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Shakespeare is still alive... in the World of Comic Books

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Ca' Foscari
Dorsoduro 3246
30123 Venezia

Relatore

Prof. Shaul Bassi

Correlatrice

Prof. Laura Tosi

Laureando

Alice Montanari

Matricola 830387

Anno Accademico

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A mio nonno Paolo, che da buon maestro mi ha saputo insegnare l'amore per lo studio e ai miei genitori Elisabetta e Antonio, che sempre credono in me e nei miei progetti.

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Introduction

Once you've written something it's not yours any longer: it belongs to other people.

Neil Gaiman¹

Nowadays William Shakespeare has become part of a global collective consciousness. His plays have lasted in the public imagination and they still continue to be a discussed topic among scholars, to thrill readers and to inspire new adaptations. Shakespearean plays are spread through different means – theatre, books, television and cinema being the most common- and every adaptation of his works lets the audience see Shakespeare from another point of view. Sometimes an adaptation becomes the first approach to Shakespeare's plays – for young students, for example- and helps people to better understand a play, reducing the distance between a modern day audience and Shakespeare's works and background. For those who have already been in contact with Shakespeare, adaptations can be seen as an opportunity to expand their knowledge of the topic, to learn something of interest about the author, or to see him and his plays from another author's point of view.

The characterization of Shakespeare's position has changed over the years. During the Elizabethan age the theatre was a booming business and was as popular as cinema today; it was part of popular culture and attracted a great amount of people. At first, plays were performed on temporary stages in inn-yards. Soon playhouses were built for this purpose, but theatres were also used for immoral purposes such as gambling and bear beating. These playhouses attracted huge crowds and many Londoners objected to the risk of spreading Plagues and the rise in crime, so the public presentation of the plays was banned within the borders of the city. Shakespearean plays, then,

¹ Neil Gaiman, "The Sandman Papers", NEIL GAIMAN (blog), July 16, 2015, http://www.neilgaiman.com/Cool_Stuff/Essays/Introductions/The_Sandman_Papers

arose in this period as part of popular and “low” culture, but - due to the theatre’s shift to “high” culture and the growing interest of scholars and academics- over the years Shakespeare has come to be associated with highbrow culture.

Despite Lawrence Levine’s portrayal of Shakespeare’s position in the twentieth century as highbrow in his paper “William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation”², nowadays the divisions between what is considered “high” and “low” culture are unstable and Shakespeare has become part of a shared culture – his plays are quoted in songs and books, his life and works inspire films and adaptations of different types. Annalisa Castaldo, in fact, states “investigation into the reasons for Shakespeare's personal popularity suggests that his image functions much as his plays do - at once apparently stable and yet completely malleable.”³ Her essay is part of a collection which tries to define Shakespeare’s position in our modern-day society and to find the origins of his integration into current popular culture. The growing presence of Shakespeare in popular culture is, in fact, evident and for this reason it is arguable that he is still relevant to a present-day audience.

Among the modern forms of adaptations, comic books and graphic novels are the most suitable to demonstrate how Shakespeare is now part of popular culture and can also reach young people. This dissertation will prove that “comics might be considered a worthy successor to the Elizabethan stage”⁴, as Castaldo puts it in her essay, comic book representations of Elizabethan

² Lawrence W. Levine, “William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation”, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (Feb., 1984): pp. 34-66, published by: Oxford University Press. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1855917>

³ Annalisa Castaldo, “No More Yielding than a Dream: The Construction of Shakespeare in *The Sandman*”, *College Literature*, Vol. 31, No. 4, Shakespeare and Popular Culture (Fall, 2004): p. 95, published by: College Literature. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115230>

⁴ Castaldo, “No More Yielding than a Dream”, 98.

theatre are, in fact, a mixture of words and images and attract a great amount of people. Following this pattern, the dissertation will compare the two plays *A Midsummer Night's Dream*⁵ and *The Tempest*⁶ to their adaptations as presented by Gaiman in issues of his graphic novel, *The Sandman*. This is a comic book series published by DC comics from January 1989 to March 1996 and it is composed by 75 issues, from the number 47 under Vertigo imprint.

Chapter 1 will focus first on Shakespeare's adaptations, trying to retrace an history of the works which adapted or have been inspired by the playwright's works. The chapter will focus especially on the adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, and a section will be devoted to Shakespeare's works adapted with the language of comics. Finally the chapter will explore Shakespeare's position in his and our culture, in order to explore the shift from popular to high culture mentioned above.

The dissertation will explore then, in Chapter 2, Gaiman's life and works especially focusing on his collaboration with Dc comics. Analysing *The Sandman* the chapter will focus in particularly on issues 19⁷ and 75⁸ (which are not only Shakespeare adaptations, but also present Shakespeare as a character) and then on the audience's reaction to its publication. The dissertation will finally highlight how the fact that *Sandman 19* was the only comic book to win a World Fantasy Award led to a change of the comic book's position in culture.

Chapter 3 contains a comparison between Shakespeare's plays *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* and their adaptations in Gaiman's *The Sandman*. The comparison will underline differences and

⁵ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004).

⁷ Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: Dream Country* (vol. 3), (New York: DC comics, 1991).

⁸ Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991).

similarities between the works and the ways in which these two different authors treat the same themes – the contrast between dream and reality and the authorship, for example. The chapter will conclude comparing the two different means of conveying these stories – the play and the graphic novel.

The dissertation concludes with a chapter which discusses the possible use of comic books in teaching. If, on the one hand, the use of images and words can help young students to approach and understand what they are studying, comic book adaptations *do* have their limitations and cannot contain the entire text of a book.

Chapter 1

William Shakespeare: The Afterlife

Somewhat like a Dior suit, Shakespeare never ages and eludes all historical implication.

Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor.⁹

The first chapter of this dissertation will attempt to retrace the history of Shakespearean adaptations, after having discussed which medium and themes were typical of each period, the focus will be in particular on two Shakespeare's plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. The main adaptations of the two Shakespearean plays taken in exam will be discussed, in order to show how these have been recreated. Therefore a section will be devoted to Shakespeare and the language of comics, especially focusing on comics adaptations of the two Shakespearean plays mentioned above. Finally, an analysis of the figure of Shakespeare will follow being him part of the collective consciousness, in order to understand how it has changed until today, shifting from highbrow to lowbrow or even to a shared culture.

1.1

An History of Shakespeare's Adaptations

“As long as there have been plays by Shakespeare, there have been adaptations of those plays.”¹⁰, in fact since the seventeenth century Shakespeare's works have been reinvented, remaked, and adapted. But – as Daniel Fischlin points out- Shakespeare himself adapted other stories into new forms. Nevertheless the figure of Shakespeare had been subject of a great amount of scholars studies making his works almost untouchable. Since the

⁹ Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology* (New York: Routledge Library Editions, 1987), 6.

¹⁰ Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, *Adaptations of Shakespeare: A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present* (Usa and Canada: Routledge, 2000), 1.

spread of the critical theory although, the focus has been moved to issues as context, authorship, originality, text sources, and meaning. This section offers an overview of how Shakespeare has been perceived and adapted until today. Secondly an excursus about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, will be provided, focusing in particular on their modern adaptations.

“The Shakespeare industry and its adaptations have a long history in many media.”¹¹, but let us begin by the seventeenth century attempting to show Shakespeare’s reputation among his contemporaries and the first adaptations of one of his works. Though it is hard to assess information about theatre and literature of that time because critical commentaries did not appear until the reign of Charles I, the facts of Shakespeare’s reputation can be guessed from some evidences. One of these is a list of leading poets in which Shakespeare has been included, and in fact his poems were reprinted more than his plays, but it is true that plays were written for performance and avoiding to print them was useful because other companies cannot use Shakespeare’s plays for their representations. Nevertheless the regular patronage of his company by the court – that in 1603 James I turned into the King’s Men- suggests the popularity of his plays.

The Woman’s Prize by John Fletcher dates from 1611 and it is one of the adaptations of the seventeenth century. Fletcher began to work in theatres of London around 1606, his collaborations with Beaumont are well known – plays such as *The Maid’s Tragedy* and *Philaster*. “Fletcher has the distinction, therefore, of being Shakespeare’s adapter, collaborator, and successor.”¹², in fact Fletcher has collaborated with Shakespeare since 1612 and succeeded him in the King’s Men after his retirement. *The Woman’s Prize* is an adaptation, or better said a sequel of *The Taming of the Shrew* and in a certain way the two plays are opposing, because in Fletcher’s version women triumph over

¹¹ Fischlin and Fortier, *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, 16.

¹² Fischlin and Fortier, *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, 23.

men. These two plays were both played at the court of Charles I and Fletcher's version were even much appreciated than the source text.

From 1642 to 1660 during the Interregnum, Puritans banned all public stage performances, but short versions of the most famous plays were reproduced; among them also Shakespeare's plays. Among the most performed scenes were the scenes of Bottom of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and various *Hamlet's* scenes. In 1660 theatres opened again and during The Restoration Shakespeare was one of the most popular playwrights – with Jonson, Beaumont, and Fletcher- to be adapted. Music, light, machines, and fireworks were added at the sophisticated adaptations of Restoration, in which also the texts were modified for the stage. A well known adaptation of this period is *The History of King Lear* by Nahum Tate, the happy-ending *King Lear* of 1681, which had not a great success. *The Tempest* then, was adapted into an opera with special effects by William Devenant.

During the eighteenth century Shakespeare dominated the London stage and productions of his plays created star actors. However he has not yet achieved his actual fame and when his plays were staged their adaptations – such as *The Tempest* by Devenant and Dryden (1667) - were preferred. During the century his popularity rose, increasing attention was paid to textual criticism, and a great emphasis on fidelity to the original Shakespearean works was given. Editions of his collected works were published such as Nicholas Rowe's edition of 1709 – considered the first truly scholarly text for the plays- which was followed by several editions, the most famous is Edmund Malone's landmark *Variorum Edition*, which was published in 1821 – after his death- and on which modern editions are based. These collections of Shakespeare's works were not meant for staging, but for reading and helped increasing his popularity. Nevertheless Shakespeare's puns and sexual allusions were removed by several authors, as Alexander Pope (1725) but by mid-century these aspects were back in adaptations. Moreover Drury Lane David Garrick – important actor of this period- had a great role in spreading Shakespeare plays; in fact he promoted himself and Shakespeare at the same

time with events like the Shakespeare Jubilee (1769), a three- day festival in Stratford.

“The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries saw adulation of Shakespeare rise to unprecedented heights”¹³ in fact the playwright became the symbol of the Romantic vision of the artist. The Shakespearean industry grew quickly, Stratford became a touristic centre, and English Literature started to be seen as a subject for academic study. As far as the nineteenth century performances are concerned, the adaptations were cut and remade to underline the soliloquies and the stars, moreover the stage on which actors of Elizabethan period would come forward for audience contact was replaced and the actors stayed permanently behind the fourth wall, separated from the audience by the orchestra. *King Stephen* by John Keats (1819) is a nineteenth century adaptation. This play is an unfinished tragedy which represents an attempt to reproduce a Shakespearean history play.

Shakespeare began to be considered the greatest English writer of all times in the twentieth century and both amateur and professional stagings of Shakespeare’s plays were very common. High-quality and well-annotated texts circulated and stagings of Shakespearean plays were textually faithfully but setting, stage, directions, and costuming were various. During this century however, performances reflected the tensions of the times and they could be very interpretive. Directors could decide to focus on Marxism, Feminism, or Freudian interpretations but the texts remained basically faithful to the original. One example is *The Public* by Federico Garcia Lorca of 1978 – performed in 1986-87 – which is original and experimental- “The surreal content of the play, the abstract and highly symbolic action of the plot, the treatment of sexual difference, and the critique of conservative theatre”¹⁴ are the main features of this challenging adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare then, was adapted with a different medium, cinema. *Romeo +*

¹³ Helen Hackett, *A Short History of English Renaissance Drama* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 192.

¹⁴ Fischlin and Fortier, *Adaptations of Shakespeare*, 103.

Juliet (1996) by Baz Luhrmann gained great success with young audience because set in modern days during a gang war. The famous *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) then, using Shakespearean motifs like the cross-dressing combined modernity and authenticity.

In the twenty-first century international films on Shakespeare proliferated, as well as tv series. In 2005 the BBC series *Shakespeare Re-Told* adapted four Shakespearean plays setting them in present-day. Nevertheless the emerging digital culture did not leave Shakespeare's plays untouched. The onset of recording technologies permitted to practice Shakespearean drama through three different platforms, the stage, the page, and the screen. DVDs of Shakespeare's plays for example were new ways to adapt his theatre. The audience is free to access them whenever he wants and they contain also some extra material. In fact deleted scenes, trailers, commentaries by the director or by the performers, interviews, and music videos are only few examples of what can offer a DVD adaptation. Moreover DVDs are organized chapter-wise, making them resemble to real books with menu; "Enabling its audiences to read performance, the DVD replicates the film product but situates it within a new network of cultural and technological relations, relations perhaps more evocative of print culture"¹⁵ as Worthen puts it.

This was an historical survey of Shakespearean adaptations, linked to the characteristics of performances of each period. The paragraphs above have omitted comic books adaptations, which – being the focus of this dissertation – will be debated separately in the following section. Let us move on focusing in particular on the main adaptations of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a comedy dated around 1590. The plot deals with the wedding between Theseus - Duke of Athens- and Hippolyta – the Amazon Queen. Then others subplot intertwine, these include the

¹⁵ W.B. Worthen, "Performing Shakespeare in digital culture" in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (London: Cambridge University Press, anno), 233.

adventures of four young Athenian lovers – Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius, and Helena- and a group of six performers (mechanicals), who are guided by the fairies who live in the Athenian forest, setting of the most of the play. The play has been several times performed and adapted, being very popular all over the world, but the date of the first performance is not certain, probably in 1595 and it might have been written for an aristocratic wedding.

During the closing of theatres in the years of Interregnum the subplot regarding Bottom and the actors of the play within the play was performed as ‘droll’. A droll was a comical playlet, adapted from Shakespearean – and others- plays and it was accompanied by acrobats and jugglers, this to elude the ban against public performances of drama. Since the re-opening of the theatres *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was performed in adapted form and after the Jacobean era the play was never performed entirely until the 1840s. Richard Leveridge, for example turned the Pyramus and Thisbe scenes into an Italian opera burlesque (1716) and John Frederick Lampe adapted Leveridge's version in 1745. Furthermore, Charles Johnson had used the Pyramus and Thisbe material in the finale of his adaptation of *As You Like It, Love in a Forest* (1723). Garrick’s adaptations of this play were very popular in the eighteenth century, for example *The Fairies* (1755) in which the play within the play was omitted from the rest.

As far as the Victorian stage adaptations are concerned, the version of Madame Vestris stand out, in fact she added dances and musical parts, and she acted in the role of Oberon. Since then for the next seventy years the characters of Oberon and Puck would always be played by women. After the success of this production in the nineteenth century *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* continued to be staged as a spectacle with a great cast. The set was detailed as far as the forest and the palace are concerned, and the fairies were represented as winged ballerinas. Charles Kean’s adaptation then, was very different because set in classical Greece.

During the twentieth and twenty-first century beyond the theatre new kinds of mediums were used to adapt the Shakespearean play. In 1911 Herbert

Beerbohm Tree staged a production with live rabbits and Max Reinhardt staged *A Midsummer Night's Dream* thirteen times between 1905 and 1934, introducing a revolving set. He then devised a more spectacular outdoor version in 1934. Due to the success of his versions Reinhardt was signed by Warner brothers and he directed a film version of the play. To arrange the music of Mendelssohn, Erich Wolfgang Korngold was brought from Austria and he not only used the *A Midsummer Night's Dream* music but also several other pieces. A less spectacular way of staging the play was introduced in 1914 by director Harley Granville-Barker, he in fact reduced the cast and used Elizabethan folk music. The large set was replaced by a system of curtains, this sparer staging influenced following productions. Furthermore, Peter Brook adapted the play for the Royal Shakespeare Company (1970) staging it in a blank white box. Brook also created masculine fairies such as trapeze artistry. And it was him who introduced the idea of doubling Theseus/Oberon and Hippolyta/Titania – very used in following productions – as if to represent the world of the fairies as a mirror of human world. Brook's adaptations opened the way to more freely adapted staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The Tempest was probably written in 1610, and it is considered the last play that Shakespeare wrote alone. The play was first published in the First Folio of December 1623 and it leads the part of comedies. John Heminges and Henry Condell, the editors, inserted stage directions to help readers and scholars who discussed about the masque in Act 4 which was probably added for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Frederic V in 1613. The play was acted at court during the winter 1612-1613 and even if there is no other performance recorded before the Restoration in Devenant version it is stated that *The Tempest* had been staged at the Blackfriars Theatre – and stage directions support this.

The performance history of *The Tempest* from the English Restoration until the mid-nineteenth century was dominated by adaptations of the play. During the Puritan government public performances were not allowed, but in 1660 monarchy was restored, also theatres were re-opened and two major

companies were established – the King’s and the Duke’s companies. William Davenant’s adaptation of the Shakespearean play was very popular and was performed by his company – the Duke’s Company. In fact, Davenant and John Dryden adapted it as *The Tempest or, The Enchanted Island* (1667). Underlining ideas as monarchy – as the natural form of government- ; patriarchal authority – decisive in education and marriage- ; and patrilineality – preeminent in inheritance and ownership of property- they aimed at an upper-class audience. Davenant/ Dryden version contained also new characters and themes, Dorinda – Miranda’s sister- and Sycorax – Caliban’s sister- for example, then Hippolito – Prospero’s foster-son – who has never seen a woman.

Thomas Shadwell adapted Davenant/ Dryden version as an opera and it seems that both audience and playgoers regarded Davenant/ Dryden/ Shadwell version as the original Shakespearean play. *Enchanted Island* provoked also a parody by Thomas Duffett for the King’s Company, *The Mock Tempest* (1675). Therefore in the early eighteenth century *Enchanted Island* adaptation dominated the scenes. While Ariel was played by a woman – usually dancer and singer- Caliban was played as a comic role by actors who looked ‘strange’. This adaptation was so popular that in 1756 David Garrick created another operatic version of the play.

During the Romantic Era *The Tempest* was part of theatre’s repertoire. Famous in this period was John Philip Kemble’s adaptation, close to the original Shakespearean text but mantaining Dorinda and Hippolito – from Davenant/ Dryden version. Romantic theatre was dominated by the fashion for luxury sets and costumes, and this trend was prevalent in Shakespearean adaptations until the late nineteenth century.

Starting with William Charles Macready's influential production in 1838 Shakespeare original play dominated over the adaptations of the previous centuries. Particularly appreciated was the performance of George Bennett in the character of Caliban. The Victorian Age then saw the play represented on abundant sets with visual speactacle, the text was heavily cut making room

for stage effects. For example, Charles Kean's 1857 adaptation of *The Tempest* represented Ariel descending in a ball of fire. The following productions – as the adaptations of William Poel and Granville Barker- turned back to a simpler and text-based style. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Caliban – instead of Prospero- was seen as the star actor of *The Tempest*, in fact actor-manager chose this role for themselves.

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century tradition saw a particular version of Caliban represented as a sort of ‘missing link’, with waist-length hair and apelike bearing, suggestive of a primitive part-animal part-human stage of evolution. This portrayal of Caliban was the norm in performances until 1934 production of Roger Livesey – the first actor to play the role with black makeup, then when Canada Lee played Caliban at Theatre Guild in New York (1945) began a tradition of black actors in that role. Despite this tradition of a black Caliban opposite a white Prospero, colonial interpretations of the play did not achieve success until the 1970s. In these years in fact Prospero was explicitly portrayed as coloniser, for example in England in the productions of Jonathan Miller and Clifford Williams. Miller’s adaptation of 1988 saw a white cast of actors to interpret humans in the play and black actors to represent the spirits of the island. The play gained a political dimension completely unforeseen by Shakespeare. Also Japanese theatre styles have been used to adapt *The Tempest*. For example in 1988 and again in 1992 Yukio Ninagawa brought his version of *The Tempest* to the UK.

The late twentieth century productions underlined the sexual tensions between the characters, as for example Prospero/Miranda, Prospero/Ariel, Miranda/Caliban, Miranda/Ferdinand and Caliban/Trinculo. In 2000 *The Tempest* was performed at the Globe and Vanessa Redgrave played a Prospero neither male nor female and by the end of 2005, BBC Radio had aired 21 productions of *The Tempest*, more than any other play by Shakespeare. As several critics and scholars have argued that the play could be autobiographical, Trevor Nunn realized on this topic the PBS miniseries *Shakespeare Uncovered*, were Prospero and Shakespeare coincide.

The twenty-first century saw a rediscovery of the minor characters of the play as Ariel, Miranda and Sycorax, as Zabus puts it “Possibly because the outset of the twenty-first century holds that every voice should be heard, (re) writers have dismantled this hierarchy and given equal importance to these *Tempest*-protagonists, who have thus become contestants desputing a territorial niche in the larger critiques of representation.”¹⁶. The character of Caliban became emblem of the colonized, while Miranda, Sycorax, and Ariel represented the ‘other’ challenging Prospero – the patriarch. Miranda and Sycorax in particular represented what Zabus calls ‘postpatriarchy’ – beyond patriarchy- because the adaptations based on them aimed to create Miranda and Sycorax as women in search of self-determination beyond men’s control. As far as the figure of Prospero is concerned, in the adaptations of this period he often refuses to give up to his magic, even inserted as character of sci-fi novels where the phobias of alien take-over were present; *And Disregards the Rest* (1992) by Paul Voerman is an example. Briefly the twenty-first adaptations of this Shakespearean play brought it in the contemporary reality, retracing in the subplots ideas as murder, rape, suicide, and incest.

This introductive speech on the history of the adaptations of Shakespearean plays shows how the work of this playwright fits different mediums such as theatre, radio, television, and cinema.

1.2

Shakespeare in the Language of Comics

“Comic books are just as legitimate a medium for expression. After all, the term ‘comics’ simply refers to the combination of words and pictures, set within sequential panels. If we can be deeply moved by words alone (as in novels) or pictures alone (via paintings), why not by the marriage of the two?”¹⁷. The aim of this issue is to analyze Shakespeare’s work through one of the most contemporary medium – not television or cinema- but comics.

¹⁶ Chantal Zabus, *Tempests after Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 2.

¹⁷ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion: A Dreamer’s Guide to the Award-winning Comics Series* (New York: DC comics, 1999), 4.

Comics adapt, recycle, polarize, or revitalise Shakespearean plays with their particular languages – words and pictures, panels, onomatopoeias- sometimes in order to please the taste of the audiences, but base line also Shakespeare wrote for the street theatre.

Comics are halfway between a product and an artwork. In fact other kinds of artworks – past or present- have like comics standards to respect – delivery time, length or size of the work, and even the theme of the artwork. Moreover, comics are not a genre but a media, and for this reason inside comics there are several genres, addressed to different kinds of audiences, and considering a general division between parodistic and realistic comics in the first group is possible to find different Shakespearean adaptations. *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are the most used by the authors of comic books. The audience of this kind of adaptations is various, but the majority of it is formed by young people. Realistic comics include instead genres such as western, superheroes, adventure, horror, and erotic. This kind of comics treats Shakespearean works in a more serious way and their drawings are more realistic and not caricature-style. The artists of these comics aim at an heterogeneous audience.

Let us now trace some boundaries for this analysis. Given the fact that comics are a modern media there are no specialized libraries and it results difficult to find material dating before 1970s, the analysis is based on relatively recent adaptations of Shakespeare's work. Despite this, the period chosen saw the Shakespeare's boom of 1990s in which his work entered in every media. This analysis will describe how the authors of comics have adapted Shakespeare's works. The last part of this issue will focus on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* and their comics adaptations.

The Taming of the Shrew is a Shakespearean comedy dated 1590-1591. The main plot deal with the courtship of Petruchio and Katherina, the shrew of the title. Initially, Katherina is an unwilling participant in the relationship, but Petruchio tempers her with various psychological torments until she becomes an obedient bride. The subplot depicts instead a competition

between the suitors of Katherina's sister, Bianca. This story has been interestingly adapted by the authors of Disney Italy – by Silvano Mezzavilla and Giorgio Cavazzano- and published on *Topolino* n. 2237 of 1998. Using as main character Uncle Scrooge – Paperon de Paperoni in Italian- Shakespearean characters are subverted and deformed. This device is very common in Italian comics which often are inspired to famous artwork with comical- satirical aims. This parody becomes part of the series even if it has no link with the other story in fact the bonds between characters are untouched.

In this adaptation the critical approach is evident, in fact five introductory pages are devoted to the original work and its author and this suggests an educative aim. The background of the story depicts Shakespeare who receives the idea for the play from Grandma Duck and the comedy is set in 1594 conventional date of the performance of the play. Anachronistically among the drawings of London appears the Globe Theatre – built only in 1599- and the parody closes with ‘Totus Mundus Agit Histrionem’, ‘all the world’s a stage’, quoted also by Shakespeare in a following play, *As You Like it*.

As far as *Romeo and Juliet* is concerned, there are several comics adaptations of this play. Published in 1975 in *Il Giornalino* – an Italian comics- the play is part of a trilogy – with *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*- named *Shakespeare a fumetti* (Shakespeare in comics) by Sigma and Gianni De Luca. The innovative aspect of this adaptation is the transposition of the stage action on the page, defined also ‘theatrical comics’ because it renders the theatre on the page. This is a remake of the Shakespearean play because the authors try to interpret the original text in order to involve the reader in a real theatrical action.

Then a Disney Italy adaptation appeared in 1988 on St. Valentine’s Day on *Topolino*. As for *The Taming of the Shrew* the characters are deformed – both the names and the roles- in order to create a comical effect and the story is a tale in costume not linked to the others of the series. Nevertheless, the element of death is present – and even if the reader is conscious that there will

be an happy ending- other characters are not, continuing to consider dead the two lovers.

Another remake of this play – always with an happy ending and written as a parody- is one of the adventures of Asterix, *Le Grand Fosseé* by Albert Uderzo (1980). This adaptation presents some scenes from the original play, but here the scuffles do not provoke death and in the world of Asterix there is no poisonous potion, so it finishes with an happy ending. Moreover, in the US series *The Dreaming* of 1997 the issue *Weird Romance* by Brian Talbot and Dave Taylor is another adaptation. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is directly quoted in the story and these references become important in the narration. *Dylan Dog* then, contains quotes from the same play in the story called *Marionette*, and also the Japanese manga *Ranma 1/ 2* adapts Shakespeare in chapters 74-77 (1993). This example is particularly useful to understand how the Japanese culture – that seems so far from Shakespeare- has adapted him underlining the balcony scene and the bond between the two young lovers and their families.

Let us move on showing examples of *Hamlet*'s adaptations. A remake of this play is part of the trilogy by Sigma and De Luca mentioned above and was published in 1975 on *Il Giornalino*. The approach is the same described for the other play of the trilogy, the characters of the series in fact appear in costume and the story is not linked to other adventures of the characters. The main scenes of the play and also quotes of the play appear in this remake, nevertheless the play is given only as revenge tragedy and the remake omits the love and familiar tragedy present in the plot.

Furthermore, Disney Italy adapted *Hamlet*. This adaptation is part of a tradition of Disney Italy which aims to remake literary classics. Nevertheless only few characteristics of the original are maintained while others are distorted in order to create a comical effect. The parody is represented as a dream of Donald Duck, who falls asleep reading the play and dream of be Hamlet, but the dream is so real that once awake he confuses the dream and the reality. Hamlet's doubts are reduced to what have for breakfast and there

are no serious thinking, being Donald Duck an actual anti-hero his performance as Hamlet results comical.

In 1985 then, *Ken Parker* was published. This adaptation of *Hamlet* interchanges pages with western reality of Parker with others in which drama is adapted; the drawings change following the two different realities. Other examples includes *Hamlet on a Rooftop*, this brief remake by Will Eisner is inserted in his volume *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985). Here Eisner uses the famous Hamlet's monologue to explain the problems of remake a story which has already a script. Furthermore in the series *Alan Ford e il Gruppo T.N.T.* (1975) the issue *Santa Claus' Story* contains an *Hamlet's* adaptation. Distorsions and improvisation characterise this version of the play. To conclude the issue *Grand Guinol* of *Dylan Dog* of 1989 is set in a theatre of London where an actor quotes *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. Almost all of these versions represent Hamlet dressed in black – as in the original text- and the majority of them quote his famous monologue. The world of comics has not remained indifferent to such an important artwork and with its language has represented adaptations and remakes.

Therefore – to conclude- as Hy Bender's quote at the beginning suggests- the medium of comics is as powerful as novels, paintings, and cinema to convey messages and adapt and remake stories.

This section will focus also on comics adaptations of the two Shakespearean plays in exam. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of the most adapted by comics authors. An outstanding example is issue 19 of the comic series *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman, *Sandman 19* is included in the third volume of the collection, *Dream Country* and was published in 1991 by DC comics. In the same year the story won the World Fantasy Award and it was the first time that a comic book achieved a literary award.

This particular adaptation creates through the character of Sandman –or Morpheus- several links between Shakespeare and the Faries –in particular Oberon, Titania, and Puck- and suggests conjectures about Shakespeare's inspiration and his own life which are still uncertain. Nevertheless the story

must be considered inside the whole series, because if the general chronological position is the 1990s Gaiman creates often flashbacks. In fact *Sandman 19*, which is the Shakespearean adaptation now in exam, takes place in 1593 and the date is given at the beginning of the story which is set in the Sussex country, outside London where that year the plague was spreading and the theatres were closed. The main characters are Shakespeare and his son Hamnet; Kempe, Armin, Cowley, Condell, and Burbage –the company of actors- and of course also Sandman appears with the audience of Faries.

This magical audience watches a performance in which they are represented, in this way Gaiman create a kind of “play- within-the-comic-book”¹⁸ which remind of similar Shakespeare’s techniques. Gaiman uses almost the whole original text but intertwined with scenes of dialogues between faries who comment about the play and panels representing the backstage where the actors are preparing. The story focus on the relationship between Sandman and a very humanized Shakespeare who wants to write plays which are meant to last forever. Moreover, Puck is a very special character, present not only in this story but in others issues of the series. Gaiman’s Puck is pretty creepy, not only in his appearance but also in his way of speaking; he will play himself in the comedy –other actors do not notice him- and when the Faries come back in Farieland he stays among humans to bother them. The story closes with Puck acting the final monologue of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and he will play an active part in Sandman’s death.

Furthermore another series linked to *The Sandman* was published monthly in the USA. *The Dreaming* is supervised by Neil Gaiman himself and the protagonist is Nuala a fairy who lives on earth trying not to reveal her true nature. When Nuala sees a representation of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at Central park she becomes nostalgic and in her ballon appears a quote of the final monologue of the play. Another adaptation of this play was published

¹⁸ Fabio Ciaramaglia, *Shakespeare e il linguaggio del fumetto* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 2003), 32.

on *Mega 2000* in 1998 with the title *L'incubo di un pomeriggio di mezz'estate* (A Midsummer Afternoon's Nightmare). The characters are Donald Duck and his family, the story is short and for this reason the original text has been cut and distorted as usual for Disney's adaptations. The adaptation omits both the play-within-the-play and the wedding between Hippolyta and Theseus, this in fact is the story of an holiday of the Ducks family at Stratford-Upon-Avon.

The play has also been simply quoted in several comics, as for example in *Martin Mystère* of 1993 written by Recano, in which the quotes enrich the comics. This comics is set in an undefined time near Athens, and in this is similar to the original; Martin e Java – the two protagonists- are helping their friend Mayo and all together are investigating on Angus Mc Quillan's death. When fairies and elves appear the quotes to the Shakespearean play begin, and while the story underlines the figures of Oberon and Titania, it overlooks that of Puck.

Even if the adaptations mentioned above are all different they thave some common features. The most important characteristic of all these comics is that they bring to life the Fairies, they become in fact real characters who interact with the others. Oberon is always present and he has the same haughty appearence of the original, except in the Disney adaptation which transforms all the charaters in order to obtain a comical effect. Titania has an important role in *The Sandman* where is similar to the original character, Disney's Titania is instead an anonymous character. Puck is similar in all the adaptations and he keeps all his comical features, a part from Gaiman's Puck, who seems to be more evil. The theatrical element is presented only in *The Sandman*, in which the performance is the focus of the story and another important issue is the dream, in which the protagonist of this comic is even personified. In the other adaptations, a part from Disney, the characters deal with dreams, in some cases they wake up after a dream, thinking of it. To conclude even if the play has been adapted in different way by comics, some important features of the work appear in all the remakes.

Let us move on considering the most interesting comics adaptations of *The Tempest*. Even if there are not many adaptations as for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, it is useful to explore how comics approached this play. This romance is considered the last Shakespearean play, probably written in 1610-11. The setting is an unknown island, where the legitimate Duke of Milan, Prospero, plans to restore Miranda's legitimate place – being his daughter- using his magic. He creates in fact a storm –the tempest of the title- which brings Antonio –usurping brother of Prospero- and King Alonso of Naples to the island. Prospero's tricks help to reveal the true nature of Antonio, the wedding between Miranda and Ferdinand –Alonso's son- and the King's redemption.

The adaptation of *Il Giornalino* by the couple mentioned above –Sigma-De Luca- is interesting because they reproduce the stage on the pages of comics. Even if Shakespeare respected in this romance the unity of time and space, De Luca changes the sequence of events especially in the first part of the play because he thinks it is not suitable for comics. The unity of time and space –so important in theatres- loses in fact its power in this medium. So initially are represented all the events that Prospero tells to Miranda – Antonio's scheme, their arrival on the island, Gonzalo who helped them- and Caliban and Ariel are introduced through their relationship with Prospero. This linear representation of the story seems so different from the original text but the adaptation provides the reader a clearer plot, showing the real order of facts.

Therefore the first setting is Milan where Antonio is plotting against the Duke –Prospero. The content of Prospero's narration in the original version is kept here in the adaptation. Then a young Prospero is represented while studying his books of magic –and with the same trust in his brother described by Shakespeare- he is telling to Miranda how Antonio is good to replace him in the formal duties of a Duke. In the same page Antonio's followers –led by Gonzalo- are coming to lock up Prospero and Miranda. Only Gonzalo helps the two putting in the launch clothes, water, and food and giving his books to

Prospero. But in the adaptation Gonzalo apologizes with Prospero, and this part is not included in the original.

Prospero and Miranda arrive on the island and Prospero find a cavern where they will live, in searching for water he meets Caliban – son of the witch Sycorax- who is described as a non-violent primitive. Caliban tells Prospero that the island is his property, and shows to the Duke the source of water and all the island's secrets; Prospero teaches him his language but then enslaves Caliban. Their first encounter in the original is only told by Prospero, but in this adaptation the episode is part of the story. Then Prospero meets Ariel –a spirit trapped in pine by Sycorax- and frees the spirit, who has to obey him since this moment. Ariel is not striving for freedom and Caliban is not the violent primitive as they are in the original play, and also Prospero is presented in this adaptations as a good master. The followings events are kept as in the Shakespearean play until the encounter between Miranda and Ferdinando.

Beginning with page 19 of the comics, the adaptation appears totally different from the original. The two main omissions are the utopic monologue of Gonzalo and the attempted betrayal of Alonso by Sebastian and Antonio. The adaptation ends with the two lovers in foreground and the ship which is sailing towards Naples in background while Caliban and Ariel are free on the island. In this adaptation the theme of forgiveness – also present in the original text- is polarized. The characters are more veiled and less marked out than the originals.

Moreover the special edition of *Martin Mystère* of 1989 adapted the play in a sci-fi version with the title *New Atlantis*. Kelly and Dee are two grave robbers and they find a manuscript in Shakespeare's tomb, and when they open the coffin Shakespeare's cadaver stands up crying the name of Caliban and then it decompose itself. The manuscript contains a story, *New Atlantis* is the title and the authors are Shakespeare, Bacon, and Raleigh. These three in fact in 1582 undertook a journey which led them to the so-called New Atlantis. During the trip appeared Ariel – robot version of the original- the

spirit of the wind and welcomed them at Ilcaliban where Prospero ruled. Miranda and Prospero are present in the adaptation and he tells the same story as in the original version.

But here Ariel is represented as the keeper of an ancient culture of this place where Prospero and his daughter arrived. Prospero in this adaptation is an expert of new technologies and he seems to Shakespeare and the other two – who come from the 1500s- a wizard. Caliban is described then as Prospero's antagonist and he can always change form; he is undefinable. The authors have played on the definition given to the original Caliban 'a deformed slave', to create a Caliban without any form. In the following pages Prospero understands that Caliban is a part of himself, he is a monster inside his mind, he is his human part to which Prospero gave up in order to become a God of science. Aware of this Prospero defeats Caliban, but dies.

The last adaptation that should be mentioned is issue 75 of *The Sandman* series by Neil Gaiman. This story closes the series and comes after the death of Sandman – the protagonist. This is not a real remake, but the story of the composition of the play. In the narrative frame of the series the story is a flashback, this episode happens before Sandman's death. Shakespeare is writing his second play for Morpheus – the first is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *Sandman 19* – respecting the deal they made years before. This issue presents in a 'classical' style the everyday scenes of the comics and in a more 'pictorial' way the parts of Shakespeare's romance quoted. This adaptation is the best well-finished, it uses episodes from Shakespeare's biography and his plays, and shows how the romance – and all the other plays in general have been influenced by the playwright's everyday life. But most of all this issue is perfectly coherent with the rest of the series.

The Tempest is one of the most difficult plays to be represented in theatre, therefore it is quite difficult also for the authors of comics adapt it with this different media. This is why in *Il Giornalino's* version the authors prefer to change the order of the events, putting them in a more chronological order. What is underlined here is the theme of forgiveness, while *The Sandman*

highlights the metatheatre telling about the composition of the romance itself and showing a humanized Shakespeare who draws fully from the episodes of his life for his material.

The examples illustrated show great differences in these approaches but also several points in common. For example major characters and important episodes have been inserted and highlight in the majority of the adaptations. Remakes, adaptations, distorsions, modifications, quotes, and parodies; all the examples taken in exam used a different method to create a version of Shakespeare's work. Nevertheless the true potentialities of the medium of comics have been displayed in that adaptations which represent the adaptation inside a theatrical performance. *The Sandman* uses the device of the double graphics to represent the play inside the story; *Alan Ford* or *Dylan Dog* create stages on the page, creating almost a Shakespearean play-within-the-play effect in a modern way. To conclude –how Fabio Ciaramaglia suggests- comics made full use of the greatness of Shakespearean drama in order to achieve real artworks status ¹⁹and the mission seems accomplished.

1.3

Shakespeare between Highbrow and Lowbrow Culture

This last part of the first chapter will explore the process which made the figure of Shakespeare part of popular culture. The section will retrace the changes in Shakespeare's reception by highbrow and lowbrow audiences – how the figure of the playwright influenced both, and how his plays were differently adapted in these two contexts- in order to understand when this detachment between cultures happened and how affected Shakespeare's adaptations. Finally a description of the cultural position of Shakespeare today will be provided in order to understand why so often the authors of comics quote or adapt his plays.

¹⁹ Ciaramaglia, *Shakespeare e il linguaggio del fumetto*, 211.

Following the path of Lawrence W. Levine this issue will attempt an explanation for the transformation of Shakespeare from popular entertainment to elitist culture,

The transformation of Shakespeare is important precisely because it was not unique. It was part of a larger transformation that Richard Sennett as argued characterized Western European culture after the eighteenth century, in which public culture fractured into a series of discrete private cultures that had less and less to do with one another. The audience that had been heterogeneous, interactive, and participatory became homogeneous, atomized, and passive.²⁰

Certainly Shakespeare was never ‘unpopular’, he worked in theatres attended by different ranges of the population of London and his plays contained that ritual and folk elements that attracted the audiences. Performances of Elizabethan Age included many kind of entertainments as clowns, dancers, jugglers; and were characterized by a great level of rhetorical and gestural improvisation and by the interaction between audiences and actors. Shakespeare began working as an actor in a professional theatre not allowed to perform within city’s limits, but later his company had the patronage of the court; so his plays were performed not only before kings and queens but also in playhouses and in inn-yards in Southwark. Considering this, Shakespeare can be included in a sort of middle range of population,

The growing class of merchants, yeomen, and artisans from whence [...] most theatrical professionals came. He and his cohort challenged a two-tier vision of high and low, and could on occasion move in either direction.²¹

Let us now use the example of the USA to revisit the changes of Shakespeare position in culture until today. During the last half of the eighteenth century while the reading of Shakespeare’s plays was an elitarian

²⁰ Lawrence W. Levine, “Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation”, *The American Historical Review* Vol. 89, No. 1 (Feb., 1984): 64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1855917> Accessed: 15-07-2015

²¹ Diana E. Henderson, “From popular entertainment to literature” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (London: Cambridge University Press, anno), 7.

prerogative, the performances of his plays began to be a popular entertainment – also in American colonies. After the American Revolution Shakespeare was the most popular and performed playwright and his works were performed in several towns and cities. Nevertheless it was in the nineteenth century that Shakespeare became well-known in all the country and part of popular culture. The fact that Shakespeare dominated the theatres in this period is proved by the flow of English actors in America in search of fame and financial rewards. But Shakespeare was not confined in city centres, also workers could enjoy performances, and if miners could not attend theatres – because they were far from the city- plays were performed where they worked; in fact Shakespeare “was by no means automatically treated with reverence”²².

From the big and comfortable theatres of the cities to the stages in saloons, halls and churches, Shakespeare’s collected successes in all the country and was familiar for all the different kinds of people. Shakespeare’s plays were not only played as highbrow supplements to popular entertainments, but as part of them – because Shakespeare was popular entertainment. In the first half of the nineteenth century theatre was as cinema in the early twentieth century – a democratic entertainment- all the ranges of society in the same place shared the same play. Nevertheless the play was not the only attraction, in fact other kinds of entertainments surrounded it. Usually the play was followed by an afterpiece – a farce- and a variety, to which usually the same actors who acted in the play participated. Therefore Shakespeare was included in a larger group of contemporary forms of entertainment and the fact that the same actors who played Shakespearean plays then took part to the afterpiece reinforced the playwright’s position as part of a shared popular culture. “These afterpieces and *divertissements* most often are seen as having diluted or denigrated Shakespeare. I suggest that they may be understood more meaningfully as having *integrated* him into American culture”²³.

²² Lawrence W. Levine, “Shakespeare and the American People”, 39.

²³ Lawrence W. Levine, “Shakespeare and the American People”, 42.

Thus the nineteenth culture absorbed Shakespeare and if his works came in America in the form of high culture in élitarian libraries, he spreaded then as popular culture throughout theatres. As said before the audience was very varied, different peoples belonging to different social status attended the same performance in one place though with different views because the theatre was divided into pit, boxes, and galleries – and the fare changed. During the performances the audience was very participatory, to describe it with a current experience the nineteenth century theatre could be seen as a nowadays sportive event – where audience is active and participate vocally and unmistakably to the performance. “The audience's vociferousness continued during the play itself, which was punctuated by expressions of disapproval in the form of hisses or groans and of approval in the form of applause, whistles, and stamping”²⁴. As Levine explains it this emotional involvement in the play demonstrated the commitment of the audience.

The description above shows how professional entertainment included folk elements – participatory audience, afterpiece- and that the edges between popular and high culture were – and are- not so strict. The example of Shakespeare suggests how is questionable the idea of a hierarchical culture strictly divided into categories – popular, folk, high. Due to the fact that the adjective ‘popular’ has often been used to describe banal or questionable artistic works, Shakespearean plays – recognized as valuable artworks- have been separated from popular culture, even if they were very popular. By the twentieth century in fact Shakespeare cultural position has changed; “If Shakespeare had been an integral part of mainstream culture in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth he had become part of ‘polite’ culture – an essential ingredient in a complex we call, significantly, ‘legitimate’ theater”²⁵. As Levine argues during this period Shakespeare was an élitarian prerogative and far from the common people who struggled to see him as familiar as he was form them in the previous century.

²⁴ Lawrence W. Levine, “Shakespeare and the American People”, 44.

²⁵ Lawrence W. Levine, “Shakespeare and the American People”, 47.

Indeed culture is a flux, it is not fixed, and the relationship between Shakespeare and American people is a process in evolution, nevertheless the beginning of the twentieth century saw a period of division between the playwright and common people. Theatres in the cities began to specify on performance's advertisement that the afterpiece – the farce- was not provided for, and progressively it became less and less necessary for theatres to give these explanations. In the same way audiences were admonished to participate loudly and noisily to the play, and a silent audience gradually became the norm. Dancers, jugglers, acrobats and orators who were part of the popular entertainments surrounding Shakespearean plays were eliminated, the play was performed alone. "Once again, William Shakespeare had become *Culture*"²⁶. The consensus view was that Shakespeare's plays had become famous for the wrong reasons, because they were surrounded by other entertainments which people liked, because the same actors who played Shakespeare then played also in the farce, and because his plays were presented in modified and simplified versions, but not because of his dramatic force.

Nevertheless divide theatres and its audiences into fixed types seems not to give an explanation for the shift of the figure of Shakespeare in culture. Levine explains that Shakespeare was so popular in the nineteenth century because he entered into the spirit of the period. His values and taste seemed to fit the popular culture of that period because close to their own. The characters were considered almost real because of the melodramatic style that actors used which involved audiences; in fact actors played Shakespearean characters emotionally and vigorously. "Whatever Shakespeare's own designs, philosophy, and concept of humanity were, his plays had meaning to a nation that placed the individual at the center of the universe and personalized the large questions of the day"²⁷. Much has been done in terms of Shakespearean adaptations in this period, and not to vulgarize his plays as

²⁶ Lawrence W. Levine, "Shakespeare and the American People", 48.

²⁷ Lawrence W. Levine, "Shakespeare and the American People", 53.

the majority thought but rather to underline that values present in the plays which could reflect American audiences. The relationship between Shakespeare and the audiences of the nineteenth century then, is linked to language, humor, action, and moral sense of his plays.

Furthermore Shakespeare reputation helped to make theatre – under attack because of its dubious morality- a legitimate medium and the lack of real competitors favoured also his popularity in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless at the beginning of the twentieth century several changes brought Shakespeare far from popular culture. Oratorical mode and melodramatic style throughout which Shakespeare was represented were declining, but they did not prevent Shakespeare to be adapted for the talking cinema and the radio. In fact if the lack of unity of time and place made the plays sometimes difficult to stage, was just this fluidity which fit the most new medias. Therefore Shakespeare did not disappear from popular culture, but he remained the playwright only for a particular audience; as Levine puts it “Separate theaters, often called *legitimate* theaters, catering to the ‘judicious’, appeared in city after city, leaving the other theaters to those whom Payne called ‘the idle, profligate, and vulgar’”²⁸. In this way theatre was no longer a shared cultural form which included all social classes and Shakespeare did not seem anymore a common property of all citizens.

“Increasingly in the second half of the nineteenth century, as public life became everywhere more fragmented, the concept of culture took on hierarchical connotations.”²⁹, continues Levine; the terms ‘highbrow’ and ‘lowbrow’ were then created as if no middle ground existed anymore. Culture became synonym of something refined and elevated from popular entertainments. Shakespeare fitted also this paradigm, in fact was considered immortal and too complex for lowbrow culture, his poetry and his plays were elevating and in this new divided perception of culture he became considered part of highbrow culture. Nevertheless the example of Shakespeare is not

²⁸ Lawrence W. Levine, “Shakespeare and the American People”, 59-60.

²⁹ Lawrence W. Levine, “Shakespeare and the American People”, 62-63.

unique, he became part of a greater change which affected Western European culture during the period described. This process led to the separation of the public culture in many private cultures, and the audience which used to be full of different kind of people, active, and participatory became homogeneous and passive.

Let us now move on considering the figure of Shakespeare today – in the digital culture of mass-media. Film and radio overtook the stage as dominant performance medium and has even been argued that in the twentieth century

Traditional distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘pop’ culture had collapsed into a postmodern array of decontextualized signs and styles, all equally available for producers to mix and match for their own purposes.³⁰

By the middle of the twentieth century the figure of Shakespeare became quite ambivalent, if on the one hand he signified traditionalism, high art, highbrow culture, on the other hand he was used by popular culture to create inclusiveness and anti-elitism. In this way Shakespeare paradox is to be the sign of highbrow culture in popular culture. In fact the crisis of cultural stratification got worse with the triumph of mass media, and the mainstream pop culture absorbed highbrow culture’s icons.

In this context Shakespeare became as a celebrity, and another meaning was added to his figure. He emerges as an indicator of the self-irony of cultural connoisseurs, his name has been attached to products appreciated both by the connoisseur and the pop consumer. In fact if the first liked both the pop allusion which Shakespeare name represented as the reference to a different cultural register, the second was in pop mediastream. Considering for examples toys and commodities with Shakespeare’s face – as Shakespeare celebri-duck- is evident how they in one way mocks high culture but on the other displays the knowledge of culture’s heroes of the owner, “these contemporary Shakespop objects acknowledge the hegemony of pop

³⁰ Douglas Lanier, “Shakespeare™: myth and biographical fiction” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture*, ed. Robert Shaughnessy (London: Cambridge University Press, anno), 97.

marketplace and recuperate Shakespeare's status as a mark of high culture only by camping up his commodification"³¹.

During the 1960s therefore the cultural hierarchy became less strictly and in Britain as well as in America directors revolted against highbrow Shakespeare and contemporaries approaches to Shakespeare were brought on stage, companies like New York Shakespeare Festival, and Stratford Festival of Canada, not only performed Shakespeare in more accessible ways but also promoted Shakespeare as a tourist attraction. Directors like Marowitz and Stoppard adapting Shakespeare with theatrical collages and modern pieces showed how the mid-twentieth theatre tried to bring Shakespeare back in popular culture again. Therefore if it is true that the studies on popularized Shakespeare have focused on film and television, on the other hand "staged Shakespop has preceded and accompanied the growth of Shakespop in other media"³². By the end of the twentieth century – through stage, film, and television- Shakespeare was then part of popular culture again, moreover he has become a cultural authority and not property of one type of culture or another, "from being a marker of highbrow elitist fare, Shakespeare has become a commodity and brand that producers and marketers can exploit"³³.

Having crossed this imaginary bridge between highbrow and lowbrow culture also authors of comics book absorbed Shakespeare and made their own adaptations. Probably in search of that kind of cultural authority, legitimacy, and quality which this figure could attach to their works they exploited and adapted his plays and this underlines the upward shift that Shakespeare continues to stand for. As for the film techniques also comics added something new to the work of Shakespeare, being adaptations both of the artist and of the adapter they not only represent the plot and the characters

³¹ Douglas Lanier, "Shakespeare™: myth and biographical fiction", 98.

³² Elizabeth Abele, "Whither Shakespop? Taking Stock of Shakespeare in Popular Culture" *College Literature* Vol. 31, No. 4, *Shakespeare and Popular Culture* (Fall, 2004): 5. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115224> Accessed: 01-04-2015

³³ Elizabeth Abele, "Whither Shakespop? Taking Stock of Shakespeare in Popular Culture", 7.

with drawings but also interpret them. Nevertheless to fit the comic book spaces a play must be cut, so the author has to decide which parts and quotes are essential and put them into the ballons, this is also interpreting and adapting. Once that the reader open the comic book his/her eyes are attracted at the same time by all the element present in one page – drawings, ballons, words- and shift from panel to panel.

This graphic medium, where words become visible rather than audible units, offers opportunity for the complex resonance of Shakespeare's words to be savored along with whatever images the artist uses to stage the play for the reader's mind: because they are a print medium, comics, like other books, allow time for grasping what is implied by a particular phrasing or image. Words are a play's bones, to be fleshed out in performance for the theater audience or the mind's eye.³⁴

³⁴ Elizabeth Abele, “Whither Shakespop? Taking Stock of Shakespeare in Popular Culture”, 88.

Chapter 2

Let's talk about Comics: *The Sandman* By Neil Gaiman

Gaiman remains the polar opposite of the stereotypical comic-book guy. He's lean, British, always dressed in black ("I started in my twenties, so I never would have to worry about matching colors," he says) and endlessly cool.

Sean Woods.³⁵

The figure of Neil Gaiman – author of graphic novels, comic books, novels and short fiction- will be the starting point of this exploration of the world of comics. An explanation on the origins of comic book and graphic novel will be provided, as well as a description of comics language and the storytelling in comics. Then Gaiman's *The Sandman* will be analysed as part of this genre. Close attention will be paid to issues 19 and 75 of this comic book series, which are Shakespearean adaptations. Moreover, the chapter will end showing the phases of *The Sandman* publication, its audience, and the origins of its main character.

2.1

Neil Gaiman, History of Comics, and visual Language

Neil Gaiman was born in Hampshire, UK, on 10th November 1960 and today lives near Minneapolis in USA. His family is of Polish and Jewish origins and he has two younger sisters. "As a child he discovered his love of books, reading, and stories, devouring the works of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, James Branch Cabell, Edgar Allan Poe, Michael Moorcock, Ursula K. LeGuin, Gene Wolfe, and G.K. Chesterton. A self-described 'feral child

³⁵ Sean Woods, "Neil Gaiman Resurrects *The Sandman*", *Rolling Stone*, October 25, 2013. <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/neil-gaimans-the-sandman-returning-this-fall-20131025>

who was raised in libraries”³⁶. In 1980s Gaiman began his writing career in journalism and in 1984 he wrote a biography of the band Duran Duran, his first book. *Violent Cases* was his first graphic novel, in collaboration with Dave McKean, and became then a series, *Black Orchid*. *The Sandman* series followed, it was divided in 75 issues and collected a great amounts of awards.

Before focusing on the comic book series *The Sandman*, let us explore the origins of graphic novel and comic books. First of all it must be reminded that there is a very clear difference between the two. Graphic novels are longer and often have their storylines wrapped up in only one or two books, while a comic book will tell a story over many issues. But let us start from the 1950s and 1960s in order to sum up the history of graphic novel until today. At the beginning of this period the comic tradition was accused of spread theme of violence and encourage criminality in young people. This anti-comics crusade led to a censorship of horror and crime comics, which forced publishers to find new themes. It was the booming Pop Art which saved comics from cultural margins, Andy Warhol’s appropriation of war, romance and superhero comics were in fact very successful. While comics gained new creative energy, this process influenced also future graphic novels production: irony, playfulness and revisionism, narrative dualism and appropriation are key lessons learned by nowadays graphic novelists such as Neil Gaiman.

Moving forward from the 1960s into the 1970s it is significant to underline the role of underground comix, most of all it influenced pioneer graphic novelists as Eisner and Spiegelman. In fact, out of this context developed the self-publishing trend and the themes created for adults, all indicate show graphic narratives were influenced by comix. Moreover, in these years developed also long-length, adult-focused comics (similar to current graphic

³⁶ “Biography”, Neil Gaiman (blog), accessed July 27, 2015, http://www.neilgaiman.com/About_Neil/Biography

novels) and longer more literary works in the field of sci-fi which gave rise to the label 'graphic novel'.

“Between the late 1980s and the present day, the graphic novel has become an accepted medium for literary and visual creativity and storytelling”³⁷. In 1986- 1987 the 'big three' graphic novels which were at the basis of the breakthrough of the genre were Moore and Gibbons's *Watchmen*, Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*. These were innovators in comic's field, free from conventions or public expectations they created a new genre and the majority of their graphic novels became then series of stories. This innovation created media excitement for the graphic novel – simple form, adult themes, new authors, and cosmopolitanism were the topics explored. Moreover, “The mainstream media depiction that 'comics were not just for kids' was complemented further with extensive commentary on the role and positive influence of foreign comics traditions on the (US) scene, notably British and French interventions”³⁸; DC comics themselves in fact were hiring British artists and writers, as for example Neil Gaiman who reviving *Sandman* made the series a great success. As a result graphic novel became associated with more cultural openness than comics.

From the 1990s to the contemporary period graphic novel did not return to be part of comics or comix background, due to the original production in fact it became a new and unique literary-artistic form. In 2000s graphic novel's production expanded and not only interacted with the literary community, but also opened to women writers and artists; no-one could have foresee “how the graphic novel would benefit from interactions with the literary community or that the trade paperback, and especially series of it, would become so central to DC and Marvel comics”³⁹.

³⁷ Jan Baetens, Hugo Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 74.

³⁸ Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, 87- 88.

³⁹ Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, 94.

Let us now continue focusing on the visual language of comics in order to understand how it works and how it can convey stories and messages. In 1993 Scott McCloud published *Understanding Comics*⁴⁰, this is not an academic text, it is written/drawn for popular audience and uses the language of comics to explain comics, as opposed to the academic practise of rendering all discourse in text, specifically the essay. Therefore this can be a useful guide to approach comics medium.



Fig. 1 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993).

Since the invention of printing while the written word improved the pictures were neglected and in this way art and writing separated each others, but through comics pictures and words are combined and exploited both by their creators in order to convey stories, for this reason comics are identified with the art of storytelling. As McCloud puts it, creator and reader become partners in creating something new, the fusion of visible and invisible is in fact at the centre of the mechanism of the closure – which permits of observing the parts but perceiving the whole. In films, for example, the

⁴⁰ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993).

closure takes place continuously because our mind transforms a series of images into a story in motion. Therefore, at the basis of comics lie icons – used to represent places or people- so pictures and symbols are icons, and words are abstract icons because they do not resemble visually to the thing they represent; in comics essential images are used by creators to amplify meanings and render them universal for readers.

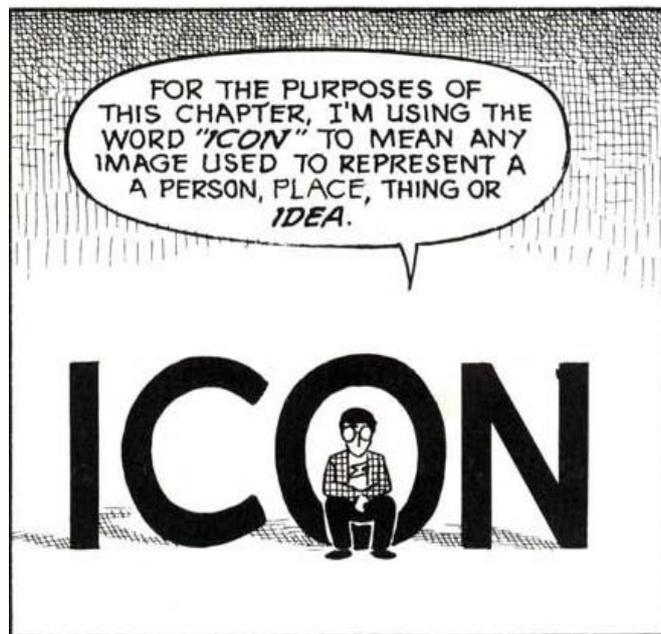


Fig. 2 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993).

Therefore symbols, pictures and words are the vocabulary of the language of comics – pictures and words are two sides of the same coin- and closure is its grammar – the space between panels, the gutter, is where imagination take place because the reader links one image to the next until the end. As far as time in comics is concerned, it is perceived spatially, therefore time and space are part of the same thing. Moreover, both past and future are visible in comics, in fact the reader's eye catches the present but in the background past and future may appear. Another interesting issue is how comics convey sounds, in fact trough ballons and sound effects these are 'visible' for the reader.



Fig. 3 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993).

Having analysed the language of comics, let us now move on emphasizing the medium-specific aspects of storytelling in comics and graphic novels. As Baetens and Frey put it: “the choice of the medium induces a set of possibilities as well as impossibilities, of obstacles as well as chances”⁴¹, in fact it is possible to tell or retell a story through different medium, but the use of the device of storytelling always changes. It is true that comics and graphic novels can adapt stories told in other media, such as film, nevertheless the narrative in comics cannot forget issues about the difference between story and plot and the status of the narrator. At the question “Is narrative a universal mechanism that can be studied independent of the concrete medium that actualizes it?”⁴² comics studies answer negatively, the form in which a story is told cannot be separated from it.

Every medium has therefore a different approach to narrative which depends from their peculiar aspects. What defines comics and graphic novel is the drawn, as Gardner explains in his essay *Storylines*⁴³, in fact the story is ‘shown’ throughout draws and lines – functioning as figures or contours- are narrative agent of storytelling. Gardner underlines the fact that the line

⁴¹ Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, 162.

⁴² Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, 163.

⁴³ Jared Gardner, “Storylines”, *SubStance* Vol. 40, Number 1 (2011) (Issue 124): 53-69.

represents the artist himself and therefore also the storytellers, according to him this feature renders comics a unique medium of storytelling, being directly connected to the source of every storytelling: the narrator. In fact drawings and lines can convey the opinion of the narrator, his or her involvement in the story or the moral stance toward it. A further thesis on this topic is that if the creator is seriously committed it is not possible to analyse separately drawing and story, and also the organization of the page, the spaces and the panels –being choices of the creator- influenced the story world.

But let us now focus on the consequences of this use of the device of storytelling in order to understand how the reader should observe these stories told in words and images. The most important and visible trait of comics storytelling is the organization of space, which is usually underestimated in narratology. The importance of spatialization and characterization depends from the fact that they supply the only way to represent time and temporal relationships. Nevertheless space in comics is not only about fictional settings, but it is also intended as a material given to the creator – the board, the page or the screen in which the story is written by the artist or will be published- and for this reason it has a great impact on storytelling. “For the artist invents by filling in that preexisting space in one way or another: page design, graphiation, and grammatextual envisioning of the text”, so organization and order of panels, balloons, distribution of drawings are all important aspects to convey the story.

Moreover, another important aspects in comics storytelling for the reader is the characterization. Until last panel what the reader is confronted with is not character’s thinking, but character’s body, and in particular the face. In a culture characterized by the division between mind and body, comics and graphic novels make the reader confront with characters and the presence of character’s body in comics correspond to a contemporary thought. This strong characterization not only catches audience’s eye, but also impacts on the analysis of the comics and graphic novel. Therefore “Even if graphic novels

do tell stories, their first concern is not infrequently the portrait of the characters and the multiperspectival representation of their bodies”⁴⁴.

However, comics storytelling is not only about the structure of the page, the characterization or the space, but also the content has an overwhelming role. As a consequence of the narrowing down of the superhero’s subject a growing thematic diversity has developed. Nevertheless if on the one hand some themes are overrepresented, on the other other topics are not treated at all. In fact, comics and graphic novels tend to tell stories about the self, a self in crisis because of a trauma, and probably because, according to Gardner, the self is imprinted on the story when a work is drawn. But it would be a critical clichè to suppose that comics could only deal with violent action, humor, semi-autobiography, history and documentary.

The particular element of comics which is totally new in storytelling is a different kind of link between description and narration. Verbal storytelling in fact tends to present the two modes separately, but in graphic novel description and narration coincide. Having both words and images in comics and graphic novels, it will be impossible to narrated without describing, and this new relationship between the two has led to the creation of two new kind of graphic novel: the ‘actionless’ and the abstract graphic novel. Given the fact that comics and graphic novels tend to separate themselves from their antimodel, the superhero comics, a lack of action in ‘actionless’ graphic novel can be read as a strategy to criticize superhero comics. In the same way the reader should look at the abstract graphic novel, through this technique a great attention is paid to the formal elements of comics and even without a ‘verbal’ story, the story arc is narrated; it suggests a challenge to the thesis which supports the lack of narrative in comics.

These last paragraphs attempted a description of the way in which comics use the device of storytelling. In conclusion the reader should remind that in comics narration and description are conveyed at the same time and that

⁴⁴ Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, 176.

drawns, lines, organization of the page but also characterizations are peculiar trait of the artist's hand. In other words, "In graphic novel, the words of the narrator are visually present, [...] and this overt presence of his or her speech act creates new possibilities of rethinking the relationships among author, implied author, and narrator"⁴⁵.

Nowadays comics are accompanied by an equally unprecedented dynamism, and consumption and production of them is growing fast. Comics and graphic novels are no longer ignored in popular culture, and they are also attracting the attention of literary prizes and fine art museums. Nevertheless this acknowledgement is far from being a dissolution of the boundaries between the highbrow and lowbrow arts, and on the contrary it only reinforces them. In addition if there is one tradition that remains relatively consistent in comics, it is that of laughing and rebelling, is it possible that this 'outstanding art' ever find a place in the highbrow culture?

"Today's the possibilities for comics are – as they always have been – endless"⁴⁶.

2.2

The Sandman's story, focus on Sandman 19 and Sandman 75

Having discussed the structure and the history of comics and graphic novel, let us move on focusing on a particular comic book series, *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman. This section will therefore explore this work – its origins, the story which underlies its 75 issues and the main characters – close attention will be paid to *Sandman 19, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Sandman 75, The Tempest* – both adaptations of Shakespearean plays.

The character of Sandman has origins both in folklore and in comics. Millions of children felt asleep listening to the story of a man who donates

⁴⁵ Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*, 187.

⁴⁶ Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 212.

dreams blowing magic sand on their eyes, impeding them to open. This folkloristic character was then revisited in comics, the first time Sandman appeared in comics was in 1939 as *Wesley Dodds*, created by Gardner Fox, he wore a mask and a green suit and had a gun to shoot soporific gas to the evils. In the 1970s then, *Garrett Sandford* was created by Simon and Jack Kirby, this character protected children from the monsters which entered their dreams helped by *Brute and Globe*. But living alone in the dreaming dimension drove him crazy and he committed suicide. Only in 1987 the character of Sandman had a second chance with its revival by Neil Gaiman.

The original series of *The Sandman* ran for 75 issues from January 1989 to March 1996 and published by DC comics, beginning with issue 47 under Vertigo imprint. The main character of *The Sandman* is Dream – or Morpheus and other names- who is one of the seven Endless, his brothers and sisters. The other Endless are Destiny, Death, Desire, Despair, Delirium who was once Delight, and Destruction who turned his back on his duties, their names describe their functions. In the series Gaiman uses anthropomorphic personification of various metaphysical entities, while also melting mythology and history in its setting. *The Sandman* is a story about stories and it narrates how Morpheus, the Lord of Dreams, is captured and subsequently learns that sometimes change is inevitable.

The Sandman's series was bound into ten volumes, *Preludes and Nocturnes* is the first one. In this volume Dream finally escapes from a wizard who captured him instead of Death, and has to search his tools – his helm, ruby and pouch- and here begins his journey which will lead the reader also through the gates of hell. *The Doll's House* is the second volume, the Dream King has to solve some problems in his realm, The Dreaming, in fact three dreams have escaped, the evil pair Brute and Glob, and the nicer Fiddler's Green. The main plot is intertwined with another about a young woman, Rose Walker, and her search for her little brother. But as the characters reunited, a vortex is discovered, this is a force that can destroy all dreamers or even the world. Dream is torn between mercy and responsibility.

Dream Country is the third volume and contains the first Shakespearean adaptation that this dissertation will take in exam, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This story arc is entirely made up of different stories, first of all this volume presents the mother of Morpheus's son, and the night talks about what cats dream about. *Sandman 19* explores then the origins of Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Death has her own story in this volume, as she attempts to help out an agoraphobic ex-superhero.

With *Season of Mists* the regular series continues. In this volume Lucifer, tired to be the Lord of Hell, free everyone from there, locks it up and gives the keys to Dream. Dream King has to decide who will then obtain the keys of Hell. This is considered the most popular story arc, filled with a cast of beings from different pantheons and myths.

A Game of You is the fifth volume and mix up old witchcraft and fantasy to create an adventure, the character of Barbie from *The Doll's House* participates too. In fact, Barbie discovers that through her dreams she can access another world, in which she is a princess trying to save her subjects from the clutches of the Cuckoo.

The series continues with *Fables and Reflections*. In this volume there are different kinds of characters, for example The Emperor of America, Marco Polo, Caesar Augustus or a director who has to choose whether to fly or fall, a wolfman in search of his dreams, a character named Joanna Constantine who wants to find Dream's son, and others.

In the following volume *Delirium* convinces Morpheus, his elder brother, to search for their brother, Destruction, who is missing. But Dream discovers the price of finding Destruction, will he overcome the difficulties? This is *Brief Lives*.

World's End is a volume in which a storm of reality is caused by ripples – dramatic changes- of reality. As a consequence the characters are drawn together and they hide into a tavern in which each one of them tells the others his tale (like in Boccaccio's *Decameron*) Therefore the volume explores many

places: a city's dreams, a Necropolis where burial is part of everyday life, running away to the sea with Cluracan. The stories never talk about Sandman himself, but all the stories explain to the reader something about the nature of dreams and storytelling.

The Kindly Ones of the ninth volume are also called The Furies. Lyta Hall calls on them for revenge against Dream because she thinks he is responsible for her son to be kidnapped and maybe killed. In this volume Dream faced the consequences of his actions in *Brief Lives* and *The Doll's House*. Therefore The Furies enter The Dreaming and force Dream King to make something which can change his realm forever.

The last volume of the collection is *The Wake*. When someone dies people has to mourn, in this volume someone important dies so a funeral and a wake follow. Nevertheless the final message of the book is clear: a dream never dies.

Having generally summarized the plots of these ten volumes which compose *The Sandman* collection, this section will now focus in particular on *Sandman 19* and *Sandman 75*, respectively inserted in the third volume, *Dream Country* and in the last volume, *The Wake*. Through *The Sandman Companion*⁴⁷ and the interviews to Neil Gaiman, an analysis of the issues will be provided, they will be contextualised in their volume showing also the general plot of these issues and their sources.

Let us begin with issues 19, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which in 1991 won the World Fantasy Award for Best Short Story, becoming the only monthly comic to win a literary prize. *Sandman 19* is in the third volume, *Dream Country*, which stories are not particularly linked each others, but each issue tell something about Sandman story in general. The first issue of the volume is *Calliope*, which is about writer's block; issue 18, *A Dream of Thousand Cats*, let the reader see what cats dream about; and the last issue of this volume, *Façade*, is a story of faces and masks. *Sandman 19*, represents

⁴⁷ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion: A Dreamer's Guide to the Award-winning Comics Series* (New York: DC comics, 1999).

the premiere of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, performed on the hills near Wilmington before an audience of Faeries, including the same characters which appear in the Shakespearean play: Titania, Auberon, Peaseblossom, and Robin Goodfellow – Puck.

As far as setting is concerned, Gaiman chose to have the performance to take place on the Sussex Downs instead of London, because he declared he was influenced by Rudyard Kipling who wrote that fairies had left the cities. So he chose a location near the place where he was living, because he knew it well. The next step was find the right time period in order to avoid anachronisms, because as Gaiman put it “suspension of disbelief is a fragile balloon.”⁴⁸, and for this reason he read Shakespeare’s biographies as an actor which placed the composition of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* around 1593. Gaiman decided then to set his story in 1593 because in that year companies of actors were travelling and performing in villages, due to a plague in London, and in fact the issue begins with a long shot with the setting in the background and a caption which informs the reader about the date in which the story is settled. *Sandman 19* is therefore a Shakespearean adaptation and Gaiman wrote on page 5 - at the beginning of the play in the story- “Written by Neil Gaiman, with additional materials taken from the play by William Shakespeare”⁴⁹, because a half of the dialogues are actually taken from Shakespeare and they generally help the reader to understand what is happening in the story or comment on the themes.

But let us now explore the story in order to show how it develops through the pages of the issue. In the first page as said above a long shot which depicts the setting is provided and Shakespeare appears with his company of about twenty people including his son, Hamnet. Asked by Hy Bender if the relationship between Shakespeare and Hamnet in the story was based on historical fact, Gaiman answered that Shakespeare spent a long time in

⁴⁸ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 76.

⁴⁹ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country* (vol. 3), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 19, 5.

London, far from his family, but it is not know for sure if Hamnet ever went with him from village to village, nevertheless it is quite possible. Gaiman included Hamnet in order to tell not only Shakespeare's story but also the story of his son and a story about a father- and- son relationship. As far as actors are concerned, their names and roles are accurate because history has provided information about them. At the beginning of the story they are discussing the play with Shakespeare and the first page ends with a powerful panel which shows the little scared Hamnet asking his father about a man approaching. Gaiman explained in the interviews that he often uses this device of putting a strong panel at the end of a page, in order to induce the reader to turn pages, in this case at page 2 the reader finds out the shadowy figure of Sandman.

Shakespeare and Sandman meet and Morpheus reveals to the actor that the play will be performed there, at Wendel's Mound and asks Wendel to open the door. Wendel is a gatekeeper which open doors between worlds, in fact at this point an audience of faries comes in. The source of Wendel character is a chalk of a man holding two sticks named Long Man of Wilmington, which is on a Downs hillside; in it Gaiman saw a man in a doorway and breaking up the name 'Wilmington' Gaiman obtained 'Wendel's Mound Town', setting of the story. The Faerie folk is regal but Oberon is horned, if on the one hand this distinguish him from Dream – considering the fact that they are very similar- on the other it is also ironic and hints to the fact that Titania, his queen, is unfaithful – because Dream and her are probably lovers. Also Puck makes his apparition, he is apelike, and is the first character who nominates the Endless: "They say the seven Endles are forever, Mighty Dream. You and the other six, until the death of time itself. What say you to that, King of the riddle- realms?"⁵⁰.

On page 7 the play-within-the-comics begins. Shakespeare plays Theseus and Burbage plays Oberon, while according to historical accuracy in Shakespearean production is probable that the same actors playing Theseus

⁵⁰ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 79.

and Hippolyta would also have played Titania and Oberon. But Gaiman deliberately let Shakespeare play Theseus in order that during the first scene, after seeing the audience of fairies, Shakespeare would be so surprised to forget the same words he wrote. His balloon has nothing in it but three dots, he cannot say anything. Hamnet helps his father suggesting his line, in fact prompters were used a lot in Shakespearean period, and in this way the play starts. From this moment the action goes back and forth, moving among different layers, “One layer is the play being performed onstage; another is the activity taking place backstage; the third is the reaction of the front row of the audience [...]; and the fourth is the reaction of the back row of the audience”⁵¹ in which Gaiman put the giant Bevis, Skarrow the goat-woman and Peaseblossom the tree spirit.

As far as this back row of the audience is concerned, it is important to explain its function. Gaiman put there these characters as a device for providing clarifications about Shakespeare’s play because not all readers are familiar with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Then thanks to some accidents the readers are involved in the story: Shakespeare is sweating worried about the performance of his company, Dream is nervous, actors fear this strange audience, and the fairies are talking about eating the actors, but then the audience laugh at humorous lines of Will Kemp, suggests the readers that the play is working and the tension lowers. Next the readers see Hamnet playing the Indian boy, and Titania who notice him asks Dream to meet the boy, and this would be possible during the interval in the play. Shakespeare’s plays did not consider an interval, but Gaiman had to put a scene in which audience and actors and most of all Hamnet and Titania could meet.

During their dialogue Titania asks Dream about his relationship with Shakespeare. It is now that Sandman reveals their deal: he gave the actor the power to write immortal plays and Shakespeare would write two plays for him, this conversation echoes the other that Sandman had with Shakespeare about the deal in issue 13. But is page 13 the heart of the story, where Hamnet

⁵¹ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 80.

talks about the relationship with his father. In the interview about issue 19 Gaiman explained that this was not the original story, after his editor Karen Berger read the draft in fact, she noticed that it lacked a 'human centre'. So Gaiman decided to show Shakespeare's career from Hamnet's perspective on page 13:

It's like he's somewhere else. Anything that happens, he just makes stories out of it. I'm less real to him than any of the characters in his plays. Mother says he's changed in the last five years, but I don't remember him any other way. Judith – she's my twin sister- she is once joked that if I died, he'd just write a play about it. 'Hamnet'.⁵²

Moving forward on page 16 Dream is satisfied with the play and has his hand on Shakespeare's shoulder, in the background Titania is talking with the little Hamnet. On the one hand we see Sandman who tells Shakespeare about the death of his friend Marlowe. Shakespeare is shocked and upset with Sandman who gives him this bad news during the performance of the play, without understanding how much the actor could have been disturbed by his friend's death. In the next panel Hamnet is testing the Faerie fruit Titania gave him, and she is telling him all the beautiful things of the Fairies land, at this point the readers know what will be Hamnet's destiny. But even if Shakespeare talks about changelings in his play he does not pay attention to Hamnet and Titania. As the story goes on panel by panel the light grows darker.

After the interval the play continues and Shakespeare is surprised by the performance of Dick Cowley, but he does not know that he is watching the real Puck playing an actor playing Puck. In fact when the Fairies will leave he will remain with humans until the end of the play. At this point the readers see a rare occasion in which Sandman questions his own action, doubting the choice he made about Shakespeare, their deal, and even the play. He explains that the play is an homage to the Fairies, in order that mortals could remind of them. On page 22 Oberon, who already noticed Puck's presence onstage, urges him and all the Fairies to leave, because Wendel has already opened the

⁵² Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country*, issue 19, 13.

door. Puck remains until page 23, among humans to finish the play. When the readers turn on page 24 the light of morning shines again and all the actors are waking up on the hills where they have fallen asleep. Hamnet tries again to tell his father about Titania, but Shakespeare seems not to care. The final panel appears as black lettering against a tan orange: “Hamnet Shakespeare died in 1596, aged eleven. Robin Goodfellow’s present whereabouts are unknown”⁵³.

As far as the drawings are concerned, Colleen Doran is the artist, who worked in contact with Gaiman. The work of a penciller is more than decide what would be the character’s look, Doran in fact explains that she has also to decide the body language and the expressions of the character. Moreover, the illustrator of issue 19, Charles Vess, also did a great amount of research to create the Fairies of the story and went often to Sussex Downs to study the figure of Long Man of Wilmington, but as far as Hamnet and the actors are concerned, Vess had to make guesses about their figure because he could not find pictures of them. Finally the colorist is Steve Oliff, who added depth to the story. In fact colors help define time and space and suggest the mood of a story. *Sandman 19* begins in the morning and the colors are bright, but they grow darker towards the end of the story, when the night falls down. Oliff declared that what he loved the most of his work on this issue was the change of colors and techniques between the audience’s layers, for example he used comic-bookish colors for the performances on the stage; a fantasy-like color for the audience; and a naturalistic color for the backstage scenes.

Having explored *Sandman 19* under different perspectives, such as characters; plot, and techniques of drawing, illustrating, and coloring the story, let us now move on analysing *Sandman 75, The Tempest*. *The Tempest* is issue 75, the last issue of the last volume, *The Wake*. In the ninth collection, *The Kindly ones*, Sandman, the main character of the collection dies. *The Wake* is the last volume and tells the readers about the new Dream and sheds some light to the figure of Sandman. Chapter One, *Which Occurs in the Wake*

⁵³ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country*, issue 19, 24.

of *What Has Gone Before*, Chapter Two, *In Which a Wake is Held*, and Chapter Three, *In Which We Wake*, narrate the wake and funeral held for Morpheus. It is attended by guests and mourner which have played important roles in the preceding volumes. The last speaker is Death, who reflects on the life and death of the late Dream King. Follows an epilogue, *Sunday Morning*, which is a flashback and take place into a Renaissance festival; next issue is *Exile*, in which an Emperor is envolved and it could be seen as a companion for the story *Soft Places* from *Fables and Reflections*. *The tempest* is issue 75 and it is the second Shakespearean adapation on which this dissertation will focus.

The Tempest is the second story that Shakespeare writes for Sandman in the series. In fact in issue 13 they made a deal, Sandman gave him the power to create immortal plays, but he had to write to plays for Dream, the first celebrating dreams, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the second about stories and endings, *The Tempest*. Issue 75 then, tells the story of the last meeting between Dream and Shakespeare, and it also tells about the work of the playwright and the loneliness of Sandman. Nevertheless *The Tempest* contains also a consideration on the art of writing and of what it means to create stories. It is not a case, in fact, that the entire collection – which deals about the place where ideas come from- concludes with a story about where Shakespeare took his ideas and what stories meant for him and the people he loved.

The story takes place in Shakespeare house and Gaiman humanizes the figure of the playwright showing him in his familiar context. Gaiman explains in the interviews with Hy Bender that he had an idea of Shakespeare in mind. Gaiman imagines the playwright in his late forties, is at the time of the story writing *The Tempest*, he has come back home after having escaped in London twenty years before and lives in his house, New Place in Stratford, with his wife and his daughters. Judith, Hamnet's twin is disappointed to Shakespeare after her twin's death and the other, Susannah is married. The scenes which depict the relationship between Shakespeare and Anne, his wife, are the way in which Gaiman explores Shakespeare's human side. Anne is eight years

older than the playwright and he married her after discovering she was pregnant, then he went to London to put on plays and now that he is at home it seems like they have nothing in common – he talks her about his last play enthusiastically and in a dream, but Anne brings him quickly to reality.

Thematically the story is about:

The cost of getting what you want is having what you once wanted. Here Shakespeare sits, with all the writing talent and achievements he craved in *Sandman 13*, in spades. But he no longer has any idea if those are the things he wants, because he's no longer the boy who wanted them⁵⁴,

this is also one of the main theme of the entire series. The heart of the story starts at page 35, Shakespeare meets Dream and they talk about the play and the playwright explains how much the people he loves, his experiences, things he saw and dreamt, the Montaigne's essay he read, are all in his last play. He reveals that his characters are more real for him than the real people he knows and fears that all his talent comes from Dream and the deal they made, but Sandman reassures him, he only opened a door within the playwright, the talent was already there.

At this point Shakespeare asks why Sandman wanted this play, why he did not prefer a tragedy, Dream answers that he wanted a play about a king who leave his kingdom, a magician who becomes a man and refuses his magic, Shakespeare thinks that this is Sandman's story but he says that he is an island, he is not a man so he cannot change, and being The Prince of Stories he has no story of his own. Also in this issue drawings and lettering have been essential for the completeness of the story. Charles Vess illustrated both issue 19 and 75, but for this final issue explained that he had to do more researches; most of all he found it difficult to find references about the old Shakespeare, in fact the pictures he discovered were all different. Todd Klein instead, lettered the script of Shakespeare; only imitating his signature and documents of the time he tried to imagine how Shakespeare's handwriting looked like.

⁵⁴ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 228.

At the end of *Sandman* 75, follows an acknowledgements page which informs the reader that Roger Zelazny, who worked with Gaiman at *The Sandman*, died after the author completed the first issue of *The Wake*. Gaiman confesses that this event inspired the wake in issue 71, because the memorial of his friend has touched him. In the last pages the final biography section is composed by a series of self- portraits instead of biographies, because as Gaiman explains the story had already been told.

To conclude, the issue which closes *The Sandman* series can be defined as a flashback, which allows the reader to meet one last time Dream. *The Tempest* was planned since Gaiman wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: “[...] I'd originally planned on doing *The Tempest* about a year after a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. But I later realized that because the play is all about stories and endings, it would be an appropriate subject for the last issue of the series”⁵⁵, in fact the themes and the mood of *The Tempest* fit very well the all collection, and it seems perfect as epilogue of the entire series. Having read issue 19, the readers know about the deal between Dream and Shakespeare, and that the playwright has to create two plays, so this is the second, that the readers were expecting – the seal of the deal. As Morpheus and Shakespeare close their deal also readers and author do the same, and the last episode becomes an occasion to think – Shakespeare thinks about the consequences of his choices and through him the reader see Gaiman himself who thinks about his work on Sandman.

⁵⁵ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 224.



Fig. 4 Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 36.

2.3

More about *Sandman*: Gaiman's Storytelling, his Relationship with DC comics, his Creative Process

Gaiman's storytelling – in particular in *The Sandman*- is especially interesting because the author can convey stories and messages using a combination of words and images, the rhythm of panels, and the difficulties of serial writing. Moreover, other elements influenced the series, DC comics background of which Gaiman and his series became part, for example. Nevertheless is important to talk about the typical audience of comics and in what it is different *The Sandman*'s audience, and also the late success of the collection and its awards. To conclude will be provided an in-depth analysis of Gaiman's creative process and the origins of his ideas about the series and in particular about the most important character of the series – Dream.

“I have to pack a lot of information into a relatively small space, I try to take the poetic approach of making words and sentences say more than one

thing at a time”⁵⁶, explains Gaiman and in fact, even if writing comics and creating screen play have been compared – due to the fact that both convey stories using words and images – or comics and radio play have been put in contrast- because if radio produce only sounds, comics produce everything but sounds- the author thinks that the right comparison should be between comics and poetry. Gaiman’s creative process is not always the same, there is not a rule, sometimes he creates before all the words and then the panels, some others he creates the comics as readers see it – panel by panel. The aspect he feels more representative of his style is create a strong image-to-image transition to tell the story, this makes his storytelling different from others. When happens that words and pictures fight each others, Gaiman focus on words, and tries to make them incisive.

As far as the construction of panels is concerned, Gaiman talks about the rhythm of panels. In fact, thinking at comics like songs the reader looks at the beat, provided by the rhythm of a sequence of panels – feature which lacks in prose; “The panels control the timing, and they help us see how events are taking place in time. I don’t know how you could do a comparable thing in prose and achieves that impact”⁵⁷. This is one of the feature which Gaiman thinks that make comics different from prose and films, with comics he can play around with time taking advantage of the technique of sequential panels. As far as *Sandman* scripts are concerned, Gaiman explains he wrote a minicomic for each issue of a collection, using enumerated sheets he wrote on each one what he wanted to have happened on each page.

Moreover, Gaiman uses repeated patterns, a technique which consists in both visual and thematic repetition. For example in *The Sandman* there is a great amount of eye imagery – cats, books, birds, glass, doors, houses, hearts. And Gaiman states in fact that he exploits the fact that comic is mainly a visual medium – all the messages are conveyed by sight, and not by sound, touch or taste. As Hy Bender underlines also events in *Sandman* follow these

⁵⁶ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 250.

⁵⁷ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 252.

repeating patterns, for example a ruler who gives up his kingdom is a recurrent event in the collection and at the end also Sandman himself leaves his kingdom to another Dream. Moreover Gaiman repeats also certain storytelling techniques, the main example – even if not evident for the reader – is adding a story which is not part of the storyline of a particular collection, but summarizes all the key concepts of the collection in which it is inserted. An example is issue 13 of *The Doll's House*- which is the story in which the character of Shakespeare appears for the first time in the collection- *Men of Good Fortune*- and it is about defensive strategies people adopt in order to protect their feelings and how to lower these defenses, which is the topic of the whole collection.

Another aspect to take into consideration when thinking to *Sandman*, is that it is a series, and this meant a challenge to a writer as Gaiman. In fact, he has to create an installment of the story every month, and this is another feature which differentiates comics and prose as novels. If on the one hand produce a story every month let Gaiman see the audience's reaction as the story went on, on the other this mechanism forced him not to change the previous issues. Therefore Gaiman adopted a technique in order not find himself trapped in his writing, between two big events in the story he put a pause – an event outside the story. Creating 'filler' characters, scenes, images he created insurance for himself, because in next issues he could have used these elements.

A unique feature of Gaiman's storytelling in *The Sandman* is the use of silence, as Gaiman puts it "It took a while for Sandman to click because it wasn't a formula comic... It's about people. It's quiet."⁵⁸; this characteristic differentiates Sandman from traditionally explosive comic books, because it seldom deals with big events. An example is in issue 19 when Shakespeare and his company are on the hill, and they spend the time readying for the performance and chatting.

⁵⁸ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 256.

The uniqueness of Sandman as comic book, though, caused it to be far from the standards of a traditional comic book's audience. The series was in fact recognized as a critical and financial success only ten years after its debut. At the time in which Karen Berger offered him to write a monthly series, Gaiman had only sold few copies of his comics – *Violent Cases* and *Black Orchid* – and *The Sandman* was a big challenge for him. The editorial background which brought Sandman to success is the period of the rebirth of mainstream serial comics in USA, and of the so-called 'first British invasion', which - after the success of Alan Moore- led young British talents to work for big editorial groups.

Thanks to these authors – among them also Gaiman- promoted by DC comics and supervised by Karen Berger under Vertigo imprint, the quality of texts improved substantially. Moreover Gaiman and the others began to be taken in serious consideration in the publishing world. For the reasons above Sandman is a testimony to a period of experimentation in the field of US mainstream comics, and of the attempt to enlarge comics themes – outside the traditional entertainment- and audience- mainly teenagers.

At this point it is useful to retrace the beginning of Gaiman's collaboration with DC comics. Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean, both British, started to collaborate with DC comics around 1987 when the editor, Karen Berger, decided to publish their *Black Orchid*. Even if interested in the project Berger knew that Gaiman and McKean were practically unknown and moreover the main character of the comic was a female – in 1987 female characters in comics were unusual- these reasons led Berger to decide to postpone *Black Orchid* release and in the meantime to let the people know who were Gaiman and McKean. In fact, McKean created the drawings for Morrison's *Arkham Asylum*, and Gaiman was proposed to write a monthly comic to gain popularity.

However, after different proposals for the subject Karen remembered that once Gaiman mentioned her Sandman, because the author thought that a series about this character could have ended anywhere he wanted, so they

both agreed on Sandman. *The Sandman* then, started as an effort to promote *Black Orchid*, Gaiman and Mc Kean were not satisfy at the time, not only because they wanted to work together, but also because they wanted their project to be releaded as soon as possible. Therefore Gaiman started creating a new character, different from the 1970s version already published by DC comics, and in this way free from any continuity.

After Gaiman prepared an outline, DC comics approved it, but the author had to fight for one particular aspect of the series. Gaiman and McKean wanted to put Sandman only on the first cover, and keep him off the covers of the other issues. It was a rule that the hero of a monthly comic should always be on the cover of the different issues, but Gaiman wanted *The Sandman* to be different from other monthly comic. They won the battle and hero-less covers have been approved, giving also Gaiman the possibility to write entire issues without the presence of Sandman. The other achievement which Gaiman recalls in interviews is when in *Sandman 64* Vertigo allowed him finally to use for the first time the f-word, because sometimes he needed to use this kind of language.

Having said that, let us focus on Sandman's audience and on its success. Gaiman's audience in composed differently from the typical comics audience, in fact *Sandman* has more female readers than other comics. Gaiman was influenced by the feedback of his audience but also by the opinions of his collaborators, nevertheless he declared that his primary audience was himself.

Despite the great success, writing *Sandman* had its negative sides for Gaiman. He revealed that at the beginning everything was new and the panels came out very easily, every page was different for the combination of images, words, panels, captions. But more or less in the middle of the collection the layout of pages seems similar to others, and Gaiman would like not to repeat the same schemes. Moreover if at the beginning of the publication of issues he was practically unknown, and he felt no pressure, neither press nor comics industries were paying attention to him, and Gaiman states that writing was easier. But then at the time of *A Game of You* the series had already won

various awards and writing a story every month with the eye of the world on him became difficult for Gaiman, “it can easily lead to a writer feeling self-conscious and pressured about continuing to perform his art”⁵⁹, he states.

After the first awards Gaiman started to suffer writer’s blocks, and he refers to these periods in the scripts of *Sandman*. But he reveals in the interviews that he elaborated some mental tricks which helps him. First of all he had to remember the schedule, that he had to write every month; then he found also useful to focus on something else, writing something different for example; the last trick he used was writing regardless the form and the next morning he checked the results.

The series *Sandman* and his author won different awards:

Gaiman won the Eisner for Best Writer four years in row, in 1991, 1992, 1993, and 1994. In addition, *The Sandman* won for Best Continuing Series in 1991, 1992, and 1993; for Best Reprint Graphic Album in 1991; and for Best New Graphic Album in 1993. Gaiman also won the Harvey for Best Writer in 1990 and 1991; and *The Sandman* won for Best Continuing Series in 1992⁶⁰.

But the most important achievement was the 1991 World Fantasy Award for Best Short Story, won by *Sandman 19, A Midsummer Night’s Dream*; this was the first time that a comic won a literary award and the fact tells a lot about the revaluation of comics in the literary field.

Let us now explore how the series was practically born. First of all the writer, Gaiman, thought to a tale he wanted to put in the issue. This idea was discussed with Karen Berger, his editor, which reviewed the script after Gaiman wrote it. Then the penciller recived the script; a penciller is an illustrator who put the written charaters into imagery and once he was signed up the story is divided into pages. The unites of each page are called panels, Gaiman put in his scripts how should have been the organiation of panels, the

⁵⁹ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 261.

⁶⁰ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 260.

imagery, the words, the captions and even the mood he wanted to obtain, giving suggestions to colorist and letter.

Berger and Gaiman reviewed, edited, and approved the results: the scenes had to be right represented, the characters and the story should reflect the script. The following step was the 'balloon placing', putting the word balloons and captions on photocopies of the pencilled pages, this served as a guide for Todd Klein, the calligrapher. Then the work arrived to the inker, who adds to the drawings of the penciller depth, shadows, and textures; and to the colorist, who chose the scheme of colors. During all this process Dave McKean was designing a cover for the issue, then the pages has been assembled by Berger and printed. This was the pattern for all the 75 issues.

Gaiman built the series with a framework in mind:

I made Sandman as old as the universe [...] because that gave me all of time and all of space to play with. And I made him the incarnation of dreams and stories because that gave me a framework for telling virtually any kind of tale⁶¹,

in fact Gaiman took advantage of this framework. The series includes different stories – a day with Augustus Caesar, a story on French Revolution- and they take place in different times and spaces, as the readers are dreaming - instead of reading- them.

Let us end this section talking about the ideas which brought Gaiman to create the character of Sandman. When Gaiman was asked about where he takes his ideas the author answered that everyone has ideas but writers take notes of them, and that the hardest part is not to have an idea for a story, but to create characters which have to be believable people. In *Sandman* characters drive the all series, the stories focus on how events affect characters, instead on the events themselves. In fact the readers tend to remember the characters of the stories, defined by their dialogue with other characters – who they talk to and what they say.

⁶¹ Hy Bender, *The Sandman Companion*, 8.

The main character of the series is Sandman, Lord of the Dreaming. Gaiman talking about the ideas which led to Sandman explains that he wanted to create a character who looked like a DC comic super hero –but who is not at all- in order to catch comics reader’s attention. The inspiration for the family of the Endless and in particular Sandman was *Lord of Light* by Roger Zelany (1967), a book in which humans act as gods, but Gaiman took a step further and created real gods as characters of his series. At the beginning of the series Sandman is imprisoned, this idea came to Gaiman’s mind in order to clarify why readers had not heard about such a powerful character, then he had to decide for how long Sandman had been locked away. The explanation Gaiman thought was linked to the so-called real phenomenon of ‘sleepy sickness’ that hit Europe through 1916 – mentioned in an Oliver Sack’s book – and in fact Gaiman suggested that this disease was caused by Sandman’s imprisonment, so his stay should have been 72 years long, ending in 1988 when the series was published. All of this gives a logical reason of Sandman apparition/creation.

Moreover Gaiman decided Sandman’s appearance to be halfway between royalty and an alienated adolescent. Gaiman explains that in the 1980s kings and queens dressed like everyday people, but the real royalties were the rock stars, so with this idea in mind he created a Sandman with long messy hair wearing a black kimono. Nevertheless in Sandman’s attitude Gaiman put that teenager part he wanted him to have, for example his not being good in relationships or his alienation – in *Brief Lives* Sandman remains on a balcony under the rain for days because of a girl.

Throughout this in-depth analysis on the series *The Sandman* and his author Neil Gaiman, his relationship with DC comics, and his creative process – which led to the creation of *The Sandman* have been explored. This exploration underlined the aspects which differentiate this series from other comic books.

Chapter 3

From Shakespeare's theatre to Gaiman's comics

William is new to comics, but we think he did a fantastic job helping Neil with our play-within-a-play's dialogue. We would ordinarily predict great things ahead for this hot British talent, but, unfortunately, he died over three centuries ago. Too bad; he might have written the definitive Batman story.

Tom Peyer.⁶²

This chapter will provide a comparison between two Shakespeare's plays and their adaptations in *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman. *Sandman 19 – A Midsummer Night's Dream-* and *Sandman 75 – The Tempest-* are the adaptations taken in exam in this dissertation; after an in-depth analysis and comparison of themes, characters, setting, and aims used by Gaiman and Shakespeare the chapter will end showing the function of Shakespeare as a character in the comics series.

3.1

A Dream for Two

Let us now begin exploring the differences and similarities between *Sandman 19* and the original Shakespearean play – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This issue will focus in particular on the characters – in order to show how they are presented in both versions- and especially on the Fairies. Moreover comparing both versions an analysis of the theme of dream, of setting, of the use of the device of play-within-the-play will be provided. The section will also explore the function of drawings and colouring and biographical details of Shakespeare that Gaiman includes in the story.

Shakespeare's play is believed to have been written between 1590 and 1597, it is a comedy and takes place both in Fairieland and in the woodland of Athens where four stories intertwine. The main plot deals about the

⁶² Assistant Editor of *The Sandman*.

wedding between Theseus – the Duke of Athens- and Hyppolita – Queen of Amazons- during which a play (within-the-play) will be performed. For this occasion the king and queen of faries – Oberon and Titania- have come to the woods of Athens and in the same woods two couples of young Athenians are running after each others. As Lou Agnes Reynolds and Paul Sayer argue in their essay⁶³, Shakespeare was probably aware that in his time the summer solstice was believed to be a special night in which plants and flowers acquired magical powers – that they did not possess other times during the year. In fact a comical misunderstanding is created due to a magical plant which Puck – servant to Oberon- gives to the wrong people.

As the plot of the original play is well know let us focus on the Fairies world which Shakespeare created in order to compare it with the fairies of Gaiman. The word ‘fairy’ comes from ‘fatae’ and so from the Latin word ‘fatum’ which means ‘fate, destiny’. The Greek Moirae or the Nordic Norns, at the beginning the word indicated only feminine spirits, but then it extended to the whole *little world*. The first documents which prove the presence of fairies also in England are spells against elf and elfshots, during the Anglo-Saxon period when England was influenced by paganism again after the Roman christianization. It is quite realistic to think that this figures of fairies which also appear later in Medieval and Renaissance literature have the same ancient origines and that in the field of fairies the celtic or native traditions have melted with those inherited from invaders.

The appearance, the values, and the lifestyle of elves and fairies are also described in several Medieval manuscripts, which provide detailed descriptions of these fairies. The fairies are often presented full-sized or tall as a child they use magical unguents and live in Fairieland where the time goes by in a strange way – possibly one minute there are seven years on earth. Several writers the talk about changeling, it was believed in fact that elves and

⁶³ Lou Agnes Reynolds and Paul Sawyer, “Folk Medicine and the Four Fairies of A Midsummer-Night's Dream”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* Vol. 10, No. 4 (Autumn, 1959): pp. 513-521. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2867099>

fairies were used to kidnap babies and replace them with elves. Nevertheless Chaucer and his contemporaries believed that these fairy beliefs were typical of their previous generation and that there will be no place for them in future, but the beliefs in fairies overcame several difficulties and became also part of the Elizabethan Age.

During the Middle Ages the fear of inquisition and the witches hunts brought people to associate witches and fairies and to leave them a part, even to fear them. But during the sixteenth century – when the fear of inquisition was over- the fairies were met with public acceptance again. William Caxton introduced the press and in this way the readership was changed and new themes for different tastes were required. The writers who should spread literature to populace understood that the ideal medium was the tradition of fairies which was already well known to the people. The stories about fairies in fact had circulated orally and could have been appreciated both by common and cultured people. The dark side of fairies was not eliminated but smoothed and their size was reduced.

During Elizabethan period the theatre was a popular entertainment shared by all the social classes and queen Elizabeth I understanding the power of this medium offered protection to the best companies and appreciated plays. The fairies represented amusement and happiness, they symbolized the lightness of the life, the sensuality, the imagination, and the transformation. Shakespeare was the playwright who most of all developed these themes and characteristics, making literature from them.

As Briggs explains ⁶⁴Shakespeare – and his contemporaries- who wanted to write about fairies had ‘categories’ in mind, deriving from the oral tradition. Shakespeare used for his play the two most common types of fairies, the first is called the Trooping Fairies, divided in heroic and ordinary fairies. Heroic fairies are kings and queens, they live in their palaces, they organize parties,

⁶⁴ K.M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 8-24.

and are full-sized fairies. These remind Oberon and Titania, as far as Puck is concerned instead he is part of a second category called *Hobgoblins* or *Brownies*, knew also as *Robin Goodfellow*, *Pooka*, and *Bwca*. These are rude and hairy spirits, usually solitary but friendly with humans – which behave well- in fact being very touchy bring them to plan little revenges.

Knowing the sources and the general characteristics of Shakespeare little world will be useful to see how Gaiman adapted in a different way the fairies of this play and also some of their actions in the comic series. Shakespeare's fairies live in the forest of Warwickshire lead by Titania and Oberon their queen and king. These two along with Puck and all the fairies represent the magical plot of the play. Titania and Oberon are regal, elegant, both in the way they speak and dress, they appear in the II act of the comedy while arguing for an Indian boy (a changeling) who Titania wants to keep for herself but who is also interesting for Oberon. At this point Oberon decides to use the magical power of a flower but Puck gets into troubles. As far as Puck is concerned, Shakespeare represents him as loyal to Oberon, almost civilized in words and acts, but a little rogue, as his laugh reminds – 'ho, ho, ho!'. Shakespearean Puck is then quite ambiguous, in fact he is not only the cause of tricks, misunderstandings, and chaos, but also the real solver.

The play is adapted by Gaiman is *Sandman 19*. This issue tells the story of the première of the Shakespearean play in which Shakespeare, Burbage, Kempe, Condell – an other famous Elizabethan and Jacobean actors- act as the characters of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The play is part of a deal between Sandman and Shakespeare and the conditions for this premiere are that it have to be performed during a midsummer night in the Sussex near to the Longman Wilmington – an existing statue- which as Morpheus explains has always been a theatre. At the beginning of the issue a caption informs the reader about the exact date, June 23, 1593. This is not a case, in fact Gaiman moves up the actual date of the performance to let it coincide with the death

of Marlowe, Dream during the performance gives the terrible news to Shakespeare – shocked by his friend's death⁶⁵.

Longman Wilmington figure – Wendel- opens a door between the worlds and the magical audience enters. In Gaiman's version Oberon, Titania, Puck, and the fairies are in fact there to participate at the performance about themselves, so the real fairies are watching humans playing them. Oberon, Titania, Puck, and Morpheus sit in the first row, the other fairies are behind them, talking, laughing, arguing – Gaiman in fact uses them to give explanations to the reader about what is happening in the play. Among these there are Bevis – giant creature, bald, with ruined teeth, and the hairless round head which merges with the neck- Skarrow – a tiny fairy with goat head and female body, sitting on the giant's shoulder- and then Peaseblossom.

This last one is the only Shakespearean fairy represented in this version. Gaiman's Peaseblossom is impetuous, surly, and impulsive, she does not agree with the definition of Puck as madcap, because she describes him as a real danger, a rogue, a criminal. Gaiman and Vess depict these fairies as nice, chatty but quite harmful for humans. They are fully-sized fairies not very kind in appearance, characterized by their mischievousness. On the contrary Shakespeare represented Oberon, Titania, and Puck smaller than humans and the other fairies were usually played by children. Since Shakespeare in fact fairies have always been imagined as little, obedient, kind creatures, and he also confers them a refined language. Peaseblossom, Moth, Cobweb, and Mustardseed are the four most loyal fairies of Titania, which represent the popular rank of the social hierarchy of fairies.

Nevertheless the real protagonist among Gaiman's fairies in his *Sandman 19* is Puck. As described above Puck, Robin Goodfellow of the Shakespearean play was quite ambiguous, but he is always the fixer. Gaiman instead stresses on his mischievousness, and as for the characterization of other fairies he takes the cue not only from Shakespearean little world, but

⁶⁵ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country*, issue 19, 16.

also from the tradition which preceded him. In fact as said above during the Middle Ages elves and fairies were associated to witches, their malice was underlined and they were feared. Puck is in fact the name of a spirit which Gaiman represents as disobedient and independent, he is also feared from the other fairies and insolent with Dream, for this reason Oberon scolds him “Robin Goodfellow, mind your manners. We are my Lord Shaper’s guests, and I will *not* have him insulted by a hobgoblin”⁶⁶. Then Puck decides to interpret himself in the play, but anyone a part from Oberon recognizes him, Shakespeare is in fact surprised for the good performance of Cowley – who he thinks is playing Puck. Gaiman’s Puck seems to be a solitary goblin and when Oberon, Titania, and the fairies left the world of humans he decides to stay and bother humans. Also the final monologue of the Shakespearean Puck is quoted by Gaiman’s Robin Goodfellow, who closes the story “If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended: that you have but sumber’d here, while these visions did appear”⁶⁷.



Fig.. 5 Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country* (vol. 3), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 19, 22.

Furthermore, another important character added by Gaiman is Hamnet – Shakespeare’s son- who is travelling with his father and the company of actors and is present to the play’s premiere in front of the fairies. Through this character Gaiman introduces one of the motifs associated with fairies in Shakespeare’s time, the changelings. Hamnet in fact seems to stand for the

⁶⁶ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country*, issue 19, 6.

⁶⁷ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country*, issue 19, 23.

Indian boy of the original play, and Titania notices him and asks Dream about the boy, “That child—the one playing the Indian boy. Who is he? [...] A beautiful child. Most pleasant. Will I met him?”⁶⁸. Hamnet is described as an obedient child, devoted to a father who ignores him, who does not care about what the child tells him, because always focused on his plays. Hamnet feels that he cares more about his characters than about him, and thinks that if he will die his father will only write a play about his death.

The character of Hamnet is used by Gaiman to include some biographical facts about Shakespeare’s life – he will do the same in *Sandman* 75 presenting Shakespeare in his everyday life- and to make him more ‘human’ for the reader. Hamnet and Judith are Shakespeare’s twins born in 1585, Hamnet died at 11 years old but the biographers do not know why, the sources of that period are not always reliable, so Gaiman provides his personal explanation for Hamnet’s death using imagination and fantasy, he was victim of a changeling. According to fairy beliefs of Shakespearean period it was very common that the fairies stole babies and children, for amusement for example. Gaiman’s Titania then waits for the interval and meets Hamnet, she describes him her realm where the night does not exists and friendly dragons play with you. She gives him an apple which symbolizes the attentions Shakespeare does not give to the boy, but that she could offer him. The reader does not know what will do Hamnet then but probably he decides to join Titania in Fairieland, the story ends informing the reader of his death in 1596.

Let us now move on to some general consideration about the drawings, the coloring, and the setting. Gaiman in fact uses different means in order to make the plot more easily to read for the reader, in fact there are different levels on which the action take place. The actors in the backstage; the first row of the audience where Oberon, Titania, Puck, and Dream sit; and the other fairies in the audience, who are talking about the play, giving explanation to the reader. Vess – who created the panels- used simple and realistic drawings, underlining and exaggerating the differences between humans and fairies. The

⁶⁸ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country*, issue 19, 11.

physical features of the fairies are highlighted, pointed ears, straight eyebrows elongated upwards, horns, wings, downs, and spotted skin.

In Shakespeare's play two places are contrasted, Athens and the forest. The first represents rationality, and order and is associated to the sun; the second stands for instinct, and irrationality and is linked to the moonlight. Gaiman expresses this contrast changing register in the written parts. The parts which he adds are more unrefined and this underlines the differences with the quoted parts. Therefore in *Sandman 19* Gaiman creates a sort of Shakespearean 'play-within-the-play', making evident for the reader that Shakespeare's play is quoted in his story. Nevertheless this is also the first case of a sort of 'play-within-the-comics', because Shakespeare's company plays *A Midsummer Night's Dream* inside the comics series on Sandman. This device seems similar to that used by Shakespeare who created the play of the mechanicals inside his play.

Both in Gaiman and in Shakespeare two worlds collide, the dream and the reality. In *Sandman 19* what distinguishes one world from another is the work of Oliff the colorist – for the issues 19, 20, 21, and 22- who won several times the Will Eisner Comic Industry Award and of the Harvey Award. The pages in which principally humans are the main protagonists of the action have bright colors, light blue and light green are the main colours; when the audience appears the background is black and the light lowers. In fact according to fairy beliefs the fairies are associated with the night so when they come in the light goes down and when humans return the atmosphere brightens. Few times in the story the two worlds meet, the first when Burbage asks Oberon for a payment, the second when Titania talks with the actor who played her, and the third when Hamnet and Titania meet. These pages have a particular atmosphere with the tones of orange, which recall that moment in a day when light and shadow meet in the sky and then trade place.



Fig. 6 Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country* (vol. 3), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 19, 24.

The night has come and the last panel is dark, when the reader turns the last page a new day has come. In this last page the company of actors is asleep on the hills which were the stage of the strange premiere of the play. Shakespeare is the first to wake up and asks himself and to Burbage if they have lived a dream or it was reality, the actor sure that all was real wants to show Shakespeare their reward which Oberon himself gave him. But as usually happens with the fairies the gold becomes an handful of dry yellowed leaves, the only solace is that the had the honor to act in front of a great and special audience. Shakespeare efforts were not vane though, because his plays will be immortal.

Gaiman’s version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is as Cataldo argues, a wonderful exploration of the power and cost of achieving dreams. [...] Woven into and around the performance are the themes of responsibility and regret⁶⁹.

In fact in Sandman every dream has its price, and Shakespeare loses both his friend Marlowe and his son Hamnet, but he realizes his dream, he wrote plays which survived him. In both work – the original play by Shakespeare and the comics adaptation by Gaiman- the authors underline the importance

⁶⁹ Annalisa Castaldo, “‘No More Yielding than a Dream’: The Construction of Shakespeare in *The Sandman*” *College Literature* Vol. 31, No. 4, *Shakespeare and Popular Culture* (Fall, 2004): 104. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115230>

of the imagination, and the relationship between dream and reality. In fact the experience in the real world can determine the experience in the dream world, and on the contrary the dreamer transposes his experience in the dream world, in the reality. If a dream arises from the dreamer's mind, the same could be said for the play itself and the characters, which are only shadow of the reality, as Puck confirms in the famous final monologue.

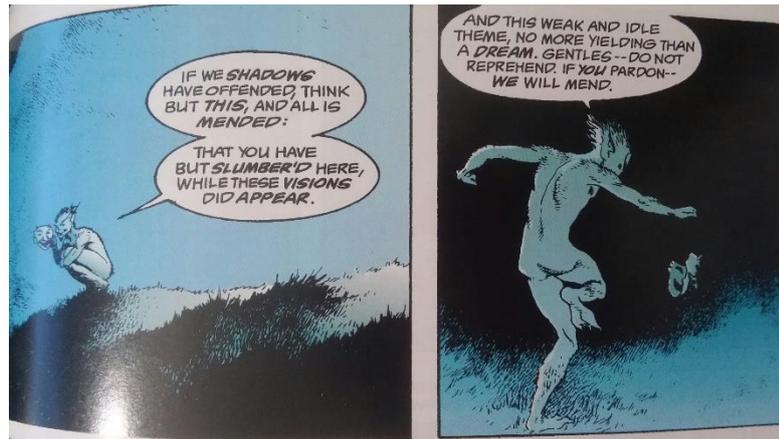


Fig. 7 Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country* (vol. 3), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 19, 23.

Maybe the readership is the real audience of the story and of the play, which needs these actors who awaken the imagination, the same actors who needs an audience to be its shadows. Both works represent the dream as a way to show the reality from different points of view because imagination and fantasy mirror the reality, the audience has to understand where, when, and why watch.

3.2

The Burden of Words⁷⁰

Comparing the two versions of *The Tempest* – the original play by Shakespeare and its adaptation by Neil Gaiman- The reader will find out that *Sandman* 75 shows a different version of the Shakespearean story and

⁷⁰ Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), 37.

Shakespeare himself along with his family and Sandman appear as characters in this episode. A brief preamble will be useful to introduce both the general plot and themes on which Shakespeare focused – in order to see the differences with Gaiman’s version- and will also contextualize Gaiman’s story in its volume – in order to understand why Gaiman uses this adaptation to close his series. The section will end comparing Puck – of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*- and Ariel – spirit of *The Tempest*.

The Tempest by Shakespeare is thought to have been written around 1610-11 and draws on the tradition of the romance, nevertheless influenced also by courtly masque, tragicomedy and maybe commedia dell’arte; writing this play Shakespeare paid attention to the unity of time and space and it is thought to be the last work he composed alone. Shakespeare’s play is set in a remote island, here the legitimate Duke of Milan – Prospero- is planning to restore his daughter Miranda to her rightful place using his powerful magic – with the help of Ariel. In fact the play begins with a storm he creates to lead his usurping brother Antonio and the complicit King Alonso of Naples to the island. Prospero’s tricks and machinations reveal the true nature of all the presents, the play ends with the marriage of Miranda to Alonso's son – Ferdinand- and Prospero leaves his island plunging his books of magic.

In order to understand what changes brings about Gaiman’s version it could be useful to underline at least two themes of the Shakespearean original play which in some way the reader will find in *Sandman 75*. *The Tempest* seems especially concerned with its own nature and in the text there are several links between the magical arts of Prospero and theatrical illusion, the shipwreck is described as a show which Ariel performs, the same Ariel will act in a masque created by Prospero, and in Prospero’s lines there are hints and allusion which may refer to theatre. Scholars and critics saw and see these allusions as indications that Shakespeare created Prospero in order to represent himself, and Prospero’s abandonment of magic as Shakespeare’s farewell to the stage.

Furthermore bearing in mind that magic, occultism, and witchcraft were well-known themes for Shakespeare's audience, he is very careful to distinguish Prospero from Sycorax. Prospero is in fact a rational magician, not an occultist; Sycorax instead adores the devil and her magic is destructive and terrible. Prospero's magic is wondrous and he can control Ariel, the spirit who Sycorax cannot control and trapped into a tree. Prospero use his magic to solve problems and then he frees Ariel. But is only the spirit who actually does magical acts, and not Prospero's himself.

Having introduced Shakespeare's play let us now contextualize Gaiman's adaptation in order then to compare the two versions more easily. *Sandman* 75 is the last issue of the last volume of the entire comics series *The Sandman – The Wake*. This tenth volume contains a narrative arc which tells the reader about Sandman's funeral wake and presents Daniel – his successor. Three stories of this issue provide the reader not only for an envoy from the series, but also a kind of compensation for the death of Dream. Gaiman commits this last volume to the illustrator Michael Zulli who uses a naturalistic style, this different graphic approach mirrors a change of tone and atmosphere compared to the previous volumes. The wake is in fact the moment which follows the shock for Sandman's death, Zulli defines the bodies and the setting in detail, and he represents a three-dimensional space shared by all the characters, put in the foreground or in the background and attending the wake. In this issue the main field is that of feelings, Gaiman and Zulli highlight what the characters feel as individuals.

In the issue of the wake all the characters of the series appear, and Gaiman uses also characters of the DC universe – as Clark Kent. The final part of the ceremony is celebrated with a nordic ritual, the coffin is put on a ship which changes form continually, the stream of a river pushes it in a waterfall. After the sinking of the coffin a new star appears in the sky, and it will remain there during all the wake. Matthew the raven is always present during the wake and represents the possible reader's point of view. In fact the same Gaiman explains that it is not so common that the main character of a series dies, or if it happens is a fake episode to attract the reader's attention. In this series

Sandman dies and he is replaced by Daniel, Gaiman faces the possible hostility of the reader for Daniel using Matthew. The raven is in fact hostile towards Daniel at the beginning, but then he accepts the lie of the land, as Gaiman hopes will do the reader.

Comics readers in fact are used to the unending series about superheroes, and it could be a narrative shock to read a about the death of the main character. Gaiman knows that this death is strange and wants the reader to accept the new character as Matthew does. This mechanism mirrors Gaiman's aversion for the serial superheroic comics which exploits a character doomed to survive even if he already has expressed all he had. In this way Matthew is the reader who get used to this new kind of comics, in which the main character can also die. But he does not leave the stage empty, because their moral values still exist and still be represented.

The Tempest is the story which closes the volume and the series. Gaiman was already planning to include this adaptation to the series when he wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but the mood and the atmosphere were closer to an issue as *The Wake* – focus on Sandman's death- and he did not want to write the two adaptations one after another. *Sandman 75* is a flashback because tells about the last time Sandman and Shakespeare met, and when the playwright gave to Dream the last play of their deal, *The Tempest*. In this last volume in fact there are several story about Sandaman, which recall past episodes of his life in order to leave something more to the reader after the death of the protagonist. So as Shakespeare respects the deal with Sandman giving him the last play, Gaiman respects the deal with the reader closing the matter about Shakespeare and his plays which he opened up in *Sandman 13*.

Sandman 75 concentrates on Shakespeare's – and thus on Gaiman's- role as author. This story in fact tells the reader about the creative process behind *The Tempest*, which were the sources, what inspired Shakespeare – in Gaiman's opinion- and it also show Sandman and Shakespeare together having a conversation about not only this play but in general on what it means to be an author. The first page of the comics is the first scene of the play, the

indistinct and watery colors represent the storm of the title, greens, purples, and reds stand out and the outlines are clear. Over the top of the scene, on the drawing of the ship in the storm, handwritten style captions are created by Vess, who uses this style in this story to represent the parts of the play Shakespeare is writing in order to distinguish them from the story of the issue. Furthermore the panels which represent Shakespeare's view of how his words might look have no borders – unlikely other panels, more delineated- they extend across the pages and fill all the spaces between the other panels which are clearly bordered.

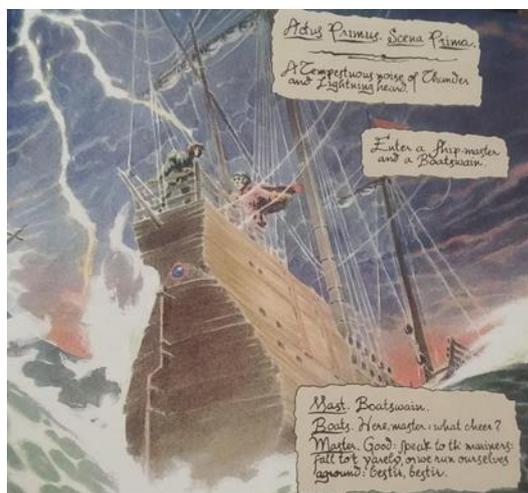


Fig. 8 Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 1.

This undefined style of drawing and coloration well suit to a play which is taking form in its author's mind. Shakespeare in the story does not have clearly in mind how his play will be, things will change, scenes, directions, characters may vary, and the course of the action itself may be different from how it was originally. This ambiguous beginning underlines the malleability of a writer's new efforts, the same technique is used at the end of the issue when Sandman fades away, leaving only the impression of his face in the foreground, and in this case it seems to show how also the memory rapidly fades. With this introductory scene then Gaiman recalls Shakespeare's tendency to draw on the reality which surrounds him – tendency which will

be explored during the issue- in fact his daughter Judith talking to him lets the reader know that there is a real storm while he is writing his play.

Gaiman gives also his version of the dialogue between Prospero and Miranda⁷¹, he shows what will be his own choices about the scene, how it should have been directed. As all the scenes of the play represented in the issue, the colors and the tones are the same of the first scene representing the storm. Furthermore Gaiman poses his characters much like a director might pose his actors, in fact Miranda keeps her arms crossed, she faces away from Prospero, she is shocked because she does not know anything about her life and her father lied to her. Prospero seems to display the staffs and the symbols which are on his robe, this confers him an air of control and authority, moreover he stands behind Miranda's shoulders and appears bigger than her, as to symbolize his control over Miranda. In the original play in fact Prospero has such power, not only over his daughter but also in general over Ariel and Caliban. This scene in Gaiman's version is an indication of how is the relationship between Prospero and his daughter also in the original play, Miranda is so susceptible to her father's directions, usually he speaks to her with commands and he is accustomed to being obeyed.



Fig. 9 Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 11.

⁷¹ Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 11.

Nevertheless Prospero's control extends also over Caliban and Ariel – creatures which inhabited the island. But Gaiman's Ariel seems not definitely characterized as the spirit is in Shakespeare's play; interestingly enough, although Gaiman highlights the figure of Puck in *Sandman 19* – Shakespeare's previous appearance- in *Sandman 75* the shape-changing, bright character of Shakespearean Ariel is almost ignored, save for some apparitions in the background of several panels, and only a single mention in the story – when Shakespeare is writing the scene of Ariel trapped in a tree by Sycorax. But although the limited mentions Ariel can be compare with Robin Goodfellow of the previous Shakespearean play in the series.

Both Ariel and Puck are spirits originated from the folklore, and both are servant of their masters to whom they obey. Moreover Ariel shares Puck's aptitude for shape-shifting and both are very confident about their own abilities. On the other hand while Puck is satisfied with himself, quite independent from Oberon and allows himself to make mistakes; Ariel instead accomplishes Prospero's orders meticulously, is loyal to his master who freed him from Sycorax's imprisonment, but strives for his freedom. The different characterization of these two characters might be explained by the disparity in focus of these two storylines. If in *Sandman 19* Gaiman empathizes Shakespeare as an author, *Sandman 75* is focus on him as a man; so if in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Gaiman highlights the play and the characters to show Shakespeare's work, in *The Tempest* he tends to 'humanize' the author, focusing on Shakespeare's interactions with his family and friends. So show Ariel as well-characterized as in the original version could have distracted the reader from Shakespeare which is the centre of this issue.

The character of Shakespeare is then pivotal in this story, his wife and his daughter are also presented and the playwright interacts with his friend Ben Jonson. Together they speak about their lives and works, and on being remembered – matter which recall Shakespeare's deal with Dream- they even compose a 'doggerel' and then Jonson helps also Shakespeare with *The Tempest*. Shakespeare is thinking about how to let Ariel enter the scene without shocking Miranda, and Jonson suggests the scene which the audience

sees in the original play, “Perchance the enchanter could send the girl to sleep while he talks to the familiar”⁷².

Why underline this collaboration, though? Maybe Gaiman is suggesting the relative unimportance of Dream’s help for Shakespeare’s plays, probably without the deal the playwright would have written the plays anyway, inspired by other sources – as Jonson, his family, or the world surrounding him. In support of this idea in this same issue when Shakespeare meets Sandman the playwright is worried about the fact that the credit for his plays would belong to Sandman and not to his skills as an author, moreover he associated Dream’s power to ‘a pagan thing’ and almost he fears this magic as a sort of witchcraft. Once again Gaiman draws on Shakespeare’s time beliefs on magic and witchcraft – and as Shakespeare did with Prospero- characterized Morpheus more as an ‘enchanter’ than an occultist. Dream then reassures the playwright, “There is no witchcraft, Will, no magic. I opened a door within you, that was all”⁷³.

Let us now focus on the relationship between Shakespeare and his daughter in Gaiman’s story, in order to create a parallel between Judith and the character of Miranda – included in the play Shakespeare is writing in the issue. Judith is mentioned since the beginning of the issue, and as said above Shakespeare’s relationship with her and with Anne is underlined by Gaiman who in this issue is focusing on Shakespeare as a man. When Shakespeare is writing about the storm, Judith is behind his shoulders, and plays the dutiful daughter; but the second time the reader sees her again she is hiding from him, nearly discovered in the arms of a local boy. Shakespeare’s back turned to her is in the foreground and she is in the background, the scene reminds Shakespeare’s neglect of Hamnet – in *Sandman 19*- but hints also at his

⁷² Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 14.

⁷³ Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 35.

willingness to ignore her behaviour, so that he can still look at her as his little girl.

Nevertheless he has other things on his mind and the following panel shows a close-up of his face, he is tired and the lines in his forehead suggest his weariness, his eyes almost closed speak for the need to rest, but he knows that in dream he could always meet Sandman, so he has to finish the last play of the deal. At page 18 of the issue Judith is mentioned again, Shakespeare is writing and she wants to talk to him. Looking at the fourth panel the parallel with the character of Miranda is clear, Judith keeps her arms crossed and she is behind his father – the posture is similar to that of Miranda in the scene with Prospero- but Shakespeare is showed in the following panel, focus on his play, while behind Judith appear her past memories floating in faded colours. When Judith is going out of the door Shakespeare turns towards her and – as Prospero in the scene of his daughter- he only sees her back.



Fig. 10 Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 18.

Furthermore a parallel between Shakespeare and Prospero is also possible. While Prospero displays his magical power, Shakespeare has only his words. Prospero uses his magic to control Miranda, while Shakespeare can control Judith only with his words, making her one of his character – Miranda- he attempts to extend his control over his daughter. In the reality of Gaiman's story Shakespeare is not able to manipulate her – as Prospero does with

Miranda- but he can manipulate his characters; therefore, the only way to deal with his flesh-and-blood daughter is his play. As the story continues Gaiman expands this connection between Prospero and Shakespeare, in the same page while the playwright is reading what he have written appears also Prospero speaking the same lines. The language of theatre dominates this passage, ‘actors’, ‘revels’, ‘globe’, are the words used, this refers to the fact that in Gaiman’s version of the play Prospero is the real manipulator and the others appears as they are, characters in a play.

The question which Gaiman rises here is whether all people are playing parts and whether Shakespeare perceives himself as a character in Dream’s hands. Moreover the language used by Shakespeare in the same passage underlines a sort of pale nothingness which downplays the importance of Dream, because if these lines which talk about him are so light and difficult to grasp also Dream himself would appear in the same way. Describing Sandman in this way shows the hostility and the rebellious attitude of Shakespeare towards him. Seen under this light the famous line of Prospero “We are such stuff as dreams are made on”⁷⁴ seems to mean that it is not important where the inspiration comes from because Shakespeare and not Dream created the character of Prospero, and Shakespeare is well aware of this.

Shakespeare’s attitude towards Dream seems to remember that Dream does not make him, but rather, Dream is made by him. But on the other hand Prospero’s lines emphasize Sandman’s importance, in fact his speech lets the reader know that the lives of mortals are short and are part of a bigger picture. But sleep is eternal, and by extension also Dream is eternal. Sandman and Shakespeare meet for the last time in *Sandman* 75, in the realm of Dream at Sandman’s house in a large hall with big glass windows – which represent Sandman’s brothers and sisters. Shakespeare is represented in the middle between two windows, one with the portrait of Despair and the other with

⁷⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 61.

Death image. The reader is aware that Shakespeare's deal with Dream is almost complete and he is despairing because he wants to lay down his pen and rest, in this way his placement in the hall is very telling.

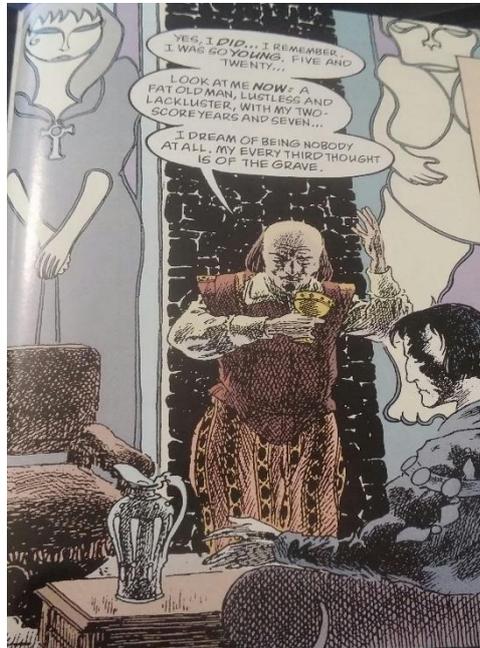


Fig. 11 Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 33.

Shakespeare has had what he wanted, the power to give his audience dreams that would live forever – also after his death- but now after years he realizes that this was what he wanted, now he sees himself like an old man who has never paid attention to his children and to his wife, Hamnet and Marlowe died and Sandman lets Shakespeare know that probably this is the price for what he asked for, every dream has a price. Dream explains that the talent was already inside him and they talk about this last play *The Tempest*; through Shakespeare's words Gaiman explains where an author finds his inspirations, his family – as Judith who in this story inspire the character of Miranda-, the reality which surrounds him – like the storm outside Shakespeare's window as he was writing-, his friends – as in the scene in which Jonson gives advices to Shakespeare. Shakespeare wonders about the idea of the play and thinks that maybe Prospero could stand for Sandman, who might have inspired a play about himself, but the Lord of Dreams argues

that he is not a man and he cannot change as Prospero, he will remain Dream without a story of his own.

In the last pages the reader sees clearly the link between Shakespeare and Prospero who can be seen as his alter ego – as many critics during the years maintained. Dream left and the playwright has to write the end of the play without him, here the final speech of Prospero is quoted first in Shakespeare's ballons and then with the hand-written style on his pages like the same words are pronounced by both Shakespeare and Prospero in his play at the same time. Prospero abandons magic and sinks his books; Shakespeare leaves the writing; and in the same time Gaiman ends the last issue of the series, "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, and what strength I have's my own, which is most fainted"⁷⁵.

3.3

Shakespeare in Comics Land

Now it could be useful to focus on Shakespeare as a character in Gaiman's *The Sandman*. The character of Shakespeare in the series in fact will be analyzed in order to show when he first appear and his function in the entire series. Finally the section will talk about the issue of authorship – present both in the works of Shakespeare and in those of Gaiman- and how it is represented in the series in exam.

The character of Shakespeare appears in three different storylines throughout *The Sandman*. His first appearance in the issue 13 – titled *Men of Good Fortune*- and it is the shortest. The main character of this issue is Robert 'Hob' Gadling, a man who wanted to be immortal. In 1389 Death and Dream entered a pub and heard 'Hob' saying that men only die because it is what they expect that they are meant to do and declaring that he had no intention to die. Thrilled, Death and Dream decided to give Hob the possibility to live as long as he wanted, so Dream proposed Hob to meet each other again in the

⁷⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 77.

same place in one hundred years' time. The man promised to be there. After one hundred years Dream returned and Hob was still alive, several things had changed in 100 years' time, he had worked as a soldier and didn't want to die. So Dream and Hob decided to meet again after another hundred years.

The next century Dreams comes back in the same pub to see Hob who is a knight, has a wife and a son. This is the background which precedes the appearance of Shakespeare. In fact, while they are talking Dream overhears a conversation between the young William Shakespeare and Kit Marlowe. Shakespeare considers Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* a real work of art and claims that he would give anything, even his soul like the main character of the story, to write plays which could survive him and live in memory forever. Dream is interested in this claim, he approaches Shakespeare and offers him a deal. "Shakespeare will now be granted the ability not just to write plays, but also to embody the dreams of mankind"⁷⁶, he accepts the deal without knowing the price.

The reader then hears about Shakespeare's success as a playwright from Hob in issue 18, where Gaiman makes him play the part of the reader and asking Dream about Shakespeare's career. Hob is in fact interested in the terms of the deal between Morpheus and the playwright, but Dream is baffling as usual. Then issue 19 is devoted to Shakespeare, the reader comes to know that the playwright has to write two plays for Dream in exchange for the power he received from him, the first is therefore *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – the premiere of which is represented in *Sandman* 19- and the second will be *The Tempest* – which concludes the series. Gaiman's Shakespeare is represented both as the man and the playwright, and most of all Gaiman humanizes his figure and uses this character to present the issue of authorship in the series.

The second appearance of Shakespeare is therefore in the third volume, in issue 19 in which he and his company represent *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

⁷⁶ Castaldo, "No More Yielding than a Dream", 102.

in front of an audience of fairies and Dream himself. This is the first play he has to write for Morpheus and it has to talk about dreams, during the performance Dream seems quite satisfied with the play, but he still has doubts about the fact that Shakespeare knows the price of his desires. With *Sandman 19* as Castaldo puts it:

[the reader becomes aware of] two other important things about the world Gaiman has created. One is that Dream is almost unnaturally concerned with duty and responsibility The other is that, powerful as he might seem to be, there are rules that even he and the other Endless must obey. Nothing is free, especially power⁷⁷.

These ideas are not clear from Shakespeare's first appearance, but they are developed in issue 19, entirely concerned with Shakespeare who is in Gaiman's world the human mirror of Dream. If on the one hand the Lord of Dream living in Dreaming and Shakespeare – playwright, married, with children, who wrote to buy his house in Stratford- seem to have nothing in common, on the other hand in Gaiman's vision both are bowed under responsibilities. Nevertheless while Dream is clearly aware of the consequences of his desires and his power, Shakespeare in issue 19 seems not to understand that power comes to a price. To underline this, Gaiman inserts the character of Hamnet – Shakespeare's son- who lets the reader see Shakespeare as a father who only pays attention to his work, to his plays, to his company, while his son is talking to Titania. The news of Hamnet's death at the end of the issue suggests that this is part of the price Shakespeare has to pay for what he desired.

It is also worth noting the appearance of this issue on Shakespeare in this position in the series. In fact if at the beginning *The Sandman* series seemed so far from the heroes series of DC universe and none knew if it would be successful, then it began to win critical favor as well as a large audience. Gaiman explains in the interviews that at that time he started to feel the pressure of the success of the series, for this reason all the series talks about the price and the consequences of the power. In this background he wrote A

⁷⁷ Castaldo, “No More Yielding than a Dream”, 103.

Midsummer Night's Dream – an issue about Shakespeare who seems not to be aware of the consequences of his desires and reminds of Gaiman himself.

Therefore starting with *Sandman 19* and through the characters of Dream and Shakespeare Gaiman talks about the “power and cost of achieving dreams”⁷⁸. The loss of his friend Marlowe and of his son Hamnet are part of the price, and Shakespeare begins to understand that – as for Dream- isolation is forced by responsibilities, but for him reality is less important than his work – his dreams. “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”⁷⁹, claims Dream underlining the fact that in Gaiman’s world he and Shakespeare share the same vision in which dreams – for Shakespeare his plays- are more important than reality. While Shakespeare and his plays are immortal – even for us- Marlowe is surpassed and Dream announces his death to a shocked Shakespeare.

“Through Shakespeare's increasing isolation, Gaiman suggests that dreams, while vital to a worthwhile existence, can easily take the place of reality and make a normal life impossible”⁸⁰, this seems the issue which dominates *The Tempest* – last story of the series- in which the character of Shakespeare appears for the last time. Nevertheless there are many arcs of stories between *Sandman 19* and *Sandman 75*, basically it is important for this analysis to know that Dream gradually understands that he is tired of all the power and the responsibilities which it brings and wants to abandon them, he gives his son Orpheus – who is only an head- the gift of death, but in doing so he is attacked by the Furies – who revenge family murders- and dies, a new Lord of the Dreaming is elected. After the issues about Dream’s death and the wake Gaiman inserts some flashback-issues in which old episodes of Dream life are represented in order to let the reader deal with the fact that the main character is dead – quite an unusual fact in a comic series.

⁷⁸ Castaldo, “No More Yielding than a Dream”, 104.

⁷⁹ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country*, issue 19, 21.

⁸⁰ Castaldo, “No More Yielding than a Dream”, 106.

The Tempest is therefore one of this flashback and this issue shows the last time Shakespeare and Dream meet. Although focusing on the final product, Gaiman gives the reader a work in progress, in fact the Shakespearean play is never performed in the issue, which explores Shakespeare's – and Gaiman's- creative process. This is the second play which Shakespeare has to write for Dream in order to respect their deal, this time the playwright is at the end of his career and he and Dream meet and talk about the play. This story links definitely Shakespeare and Morpheus, as Castaldo explains:

The Tempest has popularly been seen as his swan song, and Prospero as a self portrait. Gaiman uses this belief to round out the stories of both Shakespeare and Dream, two characters who find that they are too much ruled by the responsibilities that make them who they are⁸¹.

In this last issue of the series the reader sees Shakespeare in his house at Stratford with his family, trying to finish his play and close the deal with Dream. The playwright is tired of writing and anxious to rest, Gaiman focus not only on him as an author, but also as a man who faces a family life which seems difficult to him who has always been away with his company. The relationship with his wife and his daughter is detached, his daughter blames Shakespeare because he has never been at home with his family. Shakespeare feels that he has never truly lived – being only focused on his plays- and regrets the deal with Dream, maybe he has understand the real price of the bargain. The playwright claims in fact talking to Morpheus:

I watched my life as if it were happening to someone else. My son died, and I was hurt, but I watched my hurt, and even relished it a little, for now I could write a real death, a true loss. My heart was broken by my dark lady and I wept, in my room, alone. But while I wept, somewhere inside I smiled. For I knew I could take my broken heart and place it on the stage of the Globe, and make the pit cry tears of their own⁸².

The themes of regret and responsibilities already inserted in *Sandman 19*, in *The tempest* are clearly expressed. Shakespeare and Dream meet for the

⁸¹ Castaldo, ““No More Yielding than a Dream””, 106- 107.

⁸² Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: The Wake*, issue 75, 34.

last time, the playwright regrets their bargain suspecting that the source of his talent is only Dream's power, but Morpheus only helped his talent to come out. The two discuss about the sources of the play and throughout this discussion the reader can understand Gaiman's idea of creative process, which is the same explained by the character of Shakespeare to Dream:

I took the inspiration for it from the wreck of the Sea Venture in the Bermudas last year. The story is merely the sort of story all parents tell to amuse their children. There is some of me in it. Some of Judith. Things I saw, things I thought. I stole a speech from one of Montaigne's essays and closed with an unequivocally cheap and happy ending⁸³.

Moreover, *Sandman* 75 displays a parallel between Shakespeare and Gaiman himself, in fact throughout this character Gaiman talks about himself, his creative process, his feelings about *The Sandman*. Gaiman seems to suggest that the source of his inspiration is not only the reality which surrounds him, but also the work of others, and the same happened to Shakespeare with Holinshed Chronicles and Montaigne's essay. In the issue the playwright meets also Jonson who jokes about Shakespeare's tendency to draw from Holinshed. Gaiman underlines this parallel between him and Shakespeare also making him say that he cannot even read his work with pleasure because it seems to him fruit of artifice, and this is the same idea Gaiman expresses during several interviews about the series some years after its publication. As Castaldo explains, "Like Shakespeare, Gaiman finds himself praised for creating something completely new and innovative while uneasily aware that most of the plots and characters, and much of world view, is borrowed from sources now obscured by his creation"⁸⁴.

Gaiman in fact revived an old DC character of the 30s and when the series started to be published he didn't expect all the success that then provoked. In *Sandman* 75 the author describes a Shakespeare who seems very similar to him, a playwright – an author- who feels the pressure of his writing – of his desires- and regrets all the things he missed in order to write successful works

⁸³ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: The Wake*, issue 75, 35.

⁸⁴ Castaldo, "No More Yielding than a Dream", 107.

of art. As Shakespeare describes his creative process as a collaborative process – in his works there is something of himself, but also of what he read- Gaiman seems to suggest that the same is true for himself who uses an already existing character, some personal elements, and also Shakespeare's plays and other famous sources to create his series. Shakespeare loses his son, his friend Marlowe, and in the last issue he feels he has never lived, on the other hand Gaiman after the prizes received for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* started to feel the pressure of the audience and of the critics who expected great things from his work, because at that moment the series has boomed – and he suffered of writer's blocks. Both understand the cost of have what they once wanted, Shakespeare then works as Gaiman's alter ego in the series.

Continuing this parallel and extending it, Gaiman and Shakespeare both works with characters in which they mirror, if on the one hand the playwright sees himself reflected in Prospero – and in other his characters- on the other Gaiman compares himself to Shakespeare – of whom he is talking about in some of his issues. Is Dream who asks Shakespeare about his inspiration and about his last plays, so Dream is used by Gaiman to explain the reader his and Shakespeare's view on them works and characters. The reader reads in Shakespeare's words:

I am Prosper, certainly; and I trust I shall. But I am also Ariel—a flaming firing spirit, crackling like lightning in the sky. And I am dull Caliban. I am dark Antonio, brooding and planning, and old Gonzalo, counseling silly wisdom. And I am Trinculo, the jester, and Stephano the butler, for they are clowns and fools, and I am also a clown and a fool. And on occasion, drunkards⁸⁵.

Even if the play and so the characters are inspired by Dream – in the series- Prospero and the others resemble to Shakespeare, in this way Gaiman keeps intact both Dream and Shakespeare authority, without diminishing neither of them in reader's eye. At the same time the parallel between him and Shakespeare extends because both authors speak to the audience about their

⁸⁵ Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: The Wake*, issue 75, 29- 30.

Fig. 12 Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: The Wake* (vol. 10), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 75, 23.

In using this device in Shakespeare-related stories and in changing the normal structure of panels and speech balloons Gaiman create what can be called metacomics – the structure of comics is used to convey messages to the reader. In doing so Gaiman accomplished two missions, the first is that he highlights that there is a norm in comics – meaning that comica have enough of a structure to be considered a genre- and second he pushes readers out their comfort zone drawing their attention to the form he uses. Readers in fact might question why Gaiman choses to do these changes and what is their meaning in the stories.



Fig. 13 Neil Gaiman et al. , *The Sandman: Dream Country* (vol. 3), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 19, 14.

For example when he represents the play-within-the-comics in the two Shakespeare-related issues the reader distinguishes the play from the action in the comics because the play's scenes have no frame, they expand towards the borders of others panels or all over the page. The same is true for the coloration, while the comics action is painted with vivid colors, the scenes of the plays – both in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in *The Tempest*- have a bookish-style which make them different from the others.

Moreover, Gaiman's metacomics shares a similar vision of dialogue of methateater. In fact, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* characters literally direct each others and in *The Tempest* is Shakespeare himself who directs Prospero

and the other characters – he is writing about them on page and decides what the characters will do in the play talking with his friends and relatives. Gaiman uses this device to draw reader’s attention on the parallel between him and Shakespeare and also on his work as a director which is underlined by this new structure of metacomics.

While others – scholars, critics, writers- tried to prove that who we know as William Shakespeare from Stratford is not the same who wrote the works of art famous all around the world, Gaiman suggests that Shakespeare was really talented, but that his – as Gaiman’s- work and success depends also from other elements. Inspiration comes from personal life, relatives, friends, as from the things an author reads or see, but Gaiman’s Shakespeare is chosen by Dream not only because of his talent, but also for his motivation.

To conclude with Castaldo’s words:

Shakespeare's character continues to speak to us, just as his plays do, and to be infinitely plastic, bending to fit the current needs of a writer or a culture”. Like Dream who states that his paleness seems different according to who observes him, also “Shakespeare's character depends mainly on who's watching⁸⁶.

⁸⁶ Castaldo, “No More Yielding than a Dream”, 109.

Chapter 4

Comics in the Classroom

When I was a kid, we had Dick and Jane. Almost a full-page image and four, five, or six words on the bottom. As we got older, the pictures went away, and we had all text. It was like when you grew up, you didn't need pictures anymore, which is a huge mistake. We process images 60,000 times faster than words.

Lynell Burmark.⁸⁷

Nowadays we live in a visual culture. Internet, cinema, television, and comics convey messages with a combination of images and words. All the students, since the first approaches to school, are in contact with images and series of images. Nevertheless comics are rarely seen as teaching tools, this chapter will focus on what this new genre could offer to teachers and students who use it, even if there are negative sides – as for examples the cuts authors make to adapt literary works into comics- using visual literacy could be a new way to teach at different levels of education and could help with particular kinds of students – such as struggling students or students with disabilities. As Rodríguez and Pérez explains it:

There is broad consensus among scholars that our culture is more visual than ever before. High school or college students, among other groups, inevitably need to access images for their daily lives. However, teaching the language used by these images continues to be largely ignored as an issue in academia. Despite finding ourselves immersed in a veritable audiovisual abyss, the learning of this grammar is conspicuously absent and undervalued as an area of knowledge, like writing, that may be taught and learned.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Ph.D, 'Visual Literacy' proponent.

⁸⁸ Jose Gabriel Ferreras Rodríguez and Manuel Hernández Pérez, Review of: *Teaching visual Literacy: Using comic books, graphic novels, anime, cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills* (Thousand Oaks: California Corwin Press, Nancy Frey & Douglas Fisher editions, 2008), on *International Journal of English Studies* Vol. 9 (2) (2009), 171.

Frey and Fisher – professors at San Diego University- are in favour of comics as teaching tools as they explains in *Teaching Visual Literacy*, a collection of articles and essays among which in the first chapter appears a paper on how images can influence comprehension by Lynel Burmark – who invented the expression ‘visual literacy’. The entire volume aims to a reevaluation of the genre of comics, which has always been considered ‘inappropriate’ as teaching tool, but which can involve students in new ways. The suggestion of all the essays in the volume is to use comics to catch student’s attention and improve his/ her involvement in the classroom. Manga comics, graphic novels, comic books “have proven their detractors wrong by gaining ground in the classroom, probably due to their undeniable popularity, thematic diversity and cultural status attained over more than a century as ‘minor’ genres”⁸⁹.

Burmark defines visual literacy as writing and reading images, and the genre of comics fits this category. Comics have always been regarded as inappropriate or not serious reading, teachers and scholars have always thought that other books and manuals could be more valid in teaching, but kids – and not only- have always loved comics, and why try to dissuade them? Today in fact comics are more appreciated in the educational community and they start to be seen as useful teaching tools by an increasing number of teacher both for kids as in high school and in universities.

The idea of using comic books as an educational tool is not new, as the founder of the Comic Book Project at the Columbia University School of Education Michael Bitz claims, but what is new is the larger embrace of comics as literature. A great number of teachers ask how to introduce comics in their lessons, so panel by panel comics are booming as teaching tools and the web is full of pages and sites for teachers who want to use comics in their classrooms for students of any ages.

⁸⁹ Rodríguez and Pérez, Review of: *Teaching visual Literacy*, 172.

Kids and young students are at ease with visual literacy, combining text and visual elements is a typical feature of all that mainstream media they are used to deal with, so comics have a layout which is familiar to students and for this reason they offer a way to convey messages and information in class, involving students and they can surely help kids relate to big themes and topics. As literature comics unite the text with visual and pictorial elements, words and images are meant to be read together and in this way students use their visual literacy abilities.

After generations of children forced to hide their passion for comics because teachers and parents thought they was a waste of time, comic books are gaining respectability in the educational field. This also thanks to a creative program which helps children to express themselves and their creativity in creating and drawing comic books. This is The Comic Book Project⁹⁰ by Michael Bitz, started in 2001. Bitz started the project at an elementary school in Queens and he is now the director of the project – run out of Teachers College at Columbia University. “The point is not to drop a comic book on a child’s desk and say: ‘read this’ Rather, the workshops give groups of students the opportunity to collaborate on often complex stories and characters that they then revise, publish and share with others in their communities”⁹¹ is explained in The New York Times.

Teaching then started exploiting this genre which has a great hold on young minds. Comics have proven useful for struggling readers and they helps teaching grammar and punctuation in a way which can involve students. But what is concretely The Comic Book Project?

The Comic Book Project is a world-renowned literacy initiative that engages young people in the process of planning, writing, designing, and publishing original comic books. For over 15 years, CBP has engaged learners in a creative process leading to academic

⁹⁰ “The Comic Book Project”, Accessed 14 September, 2015, <http://www.comicbookproject.org/>

⁹¹ “Comic Books in the Classroom”, The New York Times, editorial of January 3, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/03/opinion/03thu4.html?_r=1&

achievement, social awareness, and community development. By engaging youths in the creative process of brainstorming, sketching, plotting, designing, and publishing original comic books, CBP enables students to become active learners and content creators, rather than mere information receivers⁹².

Its pilot year was the 2002 then it was used citywide in New York and Cleveland in 2003. While New York City project was based on environmental awareness, the topic of Cleveland project was conflicts resolution. The two project involved 10,000 youths and after having been featured by several medias The Comic Books Project was launched nationally in 2004-2005 with the theme of leadership. The importance of the project in helping youth to learn language and literacy is testified by the international recognition it received – from the Reading Association of Nigeria to the Ministry of Education in Australia. New projects will be presented Mexico, Canada, and Nicaragua. “The mission of bringing creativity into the classroom continues”⁹³.

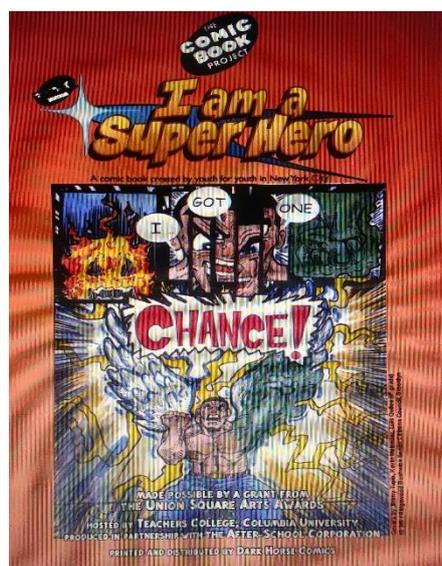


Fig. 14 New York City project, “The Comic Book Project”, Accessed 14 September, 2015, <http://www.comicbookproject.org/>

Therefore if some years ago comics were considered enemies of education, nowadays comic books – classics as Superman, but also the more complex

⁹² “The Comic Book Project”.

⁹³ “The Comic Book Project”.

graphic novels- are regarded as useful teaching tools by teachers and considered an art form, part of literature. Comics can thrill reluctant readers and convey serious messages to all the students in a familiar way for them.

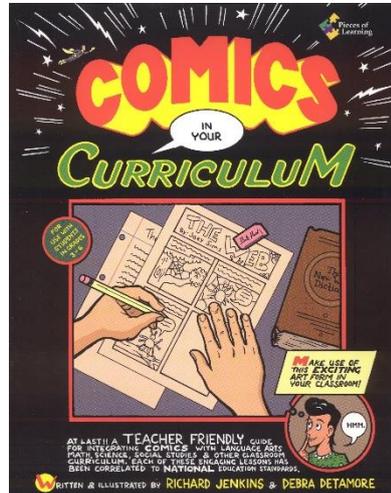


Fig 15 Paperback of *Comics in your Curriculum*, written and illustrated by Richard Jenkins and Debra Detamore (Marion IL: Pieces of Learning, 2008).

*Comics in your Curriculum*⁹⁴ is a book by Richard Jenkins and Debra Detamore which contains tips and tools for teacher who want to insert comics in their lesson, for any kind and level of students. This is an how-to guide which suggests teachers some ways to insert comics in their lessons, whatever could be the subject – math, science, literature, grammar- students will learn with fun throughout comics. The book explains not only how to incorporate comics in the lessons, but is also a guide to make comics – for third-to-sixth-grade teachers. Jenkins states that the idea for the book had come because there was no such a book about how to create a comics, but when he explained the process to students they were very interested, so he collaborated with a teacher and created this project. As Jenkins himself puts it in an interview:

We outline the various steps of how to make a comic for a creating writing or drawing activity. The kids will first write out a story, several sentences long, and then do a rough draft comic, and add dialogue to that, in a rough draft, and then a final draft with more clearly-

⁹⁴ Written and illustrated by Richard Jenkins and Debra Detamore, *Comics in your Curriculum* (Marion IL: Pieces of Learning, 2008).

defined panels, more detailed backgrounds, that sort of thing. And it keeps evolving – the writing, the drawing the background – and they can add to it and elaborate it as it's revised.⁹⁵

The book had good feedback and sales went very well, which means teachers were interested in the project. Jenkins claims that the success depends on the fact that kids are naturally familiar with comics and once teachers understand this language they can exploit it to involve students in their learning. Creating their own comics they could feel they have ownership of their studies. But let us show several examples of the use of comics as teaching tools which circulate on web sites for teachers in order to highlight the positive sides of these new methods.

Monica Edinger is an author of books for educators and a committed educator, who describes her project on her blog⁹⁶. She chose to transform *Alice in Wonderland* in a comic with her class of students through a program called Comic Life⁹⁷ – which helps in creating comics. *Alice in Comic Land* is the comic created by the students which she shares with who visits the blog. She explains she taught the students how to use Comic Life and prepared them technologically and then together they created the comics, new scenes were also added because students were active and creative. They read the book, and were divided on the basis of what chapter they preferred to draw, then they drew the scenes – scanning the images to insert them in their comics, and wrote also some blog posts on this process. Edinger thinks that Carroll's story is perfect for the medium of comics and students were very familiar with panels, speech balloons and comic elements in general. And she suggests: “in addition to using comics in the classroom, I urge teachers to consider

⁹⁵ Zack Smith, “Comic Books As Curriculum”, Newsarama, 31 December 2008. <http://www.newsarama.com/1862-comic-books-as-curriculum.html>

⁹⁶ Monica Edinger, “In the Classroom: Alice in Comic Land”, Educating Alice (blog), accessed 15 September 2015, <https://medinger.wordpress.com/2008/06/02/in-the-classroom-alice-in-comic-land/>

⁹⁷ Comic Life. <http://plasq.com/apps/comiclife/macwin/>

having kids make them as well. It is great for sequencing, deepening understanding of a book, collaborating, creativity, and tons more⁹⁸.

The web site ReadWriteThink⁹⁹ then gives suggestions and lesson plans in order to create comics to study something new in class. One example which is proposed is *Book Report Alternative: Examining Story Elements Using Story Map Comic Strips*, the aim is to let the students understand the elements of storytelling – characters, setting, problems, events, and solution- in order to be more interested in the stories they read. Throughout a six-paneled comic the students have to summarize a book they read, this could help evaluate their comprehension of the important elements of a novel. Every proposal has an author and this project has been created by Lisa Storm Fink.

Maureen Gerard offers on the same web site a new way to teach onomatopoeia, *Buzz! Whiz! Bang! Using Comic Books to Teach Onomatopoeia*. Onomatopoeia are words which describe the sound associated to an action or an object and comics make great use of these. The first step is to find onomatopoeia with the class in some comic strips and let students explain what effect they produce. So they will create their comic strips using onomatopoeia and show to the class what adds this particular effects to the story.

⁹⁸ Monica Edinger, “In the Classroom: Alice in Comic Land”.

⁹⁹ ReadWriteThink. <http://www.readwritethink.org/>

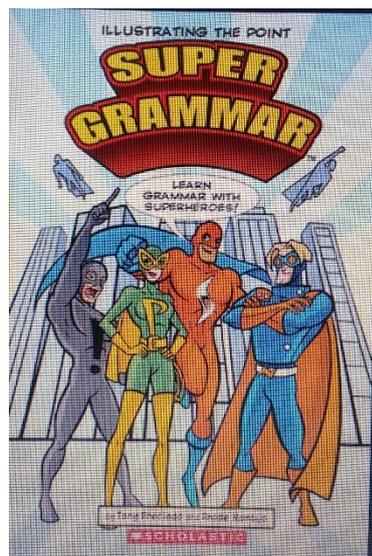


Fig. 16 *Super Grammar*, comics as teaching tools on the web site Scholastic. <http://emea.scholastic.com/en>

A lesson plan to teach Greek and Latin Roots is also proposed in another site. After a discussion on Latin and Greek Roots students can create their own Superhero, deciding what kind of superpowers he could have, and putting it in an ancient setting. Comics can be also used to write autobiographical stories, in fact modern graphic novels are useful example of how a comics could have a more serious and adult topic and many of them are autobiographies. Reading in class for example Pulitzer Prize-winning Art Spiegelman's epic work, *Maus*, which tells the story of his father's experience in a Nazi concentration camp, could be an useful example which could stimulate students to use their personal stories to create their own autobiographical comics.

On the site of BBC then, Katie Connolly published an article on philosophy and comics¹⁰⁰, with several interventions of teachers who use comics to teach philosophy in class. To understand how comics and philosophy are linked the students only have to think for example to the eternal struggle between Batman and the Joker, why doesn't the superhero

¹⁰⁰ Katie Connolly, "Teaching philosophy with Spider-Man", BBC News (US and Canada). <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-10900068>

just kill his enemy? And Kant with the theory of ethics gives the answer. Professors of philosophy have found in comics a useful tool to engage students, “moreover, superheroes are attracting students to a discipline often perceived as overrun by musty books, suede elbow patches and bow ties”¹⁰¹.

William Irwin – philosophy professor at King's College in Pennsylvania- in fact claims that is not unusual to use popular medium to convey complex theories and messages, also Socrates walked in the streets of Athens and spoke to people in their language full of agricultural analogies to explain his theories. Mr Bartel then – who uses *Watchmen* graphic novel in his lessons- explains that he used to have students read Plato, Hume, and Aristotele as introduction to the course, but they were scared by the complex and archaic language. With the new medium of comics and graphic novels the philosophical ideas can be shown through images which catch student’s eye.



Fig. 17 Spider-Man's alter-ego Peter Parker struggles with his superhero status (Image of Marvel Entertainment) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-10900068>

Mr Robichaud – professor of ethics and political philosophy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and Tufts University- states that superhero-based comics can help students to understand ethical dilemmas. The example here is Spider-Man, when he finds out his superpowers has he the obligation to use them to save people? Robichaud used this issue of Spider-Man to explain consequentialism, “a consequentialist would be likely to argue that

¹⁰¹ Connolly, “Teaching philosophy with Spider-Man”.

Peter Parker has a moral responsibility to be Spider-Man because that decision would bring about the greatest good”¹⁰², but a non-consequentialist will suggest that Peter Parker should follow his scientific vocation. Robichaud claims in fact that ethical issues are difficult to teach because some answers are very personal for people, using comics people can think about ethics on artificial examples.



Fig. 18 Peter Parker's Uncle Ben told him that with great power comes great responsibility, an axiom that thematically recurs through the series (Image of Marvel Entertainment) <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-10900068>

Nevertheless this new kind of lessons of philosophy raises critics, but as Irwin puts it:

We are not saying that the canon of Superman comic books is equivalent to Homer and Dante and you can study them for their own sake. We're not suggesting that comic books replace Plato and Descartes - not at all. The goal is always to get people interested in philosophy by speaking first in terms that people are familiar with¹⁰³.

*Turning Struggling Students into Superheroes: Comic Books as Teaching Tools*¹⁰⁴ is the title of a post on the blog Teach, make a difference. This issue explains how struggling students can find comfort in comics, linking word and pictures can help not only in reading, but also in subjects as math and

¹⁰² Connolly, “Teaching philosophy with Spider-Man”.

¹⁰³ Professor William Irwin, Editor, *Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series*.

¹⁰⁴ Michelle Manno, “Turning Struggling Students into Superheroes: Comic Books as Teaching Tools”, Teach, make a difference (blog), accessed 19 September 2015, <http://teach.com/great-educational-resources/comic-books-in-the-classroom>

science. As far as the reading is concerned struggling students – the majority of which are male students in the reading field- are helped in reading words having images in the same pages. In subject such as math – which is usually described as difficult or boring by students- then, drawing images to solve problems could help students to synthesize informations they cannot find on their own.

Being a sequential art, even if the plot of a comics could be complex, the stories are accessible because the visual sequential nature of this genre. Comics demands readers to read words, interpret images, connect words with images, and read sequentially, this could be for this reason a great exercise in class for struggling students who have problems with reading. In this way they can approach reading more easily and feel more autonomous, as Manno explains it:

If we want to reach our struggling students [...] we need to teach young boys that literacy still is the ultimate adventure, and they too have the chance to be the hero. Not only does it allow students to express their knowledge and comprehension through an alternative medium, but also it made students -- particularly boys -- more comfortable with literacy as a whole¹⁰⁵.

Beside being a fun app, Bitstrips is also a useful teaching tool for children with Autism – as long with Asperger’s syndrome, and certain Learning Disabilities. Bitstrip for School¹⁰⁶. “One of the difficulties that individuals with autism have is the ability to understand ‘abstract’ concepts of social interaction, such as feelings and emotions communicated through body language and facial expressions”¹⁰⁷ and comics help better understanding social situations. Comics strips has visual elements which reproduce a normal conversation and help children with Autism to grasp those abstract concepts

¹⁰⁵ Manno, “Turning Struggling Students into Superheroes: Comic Books as Teaching Tools”.

¹⁰⁶ Bitstrip for School, <http://www.bitstripsforschools.com/>

¹⁰⁷ “Bitstrips Comics for Autism/Asperger’s syndrome”, Valentin & Blackstock Psychology, Psychoeducational Services for Children and Adults (blog), accessed 16 September 2015, <http://www.vbpsychology.com/bitstrips-comics-for-autism-aspergers/>

they cannot during a face to face conversation. Moreover, using Bitstrip for School children with Autism, Asperger’s syndrome, and Learning Disabilities can express themselves more easily and in a fun way, involving them in every subjects and let them feel part of the class. Using Bitstrip has also been proved to be useful “for students with dyslexia, [because] the comic strip panel structure of Bitstrips can help support the left-to-right flow in reading. Bitstrips can also help students who may be having emotional or behavioural problems express themselves”¹⁰⁸.

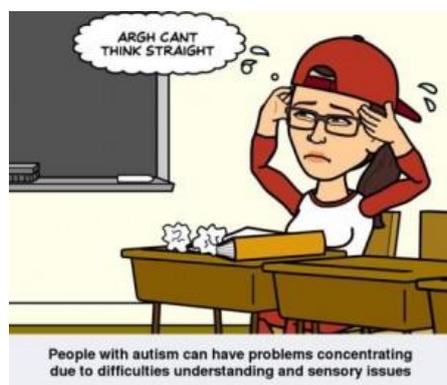


Fig. 19 Bitstrip comics created by Jo Redman for Anna Kennedy Online – a charity that supports people with Autism and Asperger’s syndrome, <http://www.vbpsychology.com/bitstrips-comics-for-autism-aspergers/>

Another interesting field in which comics have proven to be important teaching tools is creating disability awareness in the classrooms. In fact a gret number of students with disabilities are integrated in general education curriculaa, and this create the need to teach disability awareness to other students. “It is critical for teachers to create in their classrooms multiple opportunities for students with and without disabilities to academically and socially interact with one another and to have access to meaningful and reciprocal friendships that will promote inclusive behaviors in the classrooms

¹⁰⁸ “Bitstrips Comics for Autism/Asperger’s syndrome”, Valentin & Blackstock Psychology, Psychoeducational Services for Children and Adults (blog), accessed 16 September 2015, <http://www.vbpsychology.com/bitstrips-comics-for-autism-aspergers/>

and communities”¹⁰⁹, because even if students with disabilities want to integrate and fit in they may have to struggle to be accepted in a class. Moreover disability awareness is important because a limited knowledge of students with disabilities real skill creates feelings of discomfort and awkwardness, which lead to misperceptions of students with disabilities. These same feelings can affect also students with disabilities behaviour and skills.

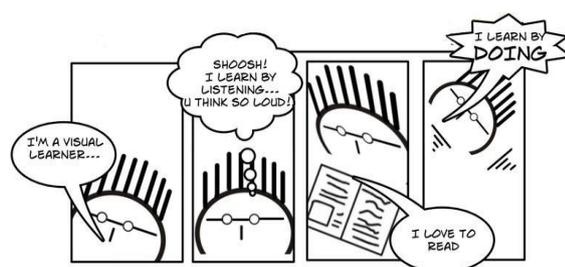


Fig. 20 Comics to create inclusiveness, <http://inclusionstrategies.wikispaces.com/Literacy+%26+Foreign+Language+Team>

Comics have proven to be a new way to create disability awareness and integration in class. This medium thrills and attracts young students because linking words and drawings, student can read and see at the same time, like reading and watch a film at the same time. “In recent scholarship on empathy, comics have been found to be particularly effective in communicating depictions of disabilities (Birge, 2010; Seidler 2011, November, Squire, 2008) in ways that represent the complex emotional, physical, and social aspects of disability”¹¹⁰, in fact drawings, images and speech balloons better represent students with disabilities and their true skills. Text alone cannot describe what a student with disabilities experience, but “embodiment and other forms of communication within these comics allowed the reader to

¹⁰⁹ Ewa McGrail and Alicja Rieger, “Increasing Disability Awareness through Comics Literature”, *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education* Vol. 3, No. 1 (Fall/Winter 2013): 3. <http://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1157&context=ejie>

¹¹⁰ McGrail and Rieger, “Increasing Disability Awareness through Comics Literature”, 4.

experience and relate to the emotional tension”¹¹¹ associated with learning about the disabilities.

After a discussion on issues on disability led by a facilitator – a teacher- the students may learn something about other students in their class, the reading of a comics about students with disabilities could then help the class to see things under their point of view. “Utilizing comics literature for conversations in support of a classroom climate of acceptance and appreciation will in turn encourage positive relationships, friendships, and interactions between students with and without disabilities. Such climate will influence positively academic achievement as well”¹¹².

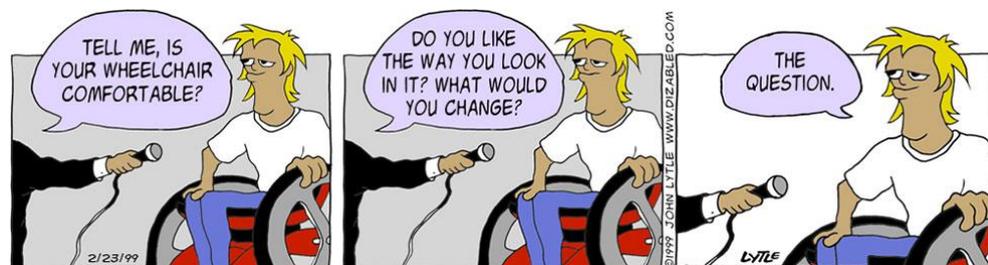


Fig. 21 Small Talk Interview, <http://leederomen.com/comic/small-talk-interview/>

Furthermore an interesting study on the use of comics to teach history has been done by Alicia C. Decker and Mauricio Castro – of Purdue University. The graphic novel chosen is “*Unknown Soldier*, by Joshua Dysart and Alberto Ponticelli, which [they] believe does an excellent job of complicating students' understanding of war and violence in Africa”¹¹³. This study is divided in two parts, in the first Castro analyzes *Unknown Soldier* series, predecessor of *Unknown Soldier: Haunted House*, chosen for explain war in Africa in a class. If the first series takes place in some not specified place during World War Two, the second is set in Uganda in 2002 and for this reason fits the aim of Decker lessons. In the second part in fact Decker shows

¹¹¹ McGrail and Rieger, “Increasing Disability Awareness through Comics Literature”, 4.

¹¹² McGrail Rieger, “Increasing Disability Awareness through Comics Literature”, 6.

¹¹³ Alicia C. Decker and Mauricio Castro, “Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel”, *The History Teacher* Vol. 45, No. 2 (February 2012), 170. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23265918>

how the graphic novel *Unknown Soldier: Haunted House* has been used in her course about the war in Africa.

“My analysis of Dysart and Ponticelli's work is meant to show that, far from being an impediment to instruction, comics can serve as valuable teaching tools both through their strengths and through their weaknesses”¹¹⁴ explains Castro. Dr. Moses Lwanga is the protagonist of this graphic novel, he is introduced with his parents which rose him in the US to escape the regime of Idi Amin. As a doctor he comes back to Uganda in 2002, the comics presents him while talking of humanitarianism and pacifism, but unfortunately after few issues he becomes trapped in the violence of the conflict. The graphic novel show how an individual violent action may only worsen the situation in a war zone, as Castro continues. So the questions a professor/teacher should pose him/herself before use this graphic novel as a teaching tool are:

What message does it convey? While carefully researched and well intentioned, is this work still an outsider's perspective that is more concerned with the spectacle conveyed by the book's horror than with an earnest exploration of the issues surrounding the conflict? And what is the reaction that it will arouse from the students to whom the work is exposed? Could the use of *Unknown Soldier* as a text in the classroom be counterproductive?¹¹⁵

Decker seems to answer these question in her part, explaining how she has integrated this graphic novel in her lesson plan, and what results she achieved with her students during an undergraduate course about violence, war, and militarism in modern Africa which she held at Purdue University in 2009. Decker thinks that even if there are several conflicts and wars nowadays in the world, students hardly grasp the real meaning of living in a war zone. They have abstract ideas about war, but living far away from it they cannot understand the consequences of this reality, “Our responsibility as educators

¹¹⁴ Decker and Castro, “Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel”, 171.

¹¹⁵ Decker and Castro, “Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel”, 177.

is to provide that reference point, filling in the blanks and helping them to understand the larger historical context(s)”¹¹⁶ she continues.

She decided to adopt a creative pedagogical approach and insert *Unknown Soldier* graphic novels among the texts of the course – which included also song lyrics, novels, memoirs, speeches, poems and more traditional monographs and articles. Decker herself had doubts about this new approach:

What sort of message would I be sending my students if I introduced them to a text that depicted violence in such a graphic manner? Would the text "confirm" African violence, rather than trouble their understanding of it? Would it be too violent, too demoralizing? Or, would it simply encourage more students to do the reading?

Nevertheless the test worked. In the first part of her course Decker gave information on the topic and organized class discussions in order to inform students on the theme of the course and in the second part she introduced the graphic novel. For some students that was the first approach with a comics and for the majority of the students the war in Northern Uganda was a new topic. Students appreciated this new way to learn and found the graphic novel interesting and educative. They noted how the violence seemed more terrible through drawings and they wanted to know more about the author, the novel, the conflict, and the issue of ‘invisible children’ – and this opened the way to watch a documentary on this topic.

Students were curious about the war and they cannot believe they had never heard about it and about the invisible children, after having seen the film Decker introduced a comparison between *Invisible Children* – the film- and *Unknow Soldier* – the graphic novel- and this discussion brought to a conversation on media coverage. The course ended with a discussion about all students had learned, the historical lecture, the film, and the graphic novel; as Decker conclude:

Everyone seemed to agree that the comic book was a welcome addition to the course. They enjoyed the readability of the text and appreciated the author's candor. Several of the

¹¹⁶ Decker and Castro, “Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel”, 178.

students were inspired to learn even more about the conflict. I know that at least two of them were looking for ways to volunteer in Uganda over the summer. This seems to suggest that if you can get students excited about history, they are more likely to become socially and politically engaged in the world around them¹¹⁷.

Having talk about one particular adaptation of two Shakespearean text into comics – *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman- let us now focus on the possible use of comics adaptations of Shakespeare to make his texts more accessible for students. Comics adaptations of Shakespeare’s works are not just condensations as Perret¹¹⁸ explains, they inform and adapt, because every version is an interpretation of the author and the adapter. Well known are Pendulum Classics – for schoolchildren- and Gilberton’s original Classics – for children of many ages. “When First Publishing took over Classics Illustrated, almost everything about the series changed except the well known name; because the new target audience was ‘in their mid-20s’ (Levine 1989,48) and college educated, a much more sophisticated approach became possible”¹¹⁹, in fact drawings were more subtle and dramatic, the best example is *Hamlet*’s version in which all the words are of Shakespeare, though the original work has been cut.

¹¹⁷ Decker and Castro, “Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel”, 180.

¹¹⁸ Marion D. Perret, “Not Just Condensation: How Comic Books Interpret Shakespeare”, *College Literature* Vol. 31, No. 4, Shakespeare and Popular Culture (Fall, 2004), 72-93: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25115229>

¹¹⁹ Marion D. Perret, “Not Just Condensation: How Comic Books Interpret Shakespeare”, 73.



Fig. 22 *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare in *Classics Illustrated* version.

Workman Publishing instead offers the complete texts of Shakespeare's works, and Zarate's *Othello* or Pollock's *King Lear* are interpretative artworks. Therefore for every kind of reader there is an appropriate comics adaptation. Children's versions of Shakespeare's works in comics are simplification of the plots, clear images, explanations of the words they may not know; for young reader Shakespeare in comics is charged of a knowledge of the subtext and a more mature comprehension of emotions and thoughts. Adults readers then approaches Shakespeare's adaptations into comics being more familiar with the medium and often the author can play with ambiguity and more dramatic images.

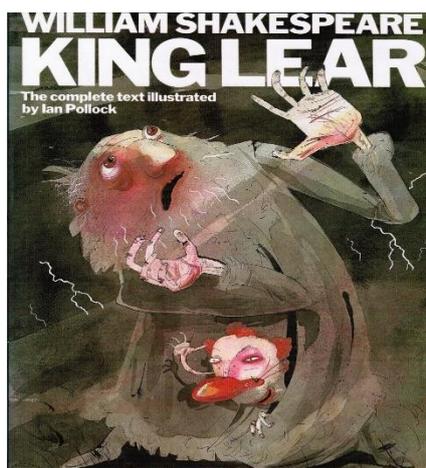


Fig. 22 *King Lear* by William Shakespeare illustrated by Ian Pollock.

Authors and adapters interpret the works of Shakespeare through different means, the cover for example could suggest what aspect of a play the author

has decided to underline, images, speech balloons, panels, all are chosen by artists and adapter who give their interpretation. “A less recognizable and more pervasive kind of interpretation comes during translation from play to comic book: though in most comics pictures of actions speak louder than words, what gives nuance and depth to Shakespeare's characters is the words they speak, and most of these must be cut”¹²⁰, explains Perret. Comics have limits of space to respect and an adapter has to chose what to include in his/her version of Shakespeare’s play, and this does not depend from the kind of audience, but from the particular features of the medium of comics.

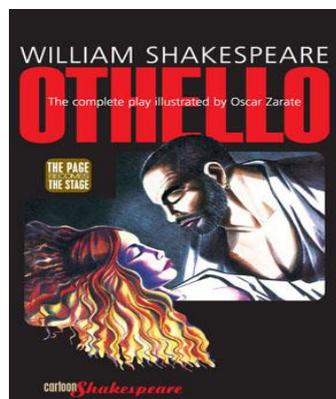


Fig. 23 *Othello* by William Shakespeare illustrated by Oscar Zarate.

“Comic books may not answer a scholar's complex questions, but they can give a teacher fresh perspective and new questions”¹²¹ continues Perret, Shakespeare in comics could serve as a useful teaching tool both for children who first approach his works, and for more mature readers who may have new perspective on him and his plays seeing them under another point of view. If the question is why teacher should use comic books version of Shakespeare’s plays the answer which Perret suggests is that this new medium offers a link between generations and could be an easier way to convey messages to students and attract their attention:

¹²⁰ Marion D. Perret, “Not Just Condensation: How Comic Books Interpret Shakespeare”, 75.

¹²¹ Marion D. Perret, “Not Just Condensation: How Comic Books Interpret Shakespeare”, 89.

At a time when comics superheroes appear in films and commercials, when more and older students are turning to graphic novels for exciting artwork and adult content, when Neil Gaiman can base sophisticated comic books on *A Midsummer Nights Dream* and *The Tempest*, high school and college teachers may discover that a comic book version of a Shakespeare play provides a point of connection with their students¹²².

Nevertheless Perret thinks that comics are not to be use as only teaching tool to study Shakespeare's works, and that they should be chosen for the themes treated. She shows also an interesting parallel between Shakespeare and a student today: as he learned and appreciated classical authors throughout a process of double translation – from latin into English and viceversa- in the same way a modern student can read and approach Shakespeare's work in comics versions and then go back to the original text, see the difference, focus on themes and how his plays are translated and tranformed through the medium of comics.



Fig. 24 William Shakespeare today.

Among the supporter of teaching Shakespeare – and not only- through comics there is Diane Roy who thaught *Hamlet* through comics to students who failed ninth-grade English the first time around in a high school of new York. “For a certain type of student – particularly those who are visually oriented and bright but may lack the motivation or maturity to succeed in

¹²² Marion D. Perret, “Not Just Condensation: How Comic Books Interpret Shakespeare”, 89-90.

freshman English”¹²³ – explains Ms Roy, graphic novels and comic books may work as a link, and may led to an increasing in motivation.

Roy’s efforts continued when she decided to include comics in her curriculum, and for example she introduces *Maus* by Art Spiegelman to explain students the Holocaust. This graphic novel shows in fact the experience of the Holocaust lived by Spiegelman’s parents through the allegory of the cat and the mouse, and it won the Pulitzer prize. Students were curious and involved in the topic and they went on reading graphic novels about Hitler.

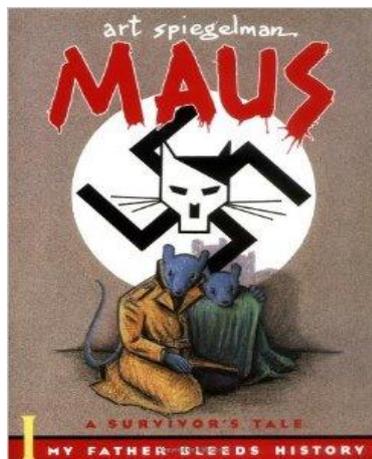


Fig. 25 *Maus* by Art Spiegelman.

Today comic books and graphic novels have become a new genre, especially appreciated by young people – but not only. Their popularity has greatly increased and comics are available everywhere, on libraries shelves, in schools, and in bookstores. If on the one hand a great numbers of teachers have introduced comics as teaching tools for schoolchildren, they seem more reluctant to chose comics for young readers but “adolescent readers face a host of complicated problems, ranging from general reluctance to pick up a

¹²³ Teresa Méndez, “*Hamlet* too hard? Try a comic book”, *The Christian Science Monitor*.
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1012/p11s01-legn.html>

book to aliteracy, an inability to fully grasp the meaning of words. Proponents suggest that comic books and graphic novels can help”¹²⁴.

In fact the graphic interface of comics can attract even reluctant reader, and offer accessibility to a struggling reader, comics can expand the vocabulary and images present the context. Nevertheless several educators thinks that there is no place for comics in the classroom and that they are dumbed-down materials. Diane Ravitch – professor of education at New York University- for example thinks that students should read novels, poems, books, and essays which enlarge their knowledge of the subjects they are studying, all but not comics.

“But just getting reluctant adolescents to read - anything - can be a boon to their discovery of the joy of reading”¹²⁵ is the idea of Marilyn Reynolds – author of *I Won't Read and You Can't Make Me: Reaching Reluctant Teen Readers*- who has worked in a high school for struggling students. This material may function as starting point to a bigger discussion in class, or maybe a comics can stir a student’s curiosity for a topic or his/her passion for reading. “For example, *Wonder Woman* comics could interest students in Greek mythology, [...] and graphic novels like Marjane Satrapi's memoirs, *Persepolis* and *Persepolis 2*, have exposed readers to life in Iran in the wake of the Islamic Revolution”¹²⁶.

On the other hand others fear that comics version of Shakespeare or of the great classics may replace the originals and this could damage the use of written word. But proponents of comics in the classroom point out that the same students who are interested in comics and stimulated by this materials excel also at the written word.

Therefore comics as teaching tools can be described as a sort of ‘bridge’, between teachers and students, between students and struggling students;

¹²⁴ Teresa Méndez, “Hamlet too hard? Try a comic book”.

¹²⁵ Teresa Méndez, “Hamlet too hard? Try a comic book”.

¹²⁶ Teresa Méndez, “Hamlet too hard? Try a comic book”.

between students with disabilities and the rest of the class; between Shakespeare's work, Math, History, Grammar, Latin – or any kind of subject- and every student.

Being the starting point of the entire dissertation let us end this chapter with the possible uses of *The Sandman* in the classroom. The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund¹²⁷ explains:

Since its release in 1989, *The Sandman* has been listed as one of the most challenged comic series by the American Library Association. Despite its critical acclaim and numerous awards, Neil Gaiman's epic series, spanning 75 issues and inspiring a variety of spin-off series and collected editions, *The Sandman* still faces censorship¹²⁸

Since its publication the series has been challenged and banned in libraries because of 'anti-family themes', 'offensive language', and for being 'unsuited for age group', the opposition to the series came out most of all because it was included in the young adult section of libraries. To a fan who criticize the contents of the series and asked it to be removed from the YA section of the libraries Gaiman answered "I suspect that having a reputation as adult material that's unsuitable for teens will probably do more to get teens to read *The Sandman* than having the books ready and waiting on the YA shelves would ever do"¹²⁹. However several teacher of high schools and colleges think that Gaiman's work is suitable for their curriculum, and included *The Sandman* – along with other graphic novels- in English Literature courses both as central texts of the course and as teaching tools which can help the study of other authors or topic – *The Sandman* is for example included in many courses on Shakespeare Afterlife.

¹²⁷ The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, <http://cblddf.org/>

¹²⁸ "Adding The Sandman to Your Library or Classroom Collection", Caitlin McCabe, The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (June 24, 2015), accessed 18 September 2015, <http://cblddf.org/2015/06/adding-the-sandman-to-your-library-or-classroom-collection/>

¹²⁹ Neil Gaiman, "Links and libraries. And... Where's Waldo?", Neil Gaiman (blog), September 18, 2015, <http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2003/09/links-and-libraries-and-where-s-waldo.asp>

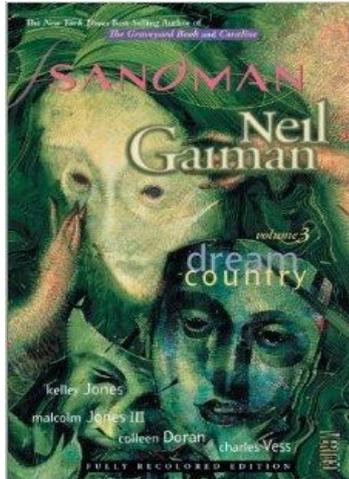


Fig. 26 Neil Gaiman et al., *The Sandman: Dream Country* (vol. 3), (New York: DC comics, 1991), issue 19.

Just this year, Tara Shultz, a 20-year-old college student at Crafton Hills College – in Yucaipa, California- is protesting because she and her parents want four graphic novels eradicated from English classes. Tara and her parents define *Persepolis*, *Fun Home*, *Y: The Last Man Vol. 1*, and *The Sandman Vol. 2: The Doll's House* as ‘pornography’ and think that the language used does not fit the young adults students of the college. The course Tara was following is English 250 of Professor Ryan Bartlett and she seems aware that the four graphic novels are the texts of the course, but she explains she thought that they would have studied some ‘Batman and Robin’ material. Tara and her parents accuse Bartlett to not have warned students about the contents of these graphic novels.

Professor Bartlett has taught this same course for three years without any complaints, and defends his curriculum:

I chose several highly acclaimed, award-winning graphic novels in my English 250 course not because they are purportedly racy but because each speaks to the struggles of the human condition. As Faulkner states, ‘The only thing worth writing about is the human heart in conflict with itself’. The same may be said about reading literature. The characters in the chosen graphic novels are all struggling with issues of morality, self discovery, heartbreak,

etc. The course in question has also been supported by the faculty, administration and approved by the board¹³⁰.

Nevertheless Shultz and her parents want these texts not to be taught anymore. Crafton Hills College stands for Bartlett's course, defending academic freedom. Cheryl Marshall – Crafton Hills President- claims that the course will not be removed and that she is in favour of an open learning environment at college, where students should be stimulated through different issues and some of them can be controversial, but they have the possibility to discuss, to learn, and to grow. Schultz and her parents obtain that students will be 'warned' about the contents of the course, but they want also these graphic novels to be removed from the shelves of the school's library because of the presence of under-aged kids in the campus, but "One must wonder if he knows what is in the library and on the Internet for free!"¹³¹

The Redlands Daily Facts also interviewed Charles Brownstein – Executive Director of CBLDF- who stated that college students are young adults and during their studies they may encounter course materials which they do not appreciate or by which they are offended, but being young adults means also being prepared to have a discussion about these materials, and not simply eliminate them from the course.

This is a recent episode linked to *The Sandman*, but teachers often include the series in their curriculum with positive results. The series is recommended for high school or college students because of the level of violence and sexuality in the plot, but the writing is so rich and the characters are so well-defined, and moreover it offers a modern vision of Shakespeare's work. For

¹³⁰ Sandra Emerson, "Crafton Hills College student, parents protest material in graphic novels English course", *Redlands Daily Facts*, 06/11/15. <http://www.redlandsdailyfacts.com/social-affairs/20150611/crafton-hills-college-student-parents-protest-material-in-graphic-novels-english-course>

¹³¹ "College Student Wants Four Graphic Novels 'Eradicated from the System'", Maren Williams, The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund (June 13, 2015), accessed September 18, 2015, <http://cblidf.org/2015/06/college-student-wants-four-graphic-novels-eradicated-from-the-system/>

example Nate Eastman – Associate Professor of English at Earlham College, Indiana- has included *The Sandman* in many of his courses about Shakespeare Afterlife. Many teachers ask also to add the series – and other graphic novels- to their school’s library, or to donate *The Sandman* to the school because students have proven very interested in the topics which discussion on the series suggested. “My students are college bound, and putting books that help engage and build stamina in their hands can only further prepare them for the world after high school”¹³², claims in fact Mr. Pearce talking about the need to have the series in his school’s library.

Comics are considered a new genre and using it as a teaching tool is a new experience for teachers, professors, educators, and students today. This section has tried to show positive and negative sides of teaching through comics, several and different examples of possible uses have been provided underlining the versatility of this medium. To end this section about comics in the classroom, it is important to take into account also student’s point of view, Ravi Bhoraskar who studied thorough comics gives his opinion on the experience of his class with the comic series *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman:

We studied Neil Gaiman's A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest from the Sandman comic book franchise for our Shakespearean Afterlives courselast semester. The experience was enjoyed by all students, and the text offered enough meat for literary analysis and criticism. A graphic novel, thus, can be an interesting yet fun medium to study in a literature class¹³³.

¹³² “Bring Neil Gaiman's Acclaimed Sandman to a Library”, Mr. Pearce, Donors Choose, accessed September 18, 2015, <http://www.donorschoose.org/project/bring-neil-gaimans-acclaimed-sandman-to/462543/>

¹³³ Quora, accessed September 18, 2015, <https://www.quora.com/Would-Watchmen-be-suited-for-study-in-the-classroom>

Conclusion

Write your story as it needs to be written. Write it honestly, and tell it as best you can. I'm not sure that there are any other rules. Not ones that matter.

Neil Gaiman.¹³⁴

This dissertation has attempted a comparison between two Shakespearean plays – *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*- and their adaptations included in the comics series *The Sandman* by Neil Gaiman. Shakespeare's works has a long history of adaptations, in fact they were already used by Shakespeare's contemporaries to compose new works or adapted in different versions – sometimes and during certain periods more appreciated than the original. A brief history of these adaptations has been displayed in order to show what aspects, topics, scenes, and character, have been more represented or changed over the years until today. It is worth noting how Shakespeare's works have standed for different values in different historical periods, and how his plays have been interpreted according to different authors, mediums, audience of a particular age.

Retracing the history of Shakespeare's figure in the US then, the dissertation has proven that the playwright and his works have shifted from the initial position in popular culture – being representative of Elizabethan theatre- to an important position in highbrow culture – through which it has arrived in the US. Nevertheless Shakespearean plays have then been represented for several years among other kinds of popular entertainments in theatres for workers and everyday people – which appreciated him and his plays because they represented the nineteenth century values being in this way very of today. Shakespeare's figure then has come back to highbrow culture, because his plays have been removed from popular entertainments and represented alone in different kind of theatres where the participation of the audience was no more appreciated. Finally nowadays Shakespeare stands

¹³⁴ Neil Gaiman, author of *The Sandman*.

for a sort of shared culture – being the symbol of highbrow culture in popular culture.

Comics – being a new medium in search for an accreditation as true literary form- adapt Shakespeare also for the upward push that his figure can give to the reputation of the medium. Moreover, being Shakespeare always of today comics authors have particularly focus on him and his work, adapting, transforming, remaking, and quoting it. Different kind of Shakespeare's comics adaptations have been provided, focusing especially on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* in order to show what themes, characters, and scenes have been the most represented in the different kinds of comics mentioned. Having shown how the language of comics approached Shakespeare's work, the comic book series *The Sandman* has been chosen to be compared to the original – being a famous and awarded example.

Neil Gaiman and his series are a departure from the classic superhero-centred comics, *The Sandman* presents more adult themes and an unusual protagonist – Dream of the Endless- who is the Lord of the Dreaming. This series shows Dream's change after his imprisonment, his growing, his journey to re-establish the order in his realm, the people he meets. *The Sandman* talks about the cost of achieving what you once desired, the price of power and success, and the burden of responsibilities. The character of Shakespeare – who is present in three issues of the series- displays all these themes. Gaiman represents him very differently from the great untouchable playwright we are accustomed to think of. Gaiman's Shakespeare is 'humanized', showed in his familiar context, with his friends, his company, his family, and most of all presented not only as an actor and playwright, but also a man – with vices and virtues.

A young Shakespeare who wants to be a famous playwright makes a deal with Dream: he will be able to compose immortal plays and in exchange he will write two plays about dreams for Morpheus. This is the first time the reader meets Shakespeare in the series, than in *Sandman 19* Gaiman represents *A Midsummer Night's Dream* premiere, an outdoor representation

in front of an audience of fairies. But this adaptation does not focus only on the Shakespearean play, but also on his relationship with his son Hamnet. The playwright pays attention to his plays and lives in his fictional world, and he has not understand the price of his desires yet. In *Sandman 75* the reader meets Shakespeare and Dream for the last time, the playwright is tired, but he knows he has to complete the bargain and write his last play for Morpheus. He lost Hamnet and it is like his family does not know him because for twenty years he has travelled to represent his plays.

In *The Tempest* Gaiman shows a parallel between Dream, Shakespeare, and Prospero, and at the same time another between himself and Shakespeare – who is his alter ego in the series. This adaptation of *The Tempest* is in reality the story of how Shakespeare wrote the play – according to Gaiman. The author uses the dialogue between Shakespeare and Dream to explain his storytelling, his way to perceive the work of author, the sources of his inspiration. Shakespeare – as Gaiman himself- is inspired by what surrounds him, the weather, his friends, his family, and has finally understood the price he paid to realize his desires – as Gaiman when *The Sandman* began to be a successful series.

The aim of this dissertation was to demonstrate not only how the figure of Shakespeare is still part of today's culture, but also how comics adaptations and *The Sandman* bring him closer to readers and add something new to his works. Comics – as the Elizabethan theatre in Shakespeare's time- have been (or are) an underestimated genre, but Gaiman's series shows how this powerful medium can convey stories and adapt an immortal playwright as Shakespeare, attracting readers who have not read Shakespeare yet, or that are already familiar with him but are interested to see his works under a different point of view. Adapting and rewriting are metamorphic practices thanks to which stories and myths of canonical literary texts are transformed and mixed to create new stories; through Gaiman's adaptations Shakespeare's stories and mythology are filtered through the lens of popular culture. Authors and readers are immersed in a sea of stories, remade and adapted differently by authors and read in different ways by readers. Shakespeare is still alive in Comic Land

and his stories and myths are part of the collective imagery of the modern reader.

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- Comic Life. <http://plasq.com/apps/comiclif/macwin/>;
- The Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. <http://cbldf.org/>;
- ReadWriteThink. <http://www.readwritethink.org/>;
- Bitstrip for School. <http://www.bitstripsforschools.com/>.