

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ  
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# DREAM A LITTLE DREAM OF WILL: SHAKESPEARE AS A CHARACTER IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *THE SANDMAN*

**Abstract:** *This paper explores the representations of William Shakespeare in Neil Gaiman's comic book series The Sandman. Shakespeare figures as a character in three of the seventy-five stories, occupying a somewhat special place since through him Gaiman expresses his beliefs on the nature of poetic creation, the relationship between the author and the narrative, as well as the relationship between fiction and reality. By presenting one of the world's most significant authors and his two plays, A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest, Gaiman plays on the ideas that fiction is as real as historical reality (or even more so) and that an author is merely a mediator of great narratives which unavoidably surpass his or her historical existence. Moreover, separate stories are, in Gaiman's view, only repetitions or reinterpretations of eternal truths embodied in the realm of dreaming. Gaiman's ideas are in this paper supported by traditional critical views on Shakespeare, his plays and characters, as well as by Barthes' more general beliefs on the role of the author in the process of artistic creation. The purpose of this paper is to analyze Shakespeare's development from an ambitious playwright to one of the most recognizable figures of contemporary popular culture. As presented in word and image by Neil Gaiman, this development entails that Shakespeare should first become aware of the parallel reality of his fiction and its power, and then become himself part of it.*

**Key words:** *Dream, poetic imagination, Shakespeare, Neil Gaiman, authorship, parallel realities, narrative, intertextuality.*

“**T**he author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort” (Coleridge 1816: 52).

The notion of poetic creation as result of some kind of mystical or divine experience has been widely known since Plato's times, “[f]or all good poets, epic as well as

lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed”, as he put it in *Ion*. Moreover, *Ion* claims that the possessed poet is a mere tool, an intermediary and interpreter of gods. Such Platonic notions of the origins of poetic creation dominated the Renaissance thought, and two centuries later, Coleridge also turns to Platonic ideas, having first followed a more rational, empirical approach advocated by John Locke and David Hartley (Cuddon 1999: 306), according to whom creative imagination originated from the association of ideas developed from past experiences. Coleridge believes that imagination is a divine vision, of

which poetry is a product (Toor, 83). Ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, critical thought has mostly regarded the process of creation as something emanating from the poet himself, not from an external source, and particularly not a divine one (Cuddon 1999: 421). In *The Sandman* series, Neil Gaiman questions this belief by focusing on poetic creation as one of his major topics. Along with this issue, *The Sandman* also addresses the role of the author in the creative process, the power of the story, its ability to shape the reality and the nature of reality itself.

Based on a mythological creature from traditional popular stories, which brings dreams to children by sprinkling sand into their eyes, Gaiman's Sandman further developed from a previous series published by DC Comics in the 1970's. Gaiman contributed to both the Western folklore and Sandman the superhero by forming a pantheon of the so-called Endless, which, apart from Dream, consists of his siblings Destiny, Death, Destruction, Desire, Despair and Delirium (once Delight). These fictional characters are of neither human nor divine origin; they existed before men and gods and will continue to exist long after every deity is dead. The Endless embody primeval forces that govern the ways of the world and affect every individual human life. Myths originated in the ancient times precisely because of the need to explain natural phenomena that human consciousness at the early stages of its development could not comprehend, since "our primitive ancestors knew nothing about laws of nature, nothing about physical forces, nothing about the relations of cause and effect, nothing about the necessary regularity of things" (Fiske 2009: 14). The laws of nature and physical forces having been rationally explained, there still remain urges such as desire or despair that psychologists have been struggling to account for, dreams that keep being ascribed various meanings, definitions

and provenances, and destiny, which has always been the subject of considerable debate. By personifying these forces and assigning certain attributes and powers to them, Gaiman has succeeded in creating his own modern mythology, a kind of an "intertextual mythology" that builds on Greek, Norse, Slavic and many other myths while still managing to overreach them all. However, intertextuality in *The Sandman* is not limited to mythologies exclusively. The nineteenth story of the series, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", gives an alternative rendition of Shakespeare's play<sup>1</sup>. In the year 1593 – before the play was actually written – on a midsummer's eve, Shakespeare is wandering the plains of Sussex with his son Hamnet and the company of actors led by Richard Burbage. The company is on its way to stage Shakespeare's latest play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when they meet the patron for the play – Dream of the Endless. Dream insists that they perform on the very plain where he meets them, which "was a theatre before [the human] race came to this island" (Gaiman 1998: 2). As the performance begins, the actors are amazed to realize that their audience is made up of numerous fairy creatures, led by Oberon and Titania themselves. From this point onwards, the panels depicting the action onstage alternate with those that show the audience's reaction, in a technique similar to parallel montage. The play progresses towards the interval, when the company has the opportunity to meet the audience, and as it later nears its end, Dream reveals two important things to Titania: that the play repre-

1 *The Sandman* is a series of 75 issues published by DC Comics in the period between January 1989 and March 1996. The commercial success of *The Sandman* was enormous, and the series became extremely popular and widely read, but also won great critical acclaim. In 1991 "A Midsummer Night's Dream" issue won the World Fantasy Award for Best Short Fiction. It was the first and only comic book to win it since comics have then-eforth been restricted to the Special Award Professional category.

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sents a gift for Faerie, and that it is part of the deal he made with Shakespeare, the nature of which remains as yet unexplained. Fairies depart after the last scene (all except Puck, who sneaks into the real world unobserved), and the final panels show the company of actors wake up after a night's sleep on the hillside, only to realize that the pouch of gold received for the performance has turned into a pouch of yellow leaves.

Shakespeare makes a brief appearance in one of the earlier *Sandman* stories, "Men of Good Fortune", which primarily deals with a certain Hob Gadling, a man who refuses to die, claiming that death is stupid and that he doesn't want anything to do with it (Gaiman 1997: 3). Dream and his sister Death happen to overhear his statement, and agree to grant Gadling his wish. Dream meets with Gadling once in a century and on one of these occasions meets "Will Shaxberd", who is about to stage his first play, which Christopher Marlowe dismisses as nonsensical. Shakespeare admires Marlowe largely and openly states that "[he] would give *anything* to have [Marlowe's] gifts. Or more than anything to give men dreams, that would live on long after [he is] dead" (Ibid: 12). Hearing this and believing in Shakespeare's talent, Dream takes him aside and presumably offers him a bargain of sorts. The nature of this bargain is partly understood in "A Midsummer Night's Dream", where Shakespeare reveals that he was commissioned to write two plays celebrating dreams, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* being the first one. In the very last story of *The Sandman* series - "The Tempest" - the play with the same name and the last one Shakespeare wrote by himself appears to be the second one commissioned by Dream. Some other features of the bargain are also revealed in the last story, and it becomes clearer why Gaiman chose to introduce Shakespeare precisely in the story devoted to Hob Gadling. Shakespeare has

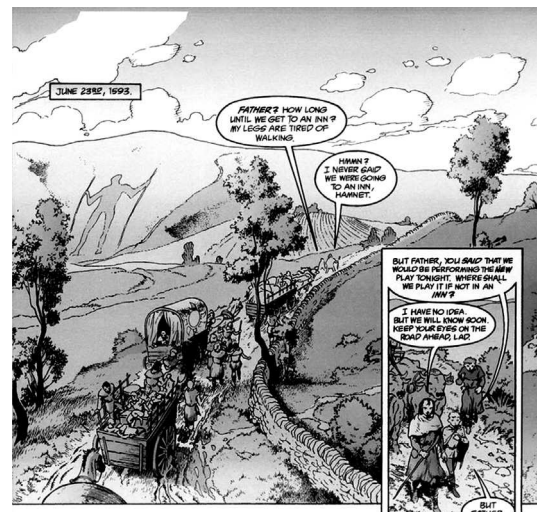
been immortalized through his plays, which have over time acquired eternal fame. He has thus, like Gadling, also become one who does not die. Gaiman portrays Shakespeare's transformation from a common man and an average writer to one of the world's most famous literary figures.

Annalisa Castaldo makes some insightful observations on the endurance of Shakespeare's popularity: apart from the fact that his works are permanently used by popular culture and media, Shakespeare himself has become a proper celebrity in the modern world, easily identified in image and words by most Americans (2004: 94). The fact that he is easily recognizable makes his cultural value (in both institutional and popular culture) extremely high, as "so many other aspects of culture have proven unstable" (Ibid: 95). Castaldo continues to make the remark about Shakespeare's personal popularity resembling that of his plays: both Shakespeare and his work are "at once apparently stable and yet completely malleable" (Ibid: 95). *A Midsummer Night's Dream* could in many ways be described as malleable, primarily as regards the characters in the play. Lysander and Demetrius are all too quick to change their romantic preferences; Theseus inexplicably decides that the law that should be enforced upon Hermia is after all not so strict; and Oberon's treatment of Titania changes from cruelty to pity and finally tenderness. Furthermore, the play presents us with multiple realities, which appear to be parallel and intertwined: the orderly Athenian world, the escapist forest world and the magical realm of fairies. In his paper on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, James L. Calderwood explains that everything that happens to Titania and Oberon actually represents Theseus' dream, helping him to come to terms with his future marital life and accept his role in marriage and society. Oberon and Titania are represented as Theseus and Hippolyta's doubles, and not merely in the way that was

obvious to the Elizabethan audience – namely, their respective roles being played by the same actors – but also in a psychological and symbolic sense, because “[Theseus and Oberon] are the respective representatives of reason and of those life mysteries which reason cannot encompass or control” (Bradshaw 1987: 69, qtd. in Calderwood 1991: 411). According to Calderwood, Shakespeare’s Theseus experiences a certain catharsis through the character of the King of Faerie: since Hippolyta is the Queen of the Amazons, her warrior nature makes it difficult for her to yield to her husband’s will and overcome the masculine side of herself in favor of maternity and womanhood, which is precisely what Theseus wants – his wife’s love and obedience – and acquires it symbolically, or rather, in a dream, by Oberon’s taking over the Indian boy from Titania. As claimed by Calderwood, in making parallels between the Duke of Athens and the King of Faerie, Shakespeare applied a graphic technique, a visual device known as anamorphism, “a perspectival technique designed to present one image if viewed from directly in front of the painting and another if viewed from an angle” (1991: 409).<sup>2</sup> Gaiman’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” also requires that the interpreter, having read the story through, should return to the first page for some further explanation. Namely, the anamorphic technique implies that, apart from the obvious, a picture also expresses something hidden that we are vaguely aware of, though we cannot quite comprehend what it is or what it means. As a dif-

2 This implies that the shadows of Oberon and Titania are present even as the play opens, though they have not yet appeared in it. If a reader, having read the play through, returns to the opening scene, the conversation between Theseus and Hippolyta will appear in an entirely new light. According to Calderwood, Shakespeare was probably acquainted with the anamorphic technique, having very likely seen the anamorphic painting of Edward VI by William Scrots, which hung in the Whitehall Palace when Shakespeare’s company played there (1991: 410).

ferent angle provides us with an answer, so does the end of Gaiman’s story reveal that all the actors, Shakespeare and his son were asleep during the entire performance – that the premiere of the play was actually dreamed. If we go back to the first page bearing this bit of information in mind, we shall notice the contours of the so-called “Long Man of Wilmington” or “Wendel’s Mound”, nearly merged with the surrounding grassy hill slope. This figure of uncertain origin and purpose comes to stand in Gaiman’s interpretation for the gates of Faerie held closed by Wendel (though according to most of the popular beliefs, “The Long Man of Wilmington” is actually holding a rake and a scythe in his hands, which is also how he appears on the first page of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”).



Images 1 (Gaiman and Vess 1998: 1) and 2 (Ibid: 5). The three panels in Image 2 symbolically mark the transition to another realm, which has been present since the opening page. Image 1 shows “Shakespeare” and his company in the foreground,



while “The Long Man of Wilmington” can be seen in the background. The Long Man of Wilmington is the passageway to Faerie, the land that will inspire Shakespeare’s play. These two realms are juxtaposed in Image 1, as they will also be later when the Faerie members of audience face the actors, and even identify with some of the roles played by them. The meeting of these two realms is only possible in dreams; therefore, the portal can only be opened once Dream has appeared. Shakespeare as seen in Image 1 (and in “Men of Good Fortune” too) is himself an anamorphic figure, as it is impossible from the present point of view to see him as just another (minor) writer who will be forgotten in the course of history – the notion of his greatness is constantly present and shedding a different light (or shadow) on his first appearances in *The Sandman*.

If we accept the interpretation of Oberon and Theseus as the contrasting forces of reason and intuition, or imagination, Gaiman’s story provides further parallels that endorse his views on the process of poetic creation, as expressed in *The Sandman* series. Namely, Gaiman’s Shakespeare plays the role of Theseus, the embodiment of Athenian law and rules. All the other actors have to play according to certain rules, or lines learnt by heart – theirs is skill, not imagination. Dream, on the other hand, is seated between Oberon and Titania, on the “dark” side, which is for the major part of the story coloured in darker hues of green, purple or blue. It could be argued from the very beginning that it is Dream who actually orchestrates the performance: prior to his appearance we learn nothing of the play’s contents and, as one of the actors, Kemp, suggests that he should crack a gag in the first scene, we might even get the idea that the text will be, and usually is, acted out in a rather random way, or as a product of the company’s joint forces. Gaiman thus presents Dream as the original creator of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Dream indeed later admits having given Shakespeare the power to tell stories: “Through him they will live for an age of man; and his words will echo down through time” (Gaiman

1998: 20). In this way does Samuel Johnson describe Shakespeare’s art in his Preface from 1765: “[His characters] are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion.”<sup>3</sup> As Coleridge believes, “all of Shakespeare’s characters [...] are manifestations of elements deep within the writer” (Toor: 88). Both descriptions focus on something beyond the writer, or the writer’s consciousness: *general passions and principles*, or *elements* situated *deep* within him. The reason embodied in Shakespeare’s Theseus also represents the conscious part of the human psyche, which regulates one’s function within society, whereas the mysticism pertaining to the realms of Dream and fairies stands for the subconscious part, which constantly needs to be subdued by reason. What Gaiman implies is that the latter actually rules over and shapes the former, though neither should be understood as the individual conscious or subconscious. Shakespeare’s texts truly represent, as Johnson put it, “a faithful mirror of manners and of life”, but Shakespeare himself is here seen as a mere tool, “a vehicle for the great stories” (Gaiman 1998: 20), a shaman or mediator who is never truly responsible for a narrative and whose “mastery of the narrative code may possibly be admired but never his ‘genius’” (Barthes 2001: 186). Following his idea that “[t]o give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text [and] close the writing” (Ibid: 188), Barthes in the quoted essay emphasizes the openness of the text, which is always a pastiche of many other texts, none of which is original: “Did [the author] wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is itself only a ready-

3 “General passions and principles” is, incidentally, a pretty good way of describing the nature of the Endless.

formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely" (Ibid: 188). Barthes' ideas rely on the Platonic views on art as a mere shadow of reality which is in turn only a shadow of eternal ideas – according to Barthes, a literary text is not even a reproduction of reality, but of a body of other literary texts that are nothing but shadows. In this vicious circle, "the best in this kind are but shadows", as Shakespeare delegates Theseus to state in the final act, and Gaiman reproduces again in his graphic version of the play (Gaiman 1998: 21). However, Gaiman tries to locate the source of the seemingly interminable process of repetitions and reinterpretations. When his Titania thoughtfully says: "It seems to me that I heard this tale sung once, in old Greece, by a boy with a lyre" (Ibid: 10), once again an intertextual reference is made, this time to the myth of Orpheus, who plays a somewhat special role in *The Sandman* series. In Gaiman's inversion of the myth, Orpheus is the son of Calliope and Dream himself, who taught him to compose lyrics so powerful that they would manage to melt the hearts of every being, mortal and immortal alike. In this way, Gaiman presents Dream as the original creator of every possible story ever told or written. What is more, Dream's palace in the realm of Dreaming contains a library filled with millions of books that have never been written. This leads us to the conclusion that Gaiman accepts the Platonic belief of individual texts being mere shadows of reality, though this reality is, in Gaiman's version and in line with Barthes' beliefs, a story – a narrative that reflects ideas originating in Dreaming. Art is thus awarded a parallel reality of its own, which is nevertheless intertwined with the reality of ordinary life – were it not so, Shakespeare would never have become a poet of such fame and renown. A Faerie creature perhaps best expresses the nature of this parallel reality: "It never *happened*; yet it is *still* true. What magic art is this?" (Ibid:

13). To this unheard remark, Dream replies: "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" (Ibid: 21).

We can differentiate several levels at which the action of Gaiman's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" takes place. Some of them are set in the ordinary historical reality, while others are parts of the reality of tales and imagination.<sup>4</sup> Actors belong to the former, though their role in the story can further be divided into what happens onstage and what happens offstage. Onstage, they try to impersonate characters and events that pertain to the reality of imagination. As Richard Burbage puts it, "I have told Will to make me a lover most tragical, and when we return to *London*, I will make them weep true tears" (Ibid: 3). His ambition is Orphic – he desires to affect human lives in the way great poetry and art do – though his acting is necessarily just a shadow of a shadow-truth. Offstage, they lead their private lives, which appear to suffer because of artistic ambitions. Hamnet's complaint that "[he's] less real to [his father] than any of the characters in his plays" (Ibid: 13) bears a certain amount of sadness and dissatisfaction, though it is not far from truth – Hamnet is less real in the sense that he is a mortal subject of historical reality. Being a great author, Shakespeare strives for the unsurpassable reality of narratives. This reality encompasses fairies, which are indeed personated in his work, and dreams. Faerie is one of the realms of narratives and tales, while Dreaming is the dominion of ideas that directly inspire realms of narratives<sup>5</sup>

4 It should be noted that Dream's words are always printed in white color against the black background, which serves to graphically emphasize the parallel reality of his realm, or the negative of the reality as we know it.

5 Cain and Abel are, for instance, the recurring *dreams* in the series. Their destiny is described in a Christian metanarrative, which further serves as the basis for many works of art where the brothers embody the original idea of the first murder.

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and, indirectly, the world of artistic creation. Since the world of artistic creation is inhabited by actors, poets, playwrights and other mediators who are also a part of the historical reality, by inspiring them, Dreaming also shapes and gives meaning to their everyday lives. Dream is therefore The Author, which is exactly how Gaiman portrays him. For instance, in the best Shakespearean tradition, Dream employs several word plays throughout the story: "Will is a willing vehicle for the great stories" (Ibid: 20), he says, or, "Fare well, fair folk" (Ibid: 22). The play was no more than a gift to Titania and Oberon, who will be immortalized by Shakespeare's words for centuries to come, though the earthly world might stop believing in them. Calde-wood emphasizes a similar word play in Shakespeare's text: right after the disagreement between Titania and Oberon is settled and the two of them make peace, Theseus calls Hippolyta "fair queen" (IV, 1, 113) which, according to the author of the paper, draws another strong parallel between the Queen of Faerie and the Amazon Queen (1991: 429).<sup>6</sup>



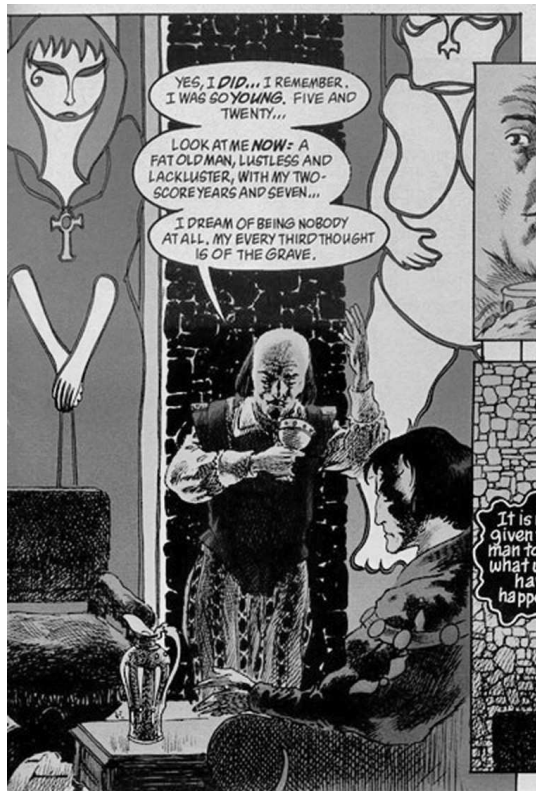
<sup>6</sup> Some further parallels might be drawn between the levels of action in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: the company of actors (historical reality) might correspond to the orderly Athenian world dominated by reason; "Wendel's Mound" might reflect the escapist forest world where transformations of all kinds are possible and where fairies can interact with humans; finally, Faerie has more than obvious parallel in Shakespeare's play.

**Image 3 (Gaiman and Vess 1998: 15).** The left panel shows Titania and one of her escorts in conversation with the actor playing Titania (in the red dress, identical to the real Titania's dress, which seems to be no more than a black-and-white image of the red one). Two Titanias seem to be looking into a mirror, each seeing the other one – her own other. In the foreground, Oberon is addressing Shakespeare, with Burbage impersonating Oberon to his right, emphasized by the colors of his attire. The stage can be seen in the background, where actors appear rather like shadows. The left panel represents the meeting of the opposing worlds of historical reality and imagination. Shakespeare is the central character of the panel, drawn right in the middle of all other characters, including his son, the acting company and Puck, the only character who desires to become part of the historical reality. Shakespeare in this way serves as a connection between the two realities and, of the two, imagination is, through the domineering figure of Oberon, presented as the primary one. In the right panel, *real* Puck and Cowley the actor assume pretty similar positions, each appearing as the shadow of the other.

However, in order to achieve everlasting fame, Shakespeare needs to renounce certain things. The essence of his bargain with Dream recalls a Faustian one, which is something Shakespeare grows increasingly aware of. In the final story of Gaiman's series, while writing *The Tempest*, Shakespeare is faced with his wife's and daughter's accusations that he never cared much for his family, Ben Jonson's accusations that he never actually *lived* enough and gained enough worldly experience, and his own personal doubts that he did not learn all the things he should have learnt in his lifetime. The panels progressively show Shakespeare in conversation with the local innkeeper, the members of his family, his fellow writer, a priest and, finally, Dream. Shakespeare is thus presented in many of the roles he played during his life – as an eminent member of society, a father and husband, an artist and a messenger of the "Prince of stories" (Gaiman 1996: 36). However, he feels a deep dissatisfaction and suspects his life was wasted.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, while Shakespeare expresses his



doubts and disappointment, the background of the panel shows large images of Death and Despair in Dream's palace, and both appear to be looking down on Shakespeare solemnly:

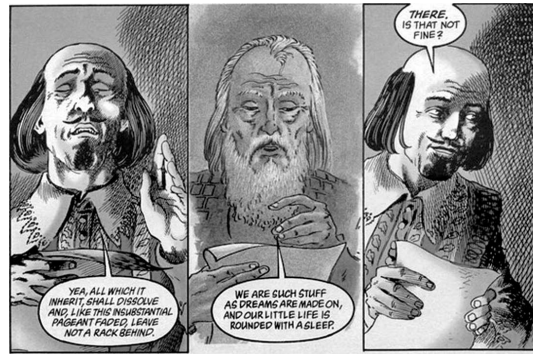


**Image 4** (Gaiman and Vess 1996: 33). Death is on Shakespeare's right, and Despair on his left. Standing in between and in front of them, Shakespeare makes them appear as the elemental life forces that his speech brings to life, or perhaps as thoughts that he has so far only subconsciously been resorting to. Another artistic device looms large in this panel, bringing into focus the difference between the manner in which Dream and Shakespeare on the one hand, and Death and Despair on the other, are drawn. According to McCloud, the artistic style applied to the latter is more simplified, which means that it is also more iconic and symbolic, subjective and universal. The iconic representation of Death and Despair allows for easier identification of the reader's (or, in this case, character's – Shakespeare's) feelings with these universal forces. The realistic drawings of Shakespeare and Dream make these two characters appear realistic, objective and specific or individual (1994: 46). Shakespeare's words echo those of Prospero in *The Tempest* (V, 1, 312).

What Shakespeare had to renounce was actually his everyday reality. This is perhaps best proved by the very fact that little of his private life is known with certainty, while on the other hand much is *imagined* and many stories are fabricated. In devoting his life to giving stories to humankind, to following a dream (Gaiman 1996: 18), Shakespeare has himself become a dream, as detached from the historical reality as any story – he settled himself in the realm of imagination. As his life nears its end, in this final story of the series, he makes several important admissions, all of which contribute to the idea that he has become no more than one of his own characters, a spirit or a shadow. Firstly, he states that he identifies with his characters (which parallels Titania, Oberon and Puck's identification with the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* staged on "Wendel's Mound"), saying that he is all of them at the same time: Prospero and Ariel, dull Caliban, Antonio and Gonzalo, "Trinculo, the jester, and Stephano the butler, for they are clowns and fools, and I am also a clown and a fool" (Ibid: 30). Secondly, he confesses that his life was not lived, but watched in order to be used as material for his plays. When his son died, he says, he was hurt, "but *watched* [his] hurt, and even *relished* it, a little, for now [he] could write a *real* death, a *true* loss (Ibid: 34). The written death is for him more real than an experienced one, just as all the characters from *The Tempest* are more real to him than any of the people he meets every day (Ibid: 34). The imagined reality is thus given supremacy over the historical one. And thirdly, he believes that he made a bargain with "a pagan thing" (Ibid: 35), which implies that he is aware none of his great art is the result of his own genius, but that it makes him part of something far more elusive, supernatural and inexplicable.

As Dream notices in another of his Shakespearean word plays, mortals never fully realize the price of their wishes – they

can only see the prize (Gaiman 1998: 19). Shakespeare's prize is well known by everybody as it amounts to near immortality. To represent it symbolically, Gaiman exploits the popular, though never confirmed, belief that Shakespeare's name is hidden in Psalm 46 of King James' authorized translation of the Bible (Gaiman 1996: 35). By confirming this in *The Sandman*, Shakespeare finds a place for himself in one of Western culture's greatest narratives. The price he had to pay in order to obtain everlasting fame is symbolically represented in the character of Hamnet Shakespeare. Just as the Indian boy in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is transformed into "a symbol of what Oberon really desires" (Calderwood 1991: 415, emphasis added), which is sustained by the fact that he does not figure as a character in the play, so does Hamnet (who, incidentally, plays the role of the Indian boy preserved in Gaiman's premiere) become the symbol of Shakespeare's sacrifice, the gift he has to honour Titania with in order for his play to achieve success. Shakespeare is, however, not conscious of this in the beginning, presumably because the true nature of his deal with Dream is still unclear to him. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream", a part of him is still attached to the worldly affairs, therefore, when Hamnet states that he had "such a strange dream" in which a lady (Titania, as the reader knows) wanted him to follow her to a distant land, his father uninterestedly disregards the story as "foolish fancies" (Gaiman 1998: 24). Still not able to fully grasp the nature of Dream's boon, nor the nature of imagination and dreams, Shakespeare is not aware that dreams can be more real than reality.<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare's own final transformation into a dream, into his "imaginary" characters, happens at the end of his career, when he also starts wondering if Hamnet would have lived had he not made the pact with Dream (Gaiman 1996: 33).



**Image 5 (Gaiman and Vess 1996: 27).** Shakespeare in the first panel dissolves into Prospero in the second panel, only to regain his original form again in the third panel. Image 3 merely confronts the actors with their counterparts from the land of imagination, who appear as their mirror images, whereas in this image Shakespeare is *transformed* into one of his imaginary creatures. The quotation is taken from Act IV, Scene 1 of *The Tempest*, right after Prospero states that the revels are ended and that "These our actors / (As I foretold you) were all spirits, and / Are melted into air, into thin air" (148-150). Prospero's actors are indeed spirits, but Gaiman here emphasizes another possible interpretation of his speech – that real human actors (and people in general) are actually spirits since they can vanish from this world at any moment and leave not a trace behind. Prospero's speech announces his nearing break-up with magic, something that Shakespeare is also occupied with, as can be seen in his conversation with a priest: "I... I have a magician, in the play I write, with magical books and robe and staff, and spirits who do his will" (Gaiman 1996: 25, emphasis added). Following the priest's advice that the magician should burn his books, break his staff and renounce all magic, Shakespeare believes he himself will atone for his magical dealings with Dream if he makes Prospero do that (the very choice of quotation from *The Tempest* emphasizes Shakespeare's struggle to regain essentially human and mortal qualities). However, the power of art lies not in its author/mediator, but in the story itself. The narrative is what goes beyond ephemeral everyday reality and, since Shakespeare is partly Prospero, he will never vanish from the realm of imagination. According to McCloud, "borderless panels", such as the one in the middle, often assume a timeless quality, as they are not enclosed within any kind of frame that would limit their duration (1994: 102).

In his tapestry of texts and stories, Gaiman manages to produce quite an

amusing effect. Namely, the two stories here presented, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” and “The Tempest”, while dealing with multiple realities produced or influenced by dreams and narratives, still maintain the basic qualities of a story. And since every story has characters, all those who appear in *The Sandman* are at this level equal, which implies that Shakespeare is no more or less real than Dream, Death, Cain or Abel, Titania and Oberon, Prospero and many other Gaiman’s personages. This is not to say that the historical figure of William Shakespeare should be equalized with his representation in *The Sandman*. What Gaiman presents in his series is the narrative of Shakespeare, or Shakespeare as a narrative, the mythical side of his personality and art. Comic books are basically “about the difficulty of being other” (Castaldo 2004: 98), where “other” might be perceived as a supernatural creature (such as in the case of Oberon and Titania), a human individual with outstanding powers and abilities (the case of Prospero and Shakespeare) or a modern deity (Dream). By transforming Shakespeare into an “other”, Gaiman assigns him the role of a hero in his modern mythology. The nature of comic books is indeed such that they have the power to shape their heroes into modern myths (McCloud 1994: 188). However much this contributes to Shakespeare’s popularity in the modern world, it still puts Gaiman the author in a disputable position. It might at first appear that he sees himself as the supreme author, as the one exclusively entitled to regard humanity, history, art and fiction only as proper cloth for his weaving since, after all, Prince of stories is nothing more than his creation. On the other hand, we might take Gaiman for another of Dream’s vehicles, a writer whose “only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them” (Barthes 2001: 188). *The Sandman* would, in this case, stand for another work commissioned by Dream, this time

with the purpose of making himself immortal since, despite being Prince of stories, he has no story of his own (Gaiman 1996: 36). Equalizing *The Sandman* with Shakespeare’s plays at this level renders the authors similar in many ways. With its multiple storylines and various plots, colorful characters and a broad range of topics, even *The Sandman* is, as Castaldo notices, a “worthy successor to the Elizabethan stage” (2004: 98). Both authors create their works by relying on the tales of old, and both have a responsibility towards their respective audiences, as well as towards the stories they relate. Both are, after all, mediators of eternal truths, whose inspiration in its major part originates from a mystic source, neither human nor divine, but simply endless.

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## SANJAJ SANAK O VILU: ŠEKSPIR KAO LIK U SENDMENU NILA GEJMENA

### Rezime

Rad istražuje načine na koje je Vilijam Šekspir predstavljen u stripovima iz serije *Sendmen* Nila Gejmena. Šekspir se kao lik pojavljuje u tri priče od ukupno sedamdeset pet i na neki način zauzima posebno mesto u seriji, zato što kroz njega Gejmen izražava svoje stavove o prirodi poetskog stvaralaštva, vezi između autora i narativa, kao i između fikcije i stvarnosti. Kroz predstavljanje jednog od najznačajnijih svetskih autora i njegove dve drame, *Sna letnje noći* i *Bure*, Gejmen se poigrava idejama da je fikcija jednako stvarna kao i istorijska realnost (ili čak stvarnija od nje) i da je autor tek posrednik u prenošenju velikih narativa koji neizostavno prevazilaze istorijsko bivstvovanje autora. Štaviše, pojedinačne priče su, prema Gejmenovom viđenju, samo ponavljanja i ponovna tumačenja večnih istina otelovljenih u kraljevstvu snevanja. U ovom radu Gejmenove ideje potkrepljene su tradicionalnim kritičkim osvrtima na Šekspira, njegove drame i likove, kao i uopštenijim Bartovim shvatanjima o ulozi autora u procesu umetničkog stvaralaštva. Svrha ovog rada jeste da pruži analizu Šekspirovog razvojnog puta od ambicioznog dramskog pisca do jedne od najprepoznatljivijih figura savremene popularne kulture. Kao što to Nil Gejmen predstavlja slikom i rečima, taj razvoj podrazumeva da Šekspir najpre treba da postane svestan paralelne stvarnosti svoje fikcije i njene snage, a zatim da i sam postane njen deo.