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“To be men, not destroyers”: Developing Dabrowskian Personalities in Ezra Pound’s The Cantos
and Neil Gaiman’s American Gods

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English
American Literature

by

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	iii
Abstract	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	11
Chapter 2	16
Chapter 3	26
Conclusion	34
References	36
Vita	40

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 4

Figure 2 5

ABSTRACT

Kazimierz Dabrowski's psychological theory of positive disintegration is a lesser known theory of personality development that offers an alternative critical perspective of literature. It provides a framework for the characterization of postmodern protagonists who move beyond heroic indoctrination to construct their own self-organized, autonomous identities. Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* captures the speaker-poet's extensive process of inner conflict, providing a unique opportunity to track the progress of the hero's transformation into a personality, or a *man*. *American Gods* is a more fully realized portrayal of a character who undergoes the complete paradigmatic collapse of positive disintegration and deliberate self-derived self-revision in a more distilled linear fashion. Importantly, using a Dabrowskian lens to re-examine contemporary literature that has evolved to portray how the experience of psychopathology leads to metaphorical death—which may have any combination of negative or positive outcomes—has not only socio-cultural significance but important personal implications as well.

Keywords: literary criticism; Joseph Campbell; Lawrence Kohlberg; existential depression; characterization; paradox

Introduction

Literary traditions throughout the world begin with myth and epic, as forwarded succinctly and popularly in the 20th century by Joseph Campbell. Epic literature, in particular, famously glamorizes honor-deaths—whether by direct or indirect suicide in battle—in which people sacrifice themselves to a cultural ideal. Likewise, Campbell’s hero’s quest narrative model functions to indoctrinate individuals into a Western culture of heroic self-sacrifice to the reigning cultural ideologies that heroes signify. As “a symbol,” the hero functions as “a sign that points past itself to a ground of meaning and being that is one with the consciousness of the beholder” (Campbell); in other words, the hero only derives meaning through its function in the symbolic system. As such, Campbell’s hero is simply a “representative” (Ryken 108), an embodiment of culture, an individual sacrificed as a vessel for the epistemological, teleological, and even ontological structures of his or her society, rather than a fully realized human being. However, even Campbell admits that applications of his foundational theory have become problematic since he published *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* in 1949, for “we don’t know what this society is, it’s changed so fast” (“Mythic Reflections”). Therefore, postmodern and contemporary writers are increasingly developing what Campbell would call creative mythologies that envision different modes of life than adherents of Campbell’s seminal text typically forward.

Authentic characters, then, in 20th and 21st century literature increasingly defy the pattern of development promoted by mythic and epic literature as typically encapsulated by Campbell’s hero’s journey. The development of these figures may be better understood through the lens of human personality development. Kazimierz Dabrowski’s psychological theory of positive disintegration is a lesser known theory of personality development that offers an alternative

critical perspective that disrupts traditional cultural narratives and heroic-epic forms by promoting deliberate and perpetual self-organization as opposed to self-sacrifice to static cultural paradigms. Dabrowski postulates that inner conflict and even neuroses—resolved through the imaginative capacity to accept paradox and conceive new realities outside one’s indoctrinated philosophical perspectives—are essential for the development of self-organized, autonomous personal identity. Significantly, Campbell’s predominating theory focuses heavily on the hero’s conflicts with the external world, as well as on the hero’s ability to secure the supremacy of the reigning paradigm of “good” in the civilization: “[The] culture of the society is saved by the hero’s courageous endeavor” (Hoffman 11). On the other hand, Dabrowski’s model focuses primarily on the resolution of an inner conflict that demands a testing of the indoctrinated schemata that drive the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of most members of society. Campbell’s model, founded upon patterns in ancient mythology and epic forms, only provides a roadmap for individuals to embody and preserve indoctrinated cultural schemata, rather than to evolve as free individuals who may thrive in the modern landscape.

The final stages of Dabrowski’s theory are of most interest to literary study because these stages move beyond Campbell’s closed cycle to depict individuals who constantly learn and evolve through turmoil and self-examination to construct their own ideal personalities. Frequently referred to as Peace Pilgrims, these individuals have identities that are open and changing, rather than remaining static at the end of Campbell’s closed cycle. In this way, Dabrowski’s model provides a framework to track the development of an authentic protagonist whose continual process of self-actualization more accurately reflects human experience and existence in modernity, as defined by Hegel. Particularly, in “the modern system of art, after the first heroic and effusive phase, conceptions of time develop that start by assuming paradox or

difference” (Muller 523), unlike presupposition of a universal truth defining the binary opposition of good and evil that founds mythic and epic tradition as well as heroic characterization. This dialectic shift, as Muller has argued, leads inevitably to a “de-teleologization” that “facilitates an emphasis on the moment” and a reorientation “toward the subjunctive and contingent” as well as an “assumption of difference . . . between the present and the past, and between the present and the future” (Muller 525). This shift in perspective destabilizes the role of the hero of myth and tradition as a symbol of good whose role is to redeem the society, according to that society’s own cultural ideals (Campbell *Hero* 362). Conversely, Dabrowski’s model of personality development more adequately provides a framework for the emergence of postmodern characters developed in literature that focuses on persistent destabilization and reconciliation in the modern and postmodern periods.

Works such as Ezra Pound’s *The Cantos*, which traverses both periods, and Neil Gaiman’s *American Gods*, settled firmly in the postmodern era, depict the progress of characters who move beyond heroic indoctrination to emerge as fully developed self-organized, autonomous personalities and who, therefore, also illustrate the process of personality development defined by Dabrowski’s theory of positive disintegration. Both *The Cantos* and *American Gods* portray a character whose sense and expectations of reality are shattered—whose reigning teleological, epistemological, and even ontological schemata have been deconstructed, resulting in the experience of metaphorical death. Both works grapple with the struggle to reconstruct the schemata that define one’s self and the world—authentically, rather than through coping mechanisms that distort reality. The protagonists in both narratives demonstrate the final realization that inner peace may only be actualized by individuals who self-organize the paradigms that drive them automatically and who act in accordance to their own experience of

reality. Additionally, the position of Pound’s poem to represent society’s transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, or a fundamental change in the psyche of contemporary society that assumes deconstructive instability and uncertainty, clearly parallels the shift in the consciousness and personal identity experienced by individuals who undergo positive disintegration.

In Dabrowski’s model, “personal growth is indeed much like scaling a mountain rather than a sequential unfolding of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood” (Piechowski “Peace Pilgrim” 103), so the narrative structure and cognitive processes involved in character development constitute a much more complex interaction of ever-changing internal and external perspectives. Secondary integration is distinguished by persistent consciously-balanced

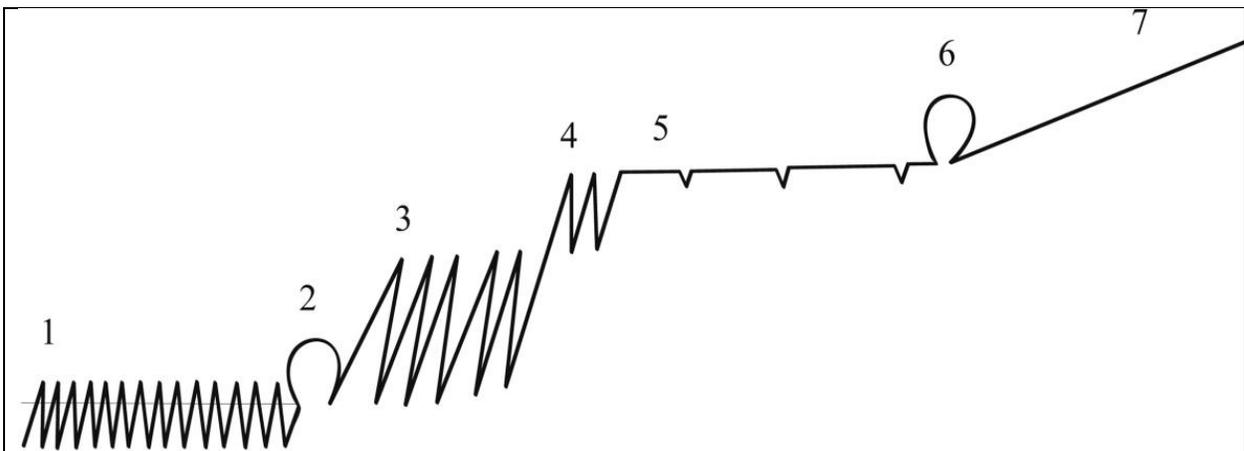
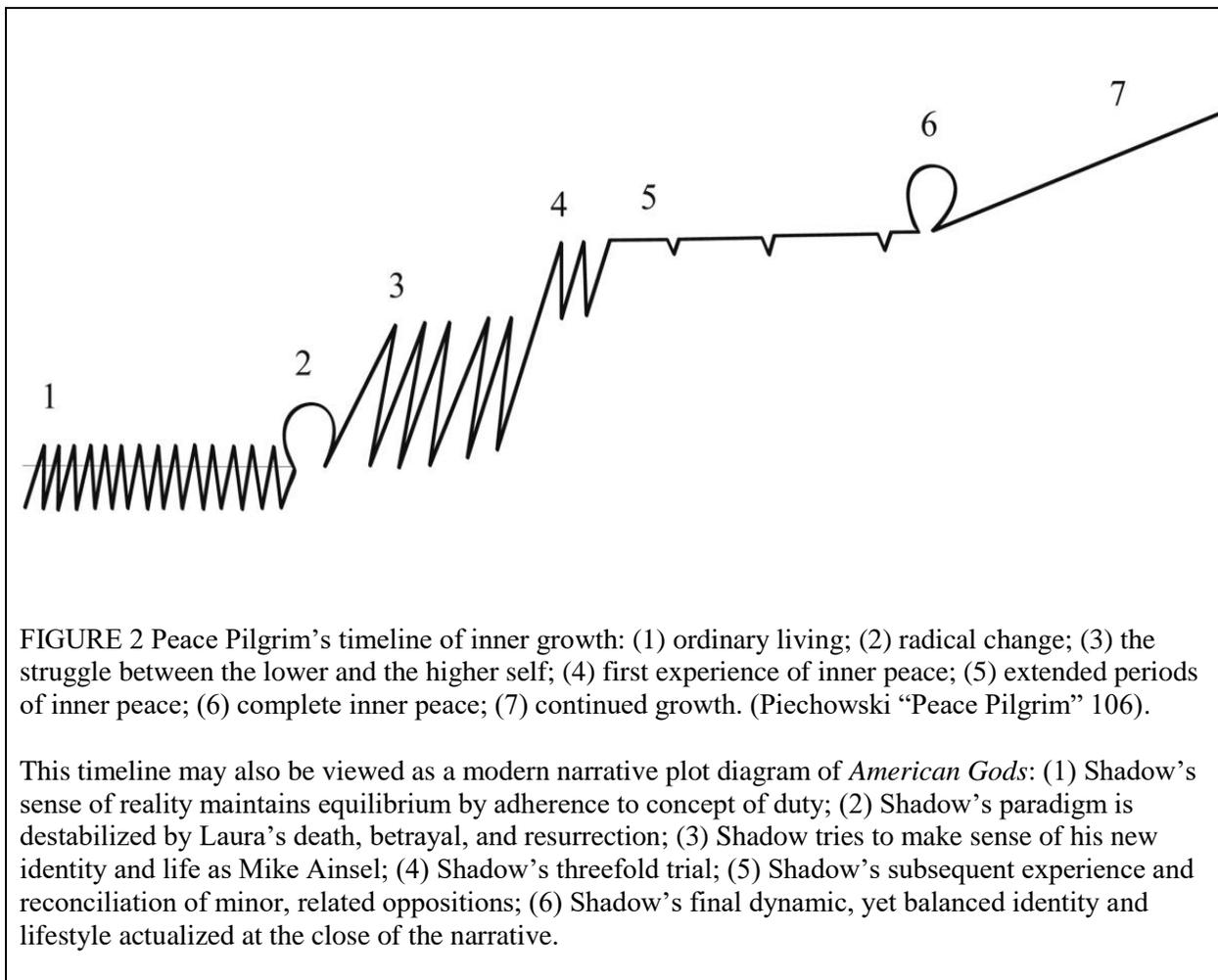


FIGURE 1 Peace Pilgrim’s timeline of inner growth: (1) ordinary living; (2) radical change; (3) the struggle between the lower and the higher self; (4) first experience of inner peace; (5) extended periods of inner peace; (6) complete inner peace; (7) continued growth. (Piechowski “Peace Pilgrim” 106).

This timeline may be viewed as a modern narrative plot diagram of *The Cantos*: (1) The hero (poet-speaker) maintains schematic equilibrium by adherence to concepts of duty and paideuma; (2) Hero is destabilized by being incarcerated in Pisa in Canto 74; (3) The poet-speaker accepts the figurative death of the hero and related “realities” (4) Poet-speaker has first experience of transformative insight and peace: “Tear down thy vanity;” (5) Hero/poet-speaker continue to transform voice and poem through the remainder of the poem; (6) Poet-speaker’s final acceptance of paradox along with redefined identity and lifestyle actualized by the poem ending in fragments and sudden silence.

disequilibrium through successive phases of multilevel growth (Piechowski “Peace Pilgrim” 103). Pound’s and Gaiman’s meta-mythical presentation of cultural and personal identities, as well as the narrative structure of *The Cantos* and *American Gods*, are the formal means by which the writers demonstrates their protagonists’ process of the “synthesis and integration of all component ‘subpersonalities’” (Piechowski “Peace Pilgrim” 104) through varying experiences of radical change and cycles of gradual active exploration (Laycraft 118), in pursuit of pathways for living one’s best life (Kane 74). The main dynamisms active in a fully realized self-organized, autonomous personality in modernity are responsibility for oneself, responsibility for others, autonomy, and authenticity.



There is a profound and active empathy toward all people, and the individual reaches his own ideal for living. Both Pound's speaker in *The Cantos* and Gaiman's protagonist in *American Gods* undergo this process of positive disintegration and secondary integration or character development that results in these characteristics as well as a state of inner peace, as illustrated by Figures 1 & 2.

The position in literary tradition of *American Gods*, published half a century after *The Cantos*, illustrates a more crystalized and accelerated realization of secondary integration in late postmodern society, a benefit of having the guidance of those who have already navigated the process of personality development in the modern world over the course of time between the publications of *The Cantos* and *American Gods*. According to Dabrowski, having an "advisor plays a fundamental role in the development of personality" (151), and Gaiman has the obvious advantage of inheriting many more such advisors than Pound in developing a self-organized, autonomous personality that embraces modernity and developing likewise authentic characters in postmodern literature. While it is important to separate the speaker from the poet, Pound himself admits that his literary work is the "record of a personal struggle" (*Guide to Kulchur* 135), and in this case, the struggle is the shift from employing traditional tropes to represent modern sensibility and then a shift to postmodern consciousness, or awareness that "the center will not hold." Pound's *The Cantos* captures the extensive process of inner conflict endured by the speaker-poet, providing a unique opportunity to track the progress of the hero's transformation into a personality, or a man, beginning with the onset of positive disintegration in the *Pisan Cantos*, progressing and regressing through *Rock-Drill* and *Drafts and Fragments*, where the end implies the full transformation of the hero and emergence of an authentic character occurs. *American Gods* is a more fully realized portrayal of an individual character who undergoes the

complete paradigmatic collapse of positive disintegration and endures inner turmoil and deliberate self-derived self-revision in a more distilled linear fashion.

Chapter 1: Postmodern Character Development Through the Lens of Dabrowski's Theory of Positive Disintegration

Kazimierz Dabrowski's personal circumstances, his education and interests in both the arts and sciences, and his professional opportunities all led to the development of his theory of positive disintegration. Born in Poland in 1902, he had early close encounters with death, beginning with the passing of his younger three-year-old sister from meningitis and, more significantly, witnessing World War I as an early adolescent—which led to a major philosophical crisis in response to his shock and horror “at the sight of the mutilated bodies of many dead soldiers” (Lesniak quoted in Kaminski 55). Dabrowski's personal experiences with suffering continued throughout his life. While pursuing his medical degree in Warsaw in 1926, he worked in a pediatric mental health clinic, where he first witnessed self-harm; he immediately understood this behavior as the result of psychic suffering that motivated inward examination rather than externalized coping mechanisms. His doctorate work focused on suicide, and he continued as a professional to work with pediatric institutes of psychopathology and neuropathology. During World War II, he created a “hidden institute” deep in the woods of Zagorze, Poland, where he provided a safe haven and treatment for patients, war orphans, and children targeted by Nazis for experimentation (Kaminski 72-73). These factors combined with his upbringing in a home that “put emphasis on culture and books” (Kaminski 55) and consequent undergraduate studies in literature with an emphasis on linguistics, philosophy, and

psychology to influence heavily the foundational concepts of his model of personality development.

Dabrowski's theory is founded on an understanding of a personality as a new stable, organized "self-aware, self-chosen, and self-affirmed [psychic] structure" that as an "open, nonlinear, and complex system, acquires a new internal state without interference from the outside" (Laycraft 117), or a personality that is free from the influence of cultural pressures. This personality is the product of multidimensional and multilevel development, driven by inner tensions and conflicts as well as feelings of anxiety and despair, through which idealism replaces materialism, intuition guides experiential learning, one's inner spiritual voice overrides the drives of the id and ego, and suffering becomes instructive and transformative (Kaminski 62-63). According to this model, one begins in a state of primary integration and unilevel disintegration before experiencing spontaneous multilevel disintegration and then deliberately engaging in organized multilevel disintegration to actualize a state of secondary integration, or a personality.

As a child, an individual's identity is constrained by cultural narratives, consequences for nonconformity, and the effort to succeed in life (Kane 73). This is a state of primary integration, the first level of personality development in Dabrowski's theory, one that Dabrowski claims not all individuals develop beyond. People who remain in this level of personality development think and behave automatically or impulsively in accordance with basic drives and schemata that are rigid and narrow. Moreover, "individuals on this [cognitive] level are not capable of having internal conflicts, although they often have conflicts with their external environment" (Laycraft 114). At this level, one relies on unconscious defense mechanisms that distort reality in order to inhibit "potentially threatening ideas, feelings, memories, wishes, or fears out of awareness" (Thobaben 330) or to disavow one's responsibility and free will, thereby maintaining equilibrium

in the face of the reality of contradiction and paradox experienced fleetingly as unilevel disintegration before returning to a state of primary integration. In this way, a person who remains in a state of primary integration, going through life in more or less conventional ways within the cultural paradigm, is, presumably, the sort of person who is most susceptible to the dehumanizing conditions of our civilization (Piechowksi “Rethinking Dabrowski” 16).

The next level of development is unilevel disintegration, the experience of ambivalence and uncertainty when facing qualitatively and quantitatively undifferentiated desires as well as fluctuating feelings in response to such inner conflict. Unilevel disintegration is unavoidable, but one cannot remain in a state of unresolved unilevel disintegration without undergoing suicidal tendencies or psychosis (Tillier). In 1986, Albert Bandura categorized eight coping strategies “by which people can temporarily disengage their conscience while retaining positive self-regard: moral justification, euphemistic labeling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, disregard of consequences, dehumanization, and blaming the victim” (Piechowski “Rethinking Dabrowski” 14). By definition, these are mechanisms through which individuals maintain a distorted sense of reality and self in order to remain in a state of primary integration.

These are also the schematic underpinnings of indoctrinated culture, of heroism and war, applicable to the central social conflict driving Campbell’s quest narratives, epic poetry such as *The Cantos* originally aimed to be, and the reigning paradigm represented by the old and new gods in *American Gods*. Persons in positions of perceived authority—including the mythic heroes and deities of *The Cantos* and *American Gods*—use strategies to disavow responsibility, while disempowered persons use strategies to inhibit thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. However, both strategies that disavow responsibility and that inhibit the self depend intrinsically

upon perceptions of authority defined by external as opposed to internal ideological systems. They ensure that the experience of conflict and conflict resolution as well as meaning-making remain externalized—and that individuals remains in a state of primary integration as vehicles of traditional (indoctrinated and static) culture. Because conflicts remain in the external realm, such as the primary realm in which Campbell's hero battles, epistemological and teleological psychic mechanisms emphasize preserving or manifesting what one was taught is classified as right and wrong within the culture. However, increasing exposure to contradictory beliefs, values, and customs in the modern world, as well as the decentralization and destabilization of local economies and ways of life, has led undeniably to increasing disequilibrium. This complex environment, when combined with other development potentialities such as positive influences in the social setting in addition to imaginative, emotional, and intellectual overexcitabilities, may transform the experience of unilevel disintegration into a necessary and beneficial transitional experience that presents individuals with an opportunity for spontaneous multilevel disintegration (Laycraft 115).

Spontaneous multilevel disintegration occurs when coping strategies fail and one is no longer able to see the world or oneself according to the schemata that one used before. Moving into this phase, "we do not just see more, we see life differently" (Tillier), and conflict becomes internal as one struggles to resolve contradictions between lower and higher instincts, thoughts, and behaviors. There is an increase in inner conflict as one engages in positive maladjustment to the culture, shifting from a binary mindset to construct a complex personal system of values. At this level, one's "attitude of like and dislike is transformed into an understanding of others and a desire to have more selective and deeper emotional relationships" (Laycraft 114). As this process stabilizes and becomes increasingly deliberate, one enters a state of organized multilevel

disintegration, the aim of which is self-perfection, enabled by a newly formed subject-object relationship with the self. One embraces reality, or the awareness of contradiction, and undertakes a process of self-education and personality development by seeking out internal contradictions between personal (as opposed to indoctrinated) values and behaviors.

Self-education plays a primary role in organized multilevel disintegration and the ongoing process of secondary integration. Because of the requisite developmental potentialities of imaginative, emotional, and intellectual overexcitabilities, the self-education required to navigate organized multilevel disintegration as well as the outcome of ongoing secondary integration often takes the form of scientific innovations, great works of creative expression, and tremendous acts of philanthropy. A literary work or body of work may function, for example, as a record of the process of positive disintegration, such as with Pound's *The Cantos*; on the other hand, literature may be product of a fully realized personality who continues to creatively express the artist's ever-evolving perspective and on-going personality development, in response to real experience, as in Gaiman's body of work, including *American Gods*.

The final level of personality development in Dabrowski's model is secondary integration, or the actualization of a harmonious and unique personality, experienced as a state of inner peace. Peace Pilgrims "are confident in their chosen value hierarchy, in their chosen hierarchy of aims (goals) and their behavior conforms to this value" and any novel "external conflicts are met with a positive and developmental orientation" (Tillier). Plainly stated, the personalities are free from the limits of indoctrinated schemata: "Self-organization mainly refers to control of a system from within the system by acting upon its control parameters" (F. D. Abraham quoted in Laycraft 118). To be fully human, or to develop a personality, the schemata driving cognition, affectation, and behavior can and must be personally, not socially, derived, as

well as pluralistic and syncretic. In this way, Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration proposes that the freedom, internal harmony, and stability of a personality may be achieved through imaginative acts—acts that willfully function to integrate and balance our dynamic epistemological and experiential (i.e., intellectual and material) realities. This is “arduous intrapsychic work that transforms one's very self” (Kane 74), as illustrated by Gaiman through Shadow's journey and by the emergence of Pound's poet-speaker as a man from the rubble of a hero's abandoned quest.

Chapter 2: Positive Disintegration as a Means of Self-Revision in Ezra Pound's *The Cantos*

In Pound's *The Cantos*, before Pisa, the reader sees in the speaker the poet's aim to emulate, or *embody* idealized heroes, or develop a character who remains in a state of primary integration, until multilevel positive disintegration occurs in *The Pisan Cantos*. Pragmatically oriented, Pound's identity was deeply invested in his concept of the epic poet as a heroic poet. How he perceived and understood the world, his concepts of right and wrong, his notions regarding one's purpose in life as well as the nature of existence in and of itself as bound to tradition—even as it gave birth to the future—all centered upon his determination to be a heroic figure. According to Leah Cillingan Flack, when he began writing *The Cantos*, “Pound envisioned himself as joining generations of artists spanning the ancient and modern worlds who were committed to the project of keeping the tradition inaugurated by Homer alive” (106). For this reason, he was deeply invested into preserving and protecting these schemata, which is one explanation of what his daughter Mary de Rachewiltz refers to as his “money mania” (“Lecture”). In *The Cantos*, the poet-speaker's attempts to maintain a state of primary

integration after repeated experiences of unilevel disintegration takes two obvious forms: an obsession with heroes who embody and enact the ideals of civilization and their opposition to a civilization built upon usurious gold (Moncef 118).

In order to escape the cyclical grips of primary integration and the fear of metaphorical death through schematic breakdown, the speaker-poet must first re-examine and reject the cultural concepts of heroism defining his identity. Throughout *The Cantos*, Pound's "repeated associations among Homer, Odysseus, Mussolini, Confucius, Jefferson, and Adams suggest that he abandoned his former interest in 'finding things different' in favor of an epistemological, ideogrammic mode that relied on emphasizing sameness" (Flack 116), a clear indication of being locked in a state of primary integration. The poet-speaker's character development is related to Pound's "desire to see [subject-]rhymes between literature and politics, history and contemporary society" (Flack 116). Hence, "while subject-rhymes, as he called them, inform the structure of *The Cantos*, which juxtapose far-flung events from history, myth, and literature to emphasize their inner resemblances," this mode of meaning-making holds the speaker-poet in a state of primary integration as a "view [of] the world in terms of sameness, echo, and rhyme at the expense of difference" (Flack 106), or personal development. Regardless, the voice of the poet-speaker in *The Cantos* portrays increasingly frequent episodes of unilevel disintegration. It is unsurprising, then, that Mary de Rachewiltz tells us that Hemingway claimed that Pound "certainly made no sense then [1933 or 34, I guess] and talked of utter rot, nonsense and balls . . . you can pick out the parts in his cantos at which he starts" (Hemingway quoted in Rachewiltz "Family Lore" 8).

The murder of Mussolini and the subsequent imprisonment of Pound in Pisa thwarted any attempts to employ coping mechanisms to distort reality and, therefore, effectively disintegrated

the poet-speaker's epistemological, teleological, and ontological schemata. This cataclysmic event ushered the speaker-poet into a new level of character development, spontaneous multilevel disintegration: The poet-speaker cannot help but realize that his expectations of reality (including, especially, his hero's destiny) were wrong. Hence, *The Pisan Cantos* mark an undeniable turn in the narrative of *The Cantos*. The speaker has moved through various personae of heroes, reaching in the *Italian Cantos* a frenzied pitch of rally for his mentor, Mussolini—Odysseus incarnate, a projection and embodiment of the speaker's reigning paradigms (Flack 116). Then, Mussolini, the poet's hero—and hence, the poet-speaker's organizing principles—is extinguished, and the speaker experiences a living death in the cages of the Pisan war camp: He is now “noman . . . on whom the sun has gone down” (74/445). *The Pisan Cantos* depicts the poet-speaker's experience of spontaneous multilevel disintegration onset by the complete deconstruction of previously sovereign ideologies. This pivotal moment of transition manifests as an absolute inversion: a turn from a pragmatic to an expressive orientation, from a quest to attain (or create) a terrestrial paradise to a journey that brings us through ephemeral experiences of love and beauty, and, finally, from a structuralist understanding of meaning-making to an acceptance of a deconstructive rejection of closure. This is the metamorphosis of a hero into a man, in which suffering becomes instructive in shifting away from rigid egotism and material conflict with the external world toward intuitive experimentation and inner spiritual peace.

This metamorphosis is only made possible through the death of Odysseus, the embodiment of his previously integration epistemological, teleological, and ontological schemata—or the cultural paradigm the poet acted as a vehicle of. Not only does Odysseus appear as the first hero in the poem, by the 1930s, it is clear that “Pound believed that the Odyssey was capable of engendering meaningful social, cultural, and aesthetic change, that

Odysseus offered an image of an ideal man and ruler, and that the Homeric epics could offer a blueprint for renewing a modern civilization decimated by war” (Flack 109). Odysseus’ idealized position in Pound’s mythology and reigning schemata is most obvious in *Guide to Kulcher*, in which “Pound’s effusive tone and praise for the ‘Weltmensch’ Odysseus exemplifies the hero worship that infused much of his writing in this era” (Flack 115). Leading up to Pisa, Odysseus has come to function as the main means of Pound meeting his pragmatic ends as a poet-hero and an increasingly frequent figure in the poem.

The death of Odysseus signified by the “noman” sequence in Pisa (74/445-446) is the death of Mussolini—is the death of the poet-speaker and the reigning cultural paradigms they embody: a final release from primary integration. The opening of the *Pisan Cantos* brims with images of death: death of the hero and death of the world, the erasure of identity and voice. The first line indicates the disintegration of the schemata driving the poet-speaker’s words: “The enormous tragedy of the dream in the peasant’s bent shoulders” (74/445), which is now dead, as indicated by Mussolini’s death, described as “Ben and la Clara *a Milano*/by the heels at Milano/ That maggots shd/ eat the dead bullock” (74/445). The bullock here is Mussolini (Terrell 362), and his being “twice crucified” (74/445) is followed by a reference to the end of the world through Pound’s allusion to T.S. Eliot’s “The Hollow Men”: “yet say this to the Possum: a bang, not a whimper,/ with a bang not with a whimper” (74/445). Juxtaposed with this image of death is an image of a utopian city ruled by a king who was loved and chosen because he was just (Terrell 362) as well as the first of many images of “suave eyes, quiet” (74/445) that are associated with Aphrodite—love and beauty.

The poet-speaker soon establishes a connection with Odysseus, “Noman, Noman? Odysseus/ the name of my family” (74/445), establishing the poet-speaker’s identity as a hero

within a tradition of those who have lost their identity, who are nameless and forsaken by their gods (i.e., divorced from their previously reigning schemata), barred from returning home—or to the world he knew before. The poet-speaker briefly returns to juxtapose his ideal heroes, literary and historical, with those that he criticizes as usurers, such as Roosevelt, a “snotty barbarian ignorant of T’ang history” (74/446), before shifting away from binary thinking and political conflict toward plasticity (“not words whereto to be faithful/ nor deeds that they be resolute) and natural reconciliation (“only that bird-heart equity make timber/ and lay hold of the earth”) (74/446). Pound himself translated this excerpt from *Analects IV, X* to mean “a proper man is not absolutely bent on, or absolutely averse from anything in particular” (quoted in Terrell 365), a shift from consciousness based on primary integration to the experience of disintegration. This brings the poet-speaker back to the death of Odysseus, or the loss of his identity and voice, represented by the repetition of “the tales of Odysseus/ Noman/ Noman/ ‘I am noman, my name is noman” (74/446), preceding references to “Ouan Jin/ or the man with an education/ and whose mouth was removed by his father/ . . . his mouth removed,” which he recalls from the “death cells in sight of Mt. Taishan @ Pisa” (74/446-447).

This sense of positive disintegration repeatedly returns throughout the opening of the *Pisan Cantos*, but the final repetition of “Noman/ a man on whom the sun has gone down” (74/450) is especially significant:

the drama is wholly subjective
stone knowing the form which the carver imparts it
the stone knows the form
sia Cythera, sia Ixotta, sia in Santa Maria dei Miracoli
 where Pietro Romano has fashioned the bases
Oÿ TΙΣ
a man on whom the sun has gone down
nor shall diamond die in the avalanche
 be it torn from its setting
first must destroy himself ere others destroy him (74/450)

In these lines, the poet-speaker reflects upon his early aesthetic sense of art (and, consequently, the self) being formed through intuition and discovery, as “sculptors are discoverers and unveilers of form” (Terrell 369). The stone, just as the person, knows its true form or identity; the development of the poet-speaker’s emerging personality will likewise follow as a result of such as subject-object relationship with the self as both the stone and the sculptor through a process of organized multilevel disintegration.

This transformation is driven by the experience of the disintegration of the poet-speaker’s state of primary integration, represented by the tearing “down” (ΟΨ ΤΙΣ) of former reigning ideals of love (Cythera), utopia (Isotta), and the mythic miracle of rebirth (Santa Maria) that were based upon the epic poet Dante’s tomb, built by Romano—or metaphorical death of the person. These also correspond with the man/noman, or the poet-speaker’s identity, that paradoxically “shall not die” though it be completely displaced from its known setting, world, or schemata—and must be destroyed (and deliberately and completely reconstructed) by the poet-speaker himself. Without this deliberate act of multilevel disintegration, the poet-speaker will die metaphorically by succumbing to destruction at the hands of external forces that render him and his world, his identity and reality, incomprehensible. By the end of the *Pisan Cantos*, the poet-speaker more clearly indicates his transition to the next level of character development in a state of organized multilevel disintegration by expressing a desire to realize a new reality and self. Most notably, the full acceptance of a new vision, that the poet-speaker’s reigning heroic schemata were false and destructive, is indicated by the famous repeated admonishment later in the *Pisan Cantos* to “Pull down thy vanity” (81/541), an internalization of the earlier acknowledgement of a tearing down of the externally derived cultural schemata founding the

poem. The tearing down of the myth in which the death of the poet-hero on a quest to actualize *terrestra paradiso* is finally internalized by the poet-speaker.

Significantly, in this famous passage toward the closing of Canto 81, the speaker's conclusions and adamant proclamations provide an ephemeral glimpse of the poet-speaker's eventual state of secondary integration; these glimpses of experiences of inner peace characterize navigation of organized multilevel disintegration. The poet-speaker's musings reject rigid, externally imposed order and heroic ideological purpose and admonish the reader (and himself) to focus instead on our natural inheritance of love and beauty through dynamic volition. The closing of Canto 81 is presented lyrically, as a *libretto* with a powerfully expressive impact. Lawes, a musician who "did not write for the crowds" (Terrell 453) or, in other words, for pragmatic purposes, is evoked twice in a sort of invocation at the beginning of this climactic moment. A reference to Ben Jonson's "The Triumph of Charis," or the triumph of love and life, follows: "Hast 'ou fashioned so airy a mood/ To draw up the leaf from the root?" (81/540). Jonson's poem celebrates the "bright lily" that grows "Before rude hands have touched it," a notion of the corruption of an authentic state by cultural order which is repeated in a subsequent admonishment to "Learn of the green world what can be they place" (81/541), which is, in turn, a Biblical allusion with parallel meaning: "See the lilies of the field, they toil not neither do they spin; yet they say unto you Solomon in all his glory is not arrayed like one of these" (Terrell 453).

The image of eyes, associated with Aphrodite, is repeated here, further developing this rejection of the indoctrinated pragmatic and material order for an emergence a unique, autonomously developed personality. In an allusion to Chaucer, "Your eyen two wol sleye me sodenly/ I may the beauté of hem nat susteyne" (81/540), the poet-speaker describes dying—not

The reader can track the progress of this emerging personality as the poet-speaker experiences the increasingly longer periods of peace that characterize organized multilevel disintegration. After Pisa, *The Cantos* continues to convey the speaker's "great conflictive and great creative tensions" (Dabrowski 151), and much of the poem thereafter presents the reader with images of a rise from destruction, and the poet-speaker's experience of a modern fragmented world, interspersed with fleeting moments of beauty (i.e., peace), which mirrors the arduous journey through the inner state of organized multilevel disintegration on the journey toward secondary integration, through which the poet-speaker reconciles his belief in love and beauty, or that "Le Paradis n'est pas artificiel" (83/548), with the reality that experience of persistent deconstruction: The reality is that paradise, or inner peace, at this level is "jagged,/ For a flash,/ for an hour/ then agony" (92/640). In *Rock Drill*, the poet-speaker seems to "have emerged from the repetitive round of history into a bright, subjective, pastoral world" in which "the motif of ascension with allusions that give rise to some uncertainty about the purely paradisaic nature of the world into which one is emerging" (Surette 495), which is a preserved break with the epic form and the stasis of primary integration, even if the poet-speaker has yet to be able to fully "let go," indicated by the fact that the poet-speaker still seems to conceive of "purification rituals, charity, mercy, magnanimity, love, and forgiveness, as if the solution comes from without" (Rehder 145-146). Regardless, during this period of prolonged organized multilevel disintegration, the poem shifts away from his boyhood and cultural heroes and more toward memory, images of beauty, and expressive proclamations of love.

Irrefutably, the conclusion to *The Cantos* in *Drafts and Fragments* and the poet-speaker's personality at its deconstructive finish urges the reader to embrace all ideas, all meaning-making activities, as uncertainties, and demonstrates an emphasis on love and the experience of inner

peace that characterizes secondary integration. The endings of the final four fragments found in “Notes for CXVII et seq,” including the famous ultimate Canto dedicated to his beloved Olga, repeat the same conclusion. The poet-speaker has undergone a complete reconfiguration and asks the reader (or himself) to “forgive what I have made” (117/821), referring to his prior work created from a state of primary integration out of his sense of duty—his attempts “to write Paradise” (117/822) or to engage in pragmatically driven external conflicts and aesthetics as opposed to expressive and internally focused works of love. The poet-speaker asks for forgiveness twice: “Let the Gods forgive what I/ have made/ Let those I love try to forgive/ what I have made” (117/822) after he admits his error:

M’amour, m’amour
 what do I love and
 where are you?
That I lost my center
 fighting the world.
The dreams clash
 and are shattered—
and that I tried to make a paradiso
 terrestre. (117/822)

This insight is reconciled in the fragments that follow, when the poet-speaker offers his solution to instead “Let the wind speak/ that is paradise” (117/822) and concludes in the final line he adds to the poem by admonishing us “To be men not destroyers” (117/823). Rather than a self committed to heroic acts of external conflict (i.e., a self defined by acts of destruction), the new vision of this person is to find inner peace in quiet moment of love and beauty. This conclusion, when combined with the final canto dedicated to Olga, or to love, “That her acts/ Olga’s acts/ of beauty/ be remembered . . . whatever I may write/ in the interim” [“Fragment” (1966)] solidify the poet-speaker’s new, deliberately organized state of secondary integration. The most compelling indication that the poet-speaker in *The Cantos* achieves this level of completely self-

organized personality, however, is the fact that the epic ends in sudden silence, with a postmodern denial of closure or resolution as he sets to following his own advice: He lays down the sword-pen and his life as a vehicle of the poetic voice of tradition, choosing to live instead for the fleeting glimpses of paradise life affords us—experiences of love and inner peace—as we (hopefully) move ever-more seamlessly through external disruption in a state of inner stability.

Chapter 3: The Road to Secondary Integration in Gaiman's *American Gods*

Neil Gaiman's body of work is fantasy fiction through which he has developed a "meta-/multi-mythology" (Blomquist 6), the overarching paradoxical function of which is to convey societal "concerns and values" (Blomquist 7) while exploring and reconciling the "questions of identity" (Parsons, Sawers, & McInally 371) or free "personal existence" (Jahlmar 267) that arise in postmodern society. The characters in his works depict individuals (represented as mythic figures and gods) who are trapped in a state of primary integration or who experience positive disintegration as a means to actualize secondary integration. In *Seasons of Mist*, a revision of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, angels are trapped in a state of primary integration, portrayed as "the static or the damned," while the Devil is portrayed as "the changeable or free" (Jahlmar 269). In *Odd and the Frost Giants*, Gaiman's character development—which, again, consequently illustrates Dabrowski's model—also undeniably appears; the mythic beings are "generally unable to learn or change" (O'Conner 31), and the "gods are destined to suffer eternally for their faults, unable to improve themselves or each other" (O'Conner 33). Conversely, in *Odd and the Frost Giants*, the children are able "to grow and mature" when they "move away from the safety of mythic time into the harsh reality of linear time" (O'Conner 29).

Gaiman's characters demonstrate that personality development (i.e., existential freedom) requires the individual to break out of "mythic time," or beyond culturally indoctrinated schemata that is "without change, consequence, or death" (O'Conner 30) by facing reality, which is "characterized by change and uncertainty" (O'Conner 29), or the deconstructive experience of positive disintegration.

In *American Gods*, Gaiman continues to forward his persistent critique of the negative effects of remaining in an indoctrinated state of primary integration and to develop characters who experience positive disintegration and secondary integration to become self-organized, autonomous personalities. At the beginning of *American Gods*, Shadow, the protagonist, survives prison in a state of primary integration, a docile acceptance of his imprisonment in which he acts according to his perception of his duty, a pragmatic or *heroic* desire to simply "find his determined purpose in the system" (Blomquist 10), or to function as his designated signifier within the ruling schemata of his society. He uses coping strategies to maintain a state of internal equilibrium and return, repeatedly, back to primary integration: "Keep your head down. Do your own time" (Gaiman 5). This confinement within the reigning cultural schemata is symbolized by his incarceration. Shadow interacts with prisoners and prison guards and (at least initially) his boss/mentor Wednesday in ways that allow him to avoid interacting freely with reality or entering into a state of organized multilevel disintegration—don't ask any questions and say as little as possible.

In the novel, the gods function as the incarnation of the ruling cultural schemata structuring primary integration, equivalent to Campbell's heroes and Pound's heroic poet-speaker. It is significant, then, that the underlying conflict of the novel is founded on Wednesday/Odin's desire to instigate a war between the old and new gods—an external conflict

that will trigger a reinstatement of the reigning, yet waning, order of the gods. In other words, Wednesday, as the embodiment of indoctrinated cultural identity, seeks to create a state of unilevel disintegration that will scare individuals and society back into a state of primary integration.

In *American Gods*, individuals trapped in primary integration who suffer from unilevel disintegration because they are unable to undergo the metaphorical death of spontaneous multilevel disintegration (nevertheless imagine different lives or selves made free through organized multilevel disintegration) are not only the gods themselves, but also those who sacrifice their minds and bodies to the ideals they worship, that the gods symbolize. The reader witnesses this consumption literally at the opening of the novel, when Bilquis devours the lover whose final ecstatic words are “I worship you with my body” (Gaiman 28). This avoidance of the suffering requisite of facing reality and enduring positive disintegration is what makes the idyllic town of Lakeside, frozen in the past and literally frozen in winter during within the timeframe of the novel, even possible. However, under the façade of the town is the stark truth of being trapped in unreconciled unilevel disintegration: “You know what the biggest cause of unnatural death is among farmers in the Midwest? . . . They kill themselves” (Gaiman 281).

As the embodiment of primary integration, many of the gods, including Wednesday, Mr. Nancy, and tech-boy, demonstrate the negative impacts of repeated experiences of unilevel disintegration that never evolve into multilevel disintegration. Some employ typical coping strategies to inhibit the inner turmoil of multilevel disintegration with alcohol or drugs, such as Mr. Nancy with his whiskey and tech-boy with his unidentified intoxicating inhalant. Others experience extreme psychosis, as the individual latches onto more and more elaborate distortions of perceptions to accommodate the reigning schemata and, thereby, to avoid realizing and

changing one's notions about one's self, one's future life, and one's current reality. The most obvious example is when tech-boy faces disintegration after becoming a murderer and discovering that there are places in reality that are farther than 50 miles away from McDonald's. He enters Shadow's hotel room, "shivering," and Shadow notices that tech-boy "smelled strange" like the man who, in prison, "had taken off all his clothes in the middle of the day and told everyone that he had been sent to take them away, the truly good ones, like him, in that silver spaceship to a perfect place" (Gaiman 393). Self-harm—or suicide in the forms of fatal violence, prolonged drug use, or extreme psychosis—characterizes unresolved unilevel disintegration.

Even Shadow considers literal suicide before undergoing metaphorical death instead—or life as a new, free person—successfully moving into organized multilevel disintegration. Shadow first evolves beyond the blind numbness of primary integration preserved by coping mechanisms. He is visited by his dead wife, not as a ghost but as a dead body—the embodiment of his formerly reigning schemata, now deceased, and life's purpose grounded in devotion and duty to his wife. As a consequence, he experiences the undeniable pain of spontaneous multilevel disintegration: "For the first time since he was as small boy, Shadow cried himself to sleep" (Gaiman 61). At the closing of the first segment of the novel, before entering into the second segment—entitled "My Ainsel," meaning "my own" (Blomquist 12) and indicating his emerging identity of his own deliberate making—Shadow fully chooses to endure the pain of his metaphorical death rather than avoid this suffering by choosing literal death. In a pivotal scene at the funeral home run by Jacquel/Anubis and Ibis/Thoth, who usher Shadow into his first figurative afterlife, Shadow "raised the straight razor, placed it, blade open, against his throat" and thinks, "*This would be a way out . . . It's painless. Too sharp to hurt. It'll be gone before I*

know it” (Gaiman 181). Instead, he “closed the cut-throat razor” and “dressed himself,” wondering, “Would he be stepping into a dead man’s shoes?” (Gaiman 181). Shadow’s state of primary integration is, in fact, dead, and the moment of crisis experienced in the transition from unilevel to spontaneous multilevel disintegration is passed through when he chooses to let his past identity die in order to live and suffer as a new self. Shadow emerges as Mike Ainsel to begin his journey through organized multilevel disintegration.

Shadow’s identity presents the reader with a modern perspective defined by increasing experiences with and acceptance of plurality and syncretism (Muller) as he repeatedly and willfully undergoes multilevel disintegration, or death. In the “My Ainsel” segment of the novel, Shadow travels through and between the geography of the United States (i.e., reality, or life) and backstage (i.e., land of myths, or death) on his journey toward secondary integration, with the “open road” being “synonymous with [the] growth and change” of organized multilevel disintegration witnessed throughout Gaiman’s body of work (O’Conner 36). His name, alone, now indicates that his life and identity exist in a liminal space, like Odysseus’ shades at the edge of the underworld and that of the living.

Gaiman repeatedly explores this postmodern reality and identity rooted in constant disintegration and reorganization, such as in *Coraline* and *The Graveyard Book*, through which he “subverts the classical ghost image by occupying the liminal space between life and death, thus examining the border between the two . . . this special condition comes with the possibility to negotiate between the worlds of the dead and the living” (Becher 99). In other words, in Gaiman’s meta-mythology, the “ghost child motif is a symbol for a positive relation with Death” (Becher 91). Demonstrably, Shadow’s repeated experiences of death—others and his own,

literally and ideological—function to shatter indoctrinated schemata, catapulting him through repeated cycles of organized multilevel disintegration.

Gaiman closes the “My Ainsel” segment with a more distilled portrayal of positive disintegration and actualization secondary integration through Shadow’s threefold trial: death on the tree of life; judgement, or the realization of error and righteousness; and action that defies externally derived indoctrinated schemata. This cycle may also be used to describe the organization of the first three parts of *American Gods*, which is then repeated in smaller cycles in the epilogue, as he leaves the past behind and acts according to his own sense of what ought to be. In the first segment, the external world exerts agency over Shadow, in a state of primary integration. In the second segment, Shadow exerts agency over his own interior world, in a state of organized multilevel disintegration. In the third segment, Shadow actualizes this new internal organization in the exterior world, manifesting his own personality or his new state of secondary integration.

Shadow’s choice to hold Wednesday’s vigil is another feature distinguishing the truly adaptive strategies of organized multilevel disintegration by which one may make sense of dynamic realities and act according to what one determines is real and ought to be—as opposed to maladaptive strategies used to distort real experiences, disavow responsibility, and inhibit the self according to what one was taught is and ought to be. Shadow is told repeatedly that it is not his duty to hold Wednesday’s vigil, but he willfully chooses to do what he feels he “ought” to do. Despite warnings that he should not because he would die, he tells them, firmly and ironically, “I’ll do it . . . Because it’s the kind of thing a living person would do” (Gaiman 402). Shadow’s subsequent ordeal is an allegorical representation of this undertaking, his willful metaphorical death—and life after death—or the process of positive disintegration. This is not a suicide of

escape or a suicide as an act of sacrifice in war, but a personal sacrifice to his own evolving paradigm, a use of his body to manifest his own changing beliefs and values. In fact, Shadow finds that in this act of positive maladjustment, “He was alive. He had never felt like this. Ever. If he did die, he thought, if he died right now, here on this tree, it would be worth it to have had this one, perfect, mad moment. ‘Hey!’ he shouted at the storm, ‘Hey, it’s me! I’m here!’” (Gaiman 411). Shadow has become his *own* person; he has developed his personality.

However, this is an internal state that must be actualized and remain plastic in order to be real. In his transition through the backstage or underworld back to the United States or material world, Shadow must become comfortable with this death, overcome fear, and face self-judgement and pain once again, repeating the cycle of disintegration and integration. Shadow, guided by Thoth/Ibis, declares, “‘So I’m dead’ . . . He was getting used to the idea. ‘Or I’m going to be dead’” (Gaiman 428). Jacquel/Anubis, “his prosecutor and his persecutor” (Gaiman 429) weights his heart against a feather, and Shadow, once again, “began to weep painfully . . . He was a tiny child again” (Gaiman 430). Finally back in the United States, he must consider and then reject a divine existence (i.e., a fixed identity as a hero defined by a primary integration schemata): “I think I would rather be a man than a god. We don’t need anyone to believe in us. We just keep on going anyhow. It’s what we do” (Gaiman 480).

Shadow, a fully realized human with his own personality, understands and demonstrates that identity and reality are not static: “the journey is the destination” (Blomquist 19). In the epilogue, as a Peace Pilgrim, Shadow continues having more realizations, or changes of perspective—such as the difference between believing in gods and believing in the land (AG 488). Further, his identity—associated and disassociated simultaneously with Balder, Christ, and Odin—remains obscure, indicating “a postmodern refusal of closure” (Blomquist 17). Rather

than basing his perceptions of reality on ideas, he bases his ideas and chooses his actions according to his perceptions of reality and personal teleological structures. This state of interior balance, juxtaposed with constant external change, is symbolized by the closing image of the gold coin that has traveled with him through the novel, which he “tossed into the air” and which “spun golden at the top of its arc” and “hung there in the mid-summer sky as if it was never going to come down” (Gaiman 522).

This vision of internal balancing requires “self-awareness and self-control” and must be externalized as “behavior changes toward self-perfection” (Laycraft 114). The opening scene of the epilogue, in which Shadow climbs the stairs, deliberately, to his death at Czernobog’s hand, also symbolizes this approach: “He walked up the stairs steadily, not fast, that would have meant he was eager to go to his death, and not slow, that would have meant he was afraid” (Gaiman 514). Moving too quickly or too slowly both symbolize an avoidance of pain; ironically, in turn, this avoidance of pain is an avoidance of living at all—nevertheless living happily—for death and suffering are the paradoxical partners of living and happiness in this universe. This motif is extended at the conclusion, in which Shadow is described as the Peace Pilgrim, who has decided, at this deliberate pace, to “keep on walking” (AG 522), metaphorically sacrificing himself daily, to himself, as he did in Wednesday’s/his own vigil. This personality endures an endless process of deconstruction, balancing, and reconciliation, as foreshadowed in his prophetic dream of standing upon a thousand skulls (Gaiman 268-269), each of which is his own: “they were mine. Old skulls of mine. Thousands and thousands of them” (Gaiman 276).

Conclusion

Dabrowski's unfolding theory is an experiential as opposed to ontogenetically predetermined developmental concept of personality formation. When applied at the cultural level, as allegorically depicted in postmodern literature such as *The Cantos* and *American Gods*, this theory provides a powerful narrative framework to illustrate the causes of psychosocial disorder as well as the possibility of an ideal life for humanity. In this framework, personalities are no longer oppressed by heroic paradigms or fear of the discomforts of personal growth and commit to the hard work of personal freedom that may be realized by a self-organized personality. According to Dabrowski's model, individuals must restructure the schemata defining their epistemological, teleological, and ontological perspectives in the process of developing their personalities. Certain individuals (or characters) are more likely to undergo this process successfully, depending upon both dispositional tendencies and environmental factors (or plot lines). Experiences that completely disrupt a person's concept of reality trigger personality development. Additionally, pre-existing overexcitabilities, or heightened modes of perceiving, in conjunction with a capacity for highly creative thinking foster an ability to engage in self-education, conceive of alternate realities, and sustain personality development.

Pound's and Gaiman's personal experiences as world citizens give them a unique perspective of syncretic plurality among cultural paradigms. This postmodern perspective corresponds with the ability to perceive contradictions, to be comfortable with paradox, and, therefore, to undergo and depict positive disintegration. Both writers synthesize a wide range of cultural schemata represented by myths to convey parallel realities (the mythic and the temporal, interior and exterior), through which the protagonist and, therefore, the reader may conceive of a

means to reconcile paradox, perpetually, and maintain a self-organized, liberated personality in the postmodern world (Blomquist 6).

The alternate model of character and plot development offered by Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration has only become more significant for developing authentic characters and plots since Pound's (i.e., the modern) era. As world citizens, very few individuals may remain in a state of primary integration without any awareness of the ambiguities and contradiction inherent to human nature and experience. Contemporary life and cultures are dynamic, defined by increasing experiences of complexity and, therefore, paradox (Muller), which leads to increasing inter- and intrapersonal chaos, or disequilibrium (Laycraft 117-118). However, this increasingly undeniable experience of the absolute uncertainty and rejection of conventional ideologies and lifestyles, or madness, that is requisite "to personality development" (Kane 75) only increases the possibility of positive disintegration and deliberate reorganization and conception of one's self and life—in other words, of achieving personal freedom. Consequently, using a Dabrowskian lens to re-examine contemporary literature that has evolved to portray how the experience of psychopathology leads to metaphorical death—which may have any combination of negative or positive outcomes—has not only socio-cultural significance but important personal implications as well.

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