular fantasy worlds, such as J. K. Rowling's wizarding world of *Harry Potter*. Mann explains, "The system of exams in geomancy and alchemy and magical grades may sometimes seem reminiscent of Harry Potter's world, but in the end ritual magic is about aligning the forces of microcosm and macrocosm." The hermetic view is not about physical magic but of aligning the individual to the larger system of the cosmos.
12. Please see the Conclusion to this project for a discussion of critical tendencies to limit mainstream comics to classical literature.
13. From 1994 until 1998, Gross contributed artwork to the series, and he then took over writing *and* drawing the title until 2000, ending his run with issue #75.
14. For curious readers, *The Books of Magic* #1 was published in 1990, predating J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series by about seven years.
15. Please refer to Chapter 1 for a longer discussion of how Gaiman and Alan Moore are connected to Farmer's Wold Newton Universe.
16. He defines nostalgia as the desire to convey a longing to "go back, to go back home to what is pulling and drawing [us], the famous infinite *Sehnsucht* of the romantics, the search for the blue flower, as Novalis called it" (104).
17. It should be noted that we can also see how it may be logical to read *Fables* as descended from the Wold Newton larger narrative design.

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