

Abstract:

Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* is not an environmental novel, yet it narrates the primacy of the physical world in the form of cosmic struggle between the Old Gods and the New; in this way, it resonates with the crisis humankind face in the Anthropocene. As climate change threatens human survival, a renewed focus on presence and the physical world is required to address anthropocentric impacts on the planet and incite cultural change. *American Gods* is a unique blend of horror, science fiction and fantasy, and draws from Americana and ancient and modern mythology. The protagonist, Shadow, is drawn into a war between the Old Gods and the New, the former fading from existence as the New Gods garner the fickle 'faith' of the population. Behind what appears to be a war between religious faith and human progress, however, is an underlying recognition of the role of the land, and the reality of the land as the true source of human betterment and survival.

This paper seeks to reveal the underlying eco-ethic in *American Gods* by arguing that physicality and presence surpass the power of faith, thus positioning the natural world as the undeniable truth, and constant provider. The multiplicity of truths and the role of story and storytelling in the building of American culture are exemplified by the instability of belief structures in the novel. Old Gods reside in America, brought over by migrants to the new world, but are weakened as civilisation progresses to favour belief and worship of technology, urban expansion, media and money. Simultaneously, New Gods manifest based on pillars of fast-paced modernisation, Mr Town, Mr Stone, Media, and Technical Boy. There is only one element of America that remains constant, unaffected by the transient nature of human belief, and precedes human belief at all: the land.

The power of faith is upheld throughout the text as people's faith literally manifesting living beings in the form of gods. As belief wavers, so too does the strength of the Old Gods, creating friction between the old and new. However, as Odin and Loki's plot to set the Old and New gods against each other climaxes, the strength of belief that has the power to literally create living beings is revealed for what it is: a fickle, transient thing that lacks the follow through required to sustain itself. It is the land, manifesting in Shadow's dreams as a buffalo-headed man, that is eternally providing for all of life. It does not require belief to exist, nor to sustain its existence.

In this way, the multiplicity of truths that *American Gods* posits becomes a persistent reminder that human systems of understanding are not the solution to the issues we face in the Anthropocene.