

CHAPTER III

THE TRICKSTER NATURE OF LOKI IN NEIL GAIMAN'S NORSE MYTHOLOGY

3.1. Analysis of Narrative Elements in Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*

As it has been mentioned before, out of the three main cast members, the prime subject that has been selected for the study is Loki. The following entries will discuss Loki's character and characterization as well as the elements of setting and conflict that exists within *Norse Mythology*.

This following section also determines whether Loki is a flat or rounded character and either he is a static or dynamic character.

3.1.1. Loki's Character

Loki is one of the most, if not the only most, enthralling characters with a beguiling personality that appear in Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*. He stands next to Odin and Thor as one of the three major "players" that play an important role in the novel with their own exclusive introductory blocks of description (Gaiman, 2017:13-16). Loki is portrayed to be an individual with a charismatic attribute, able to use his words to his advantage. With this, he is able to use his power of trickery and cunning to plan and fool people to his liking. Moreover, it is hinted that Loki has a deep darkness that he harbours inside of him, a foreshadow of what is to come. Thus, it is clear that Loki is a rounded type of character.

Throughout the beginning chapters of *Norse Mythology*, Loki acts as the resident problem solver for the society. When a hostile situation is encountered by the inhabitants of Asgard, whether that situation is triggered due to Loki himself or from an outside force, the gods would look for answers either by the strength of Thor or the wisdom of Odin. If all else fails, then the last choice they would choose would be the likes of Loki. This is apparent in *The Master Builder*, a story in which the gods encounter a stranger that offered them to build them a massive wall for a hefty price (Gaiman, 2017:39-50). When the discussion amongst the folk of Asgard came to a standstill, Loki offered a solution that would help them in this endeavour. When his solution did not work as intended, Loki took matters into his own hands. From this chapter, it can be deduced that Loki has a sort of a supporting role for his fellow gods. But things took a turn after Loki is captured and imprisoned due to a heinous act he committed against the gods. Towards the end of the novel in *Ragnarok: The Final Destiny of The Gods*, Loki is freed from his captivity and launches a full assault against the gods, triggering the Norse cosmology of the end of days (Gaiman, 2017:153-161). Loki leads an army against the inhabitants of Asgard and becomes an absolute antagonist, a far cry from his initial role from the beginning. This total transformation from being a supportive role and becoming an utter villain is proof of Loki's character development, making him a dynamic type of character.

3.1.2. Loki's Characterization

The manner in which Loki is described in the novel is twofold. As stated previously, the first introduction of the main cast of characters, consisting of Odin, Thor and Loki, the author gives a block of description for each mentioned character. In this section of the novel, the readers are exposed to Loki's initial illustration of who he is and what his role is in the narrative. The full contents that are described are Loki's portrayal or depiction, his lineage of a giant's son, his abilities and powers, his relation to both Odin and Thor as well as a brief glimpse of his darkness within (Gaiman, 2017:15-16). This block gives a surface-level familiarity of who Loki is and does not reflect the full portrayal of said character in the novel. As such, it is evident that Loki has a direct method of characterization.

In one of the first appearances of Loki in the book, *The Treasure of The Gods* is the first story in which the gods are gifted a number of troves thanks to Loki's doing (Gaiman, 2017:28-38). Early in the chapter Thor finds that his wife's, Sif, hair is gone. Without a second thought, Thor reacts in the following "Thor said nothing. He strapped on his belt of power, Meginjard, which doubled his enormous strength. "Loki," he said. "Loki has done this"" (Gaiman 2017:29). This very short interaction suggests that Loki is a person that has had history of doing mischievous pranks on other gods, due to the fact that Thor sees Sif's missing hair and his first instinct is to suspect Loki even with no evidence whatsoever. This is also an indication that Loki is an individual that often would do such vexing, though close to malicious, acts. This suggests that Loki also possesses an indirect method of characterization.

3.2. Analysis of Setting in Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*

Norse cosmology contains an extensive and vast world with rich and great worldbuilding. It has a fantastical and entrancing setting that can be seen in Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*. The first element of the setting that is perceptible is the temporal setting or the setting that pertains to time. It is not clearly recorded the precise date in which the different events that occurred in each chapters happened, but it is definite that the narrative begins with the creation of everything and that it ends with the destruction of all things. It is evident in *Before The Beginning, and After* where it is stated, "Before the beginning there was nothing—no earth, no heavens, no stars, no sky: only the mist world, formless and shapeless, and the fire world, always burning" (Gaiman, 2017:17) and in *Ragnarok: The Final Destiny of The Gods* where it is reported, "That is how the worlds will end, in ash and flood, in darkness and in ice. That is the final destiny of the gods" (Gaiman, 2017:160). Again, this is clear proof how the temporal setting of the Norse cosmology begins and ends. Another evidence that confirms the temporal setting is the changing of seasons. In *The Master Builder*, the stranger offers to build for the gods of Asgard a massive wall within a specified duration, "'Not at all,'" said the stranger. "I can build it in three seasons. Tomorrow is the first day of winter. It would only take me a winter, a summer, and another winter to build'" (Gaiman, 2017:40) This denotes that there is another spatial evidence in *Norse Mythology*.

The second element of the setting is the spatial setting or the setting that pertains to place. Due to the various realms that exists in the Norse Cosmology, the

analysis is focused on the realms in which Loki has encountered situations in which he must overcome. Of course, the first place that is mentioned is the realm of Asgard in which all the gods reside in. It is also the realm in which Loki would do his pranks against his fellow gods, “The Aesir and the Vanir are gods, united by peace treaties, and many Vanir gods live in Asgard, with the Aesir.” (Gaiman, 2017:23). The second place is the realm of Svartlheim, in which Loki goes to in *The Treasure of The Gods*, “He put on his shoes that let him travel through the sky, and he went to Svartalfheim, where the dwarfs have their workshops” (Gaiman, 2017:30). The third place that Loki visits is Jotunheim, when Loki has to help Thor find his missing hammer in *Freya’s Unusual Wedding*, “Loki put on the feathered cloak and he took to the air, in falcon shape. He flew beyond Asgard. He flew deep into the land of the giants, looking for something unusual” (Gaiman, 2017: 62). He visits Jotunheim for the second time with Thor and a human servant Thialfi, “The world beyond the farm was wilderness, and Thor and Loki and Thialfi traveled east, toward Jotunheim, home of the giants, and the sea” (Gaiman, 2017:89). There perhaps are other realms where in Loki visits in one of his adventures, but the major realms in which Loki encounters dire situations are the one previously described.

The third element of the setting is the social setting. The social setting in *Norse Mythology* is closely tied with its spatial setting, due to the demographic that each group of people (i.e. gods, dwarves, trolls, etc.) have made home in a specific realm. The following social settings are the ones in which Loki has left a major effect on. The first social setting that has a major role in the narrative of *Norse Mythology* is the society of the gods, “The last root of the world-tree goes to a spring

in the home of the gods, to Asgard, where the Aesir make their home. Each day the gods hold their council here...” (Gaiman, 2017:24). As previously mentioned, Asgard holds both the folk of Aesir and Vanir in which they would convene if ever there are certain situations that needs to be addressed. They act as a singular collective that rule over the entirety of Asgard. Another social setting that Loki encounters in his adventures are the societies in Jotunheim. In *Freya's Unusual Wedding*, Loki escorts a disguised Thor to a wedding that is being held for him with Thrym, lord of ogres.

“He hit Thrym with his hammer, only once, but once was all it took. The ogre fell to the straw-covered floor, and did not rise again. All the giants and ogres fell beneath Thor’s hammer: the guests at the wedding that was never to be. Even Thrym’s sister, who received a bridal gift she had not been expecting” (Gaiman, 2017:70).

This visceral scene accounts the several members of Thrym’s wedding. Another society that exists in Jotunheim aside from Thrym’s is the giants of Utgard. “There were benches as high as treetops, with giants sitting on them... They could see the king of the giants, sitting on the highest chair, at the end of the hall” (Gaiman, 2017:94). This is the place where Loki comes from, one of the reasons why the ruler there, Utgardaloki, recognizes him. Though the gods rule all over Asgard as one body of society, the same could not be said for the inhabitants of Jotunheim. It can be deduced that there are separate societies that rule amongst themselves in

Jotunheim, such as they do not act as a singular commune, instead act as multiple independent societies.

3.3. Analysis of Conflict in in Neil Gaiman's *Norse Mythology*

Since the subject of the study is Loki, the internal and external conflict that is analysed in this section of the study is from Loki's perspective. In *The Last Days of Loki*, the gods are already fuming with the nefarious antics that Loki has done upon them. A band of them, led by Thor himself, set out to capture the elusive trickster. When he is in their custody, Loki is brought to cave deep beneath the earth and he sees his wife, Sigyn, alongside his two sons, Narfi and Vali, present. The following scene occurs, "Loki recognized them before he saw their faces, and his heart sank. "No," he said. "Do not hurt them. They did nothing wrong"" (Gaiman, 2017:149-150). In this brief excerpt, Loki did not realize that his pranks and mischiefs would result in the punishment of his family beside himself. It can be deduced that Loki does not care much if the consequences of his actions would fall upon him, but due to the presence of his family in this chapter, he recognizes the severity of his actions and thus is pleading to the other gods to not punish them. This can be argued to be Loki's sense of regret of the actions that he did and now his family is punished as well. Thus, this is a hint of Loki's internal conflict that may be going through inside his being.

In the following chapter, *Ragnarok: The Final Destiny of The Gods*, Loki is freed from his captivity and commands his own army against the forces of Asgard. He and the other forces that he has gathered battle in the place that is called Vigrid

where in all manner of creatures, may it be gods, giants or men, sheds blood against one another and die. This rings true in the following excerpt, “Of Loki’s legions, only Loki himself will still be standing, bloodied and wild-eyed, with a satisfied smile on his scarred lips” (Gaiman, 2017:158). To represent the last of the forces of Asgard, stands Heimdall, the watchmen of the gods. In the last moments of the battle, Loki duels with Heimdall and they strike blows against each other, “Heimdall will still say nothing, but he will strike, and strike hard, his sword crashing against Loki’s armor, and Loki will counter, and Loki will attack with fierceness and intelligence and glee” (Gaiman, 2017:158). This is massive battle against the forces of the gods and of Loki’s is the sign of the external conflict Loki strives against his fellow gods. It is his final act of defiance against them.

3.4. Analysis of Loki’s Archetypes in Neil Gaiman’s *Norse Mythology*

This section of the study is the analysis of Loki through the lens of Carl Jung’s theory of archetypes. The archetypes that are discussed to analyse Loki are Persona, Shadow, Anima, Self and The Trickster.

3.4.1. Loki’s Persona

As all personas that exists in different individuals, Loki’s persona is tied with the social setting that he is in. The society in which Loki engages with much of his time would be with the folks of Asgard. His behaviour and personality is deeply involved with how the persona he has.

As mentioned before the gods that live in Asgard are from the tribes of Aesir and Vanir, though the ones that are most important are Odin, the all-father and the king of the gods, as well as Thor, the protector of Asgard and Midgard. Alongside the two gods, Loki is also one of the most famous, or rather infamous, gods that dwell in Asgard also. It is well known that he would act on some mischief antics from time to time, ever so often that if one finds themselves in a state of trouble, the first thing they would blame is Loki. The reason why Loki still lives amongst the gods is due to his usefulness in their time of need, “He is tolerated by the gods, perhaps because his stratagems and plans save them as often as they get them into trouble” (Gaiman, 2017:15-16). This is evident with the aforementioned Sif’s missing hair and the following incident that Thor encounters, “Thor loved his hammer. And his hammer simply was not there. There were things Thor did when something went wrong. The first thing he did was ask himself if what had happened was Loki’s fault” (Gaiman, 2017:62). Once again, Thor thinks if his missing hammer is due to Loki’s doing, even with no clear evidence of such things. This line of thought bolsters when Balder, one of the most cherished gods of Asgard, is bestowed with protection against all manners of harm in the chapter, *The Death of Balder*. The gods were merrymaking knowing of this feat, lest for Loki.

“Loki was not smiling or laughing. He watched the gods hack at Balder with axes and with swords, or drop enormous rocks on Balder, or try to strike Balder with huge knotted wooden clubs, and laugh as the clubs and swords and rocks and axes avoided Balder or touched him like gentle feathers, and Loki brooded, and slipped away into the shadow.” (Gaiman, 2017:134)

Loki does not seem happy with how the gods are having fun with Balder's new trait. Thus, he is preparing to find a way to do something harmful against him but not only to him, "If he was going to do harm to Balder, he was going to hurt as many people as possible" (Gaiman, 2017:135). Another grave event in which Loki does his prank, albeit a careless one, is in *The Last Days of Loki*. When the gods were gathered in Aegir's hall to drink and feast, Loki appears drunk and annoyed, "When Loki heard the gods praise Aegir's servant, Fimafeng, for his swiftness and diligence, he sprang up from the table and stabbed Fimafeng with his knife, killing him instantly" (Gaiman, 2017:144). Once again, Loki fulfils another one of his tricks though it is one of the most brutal ways he has ever done. This naturally angers the gods, but Loki does not care what they think of him. From the cited sources, it can be seen that Loki loves to do his mischievous pranks and tricks, regardless of the level of severity that he would cause against the folk of Asgard.

Another significant albeit major society that Loki has exposed to is the societies in Jotunheim. As previously stated, there are multiple societies that exist in the land of giants. One of them is from the tale of *Freya's Unusual Wedding* where in Thrym holds his wedding with several of his relatives and subjects. As Thor is disguised as Freya, the goddess that Thrym wants to marry, Loki shapeshifted into something appropriate, "'I'll be your maidservant and go with you to the land of the giants.'" Loki shifted his shape, and now he was, in voice and in appearance, a beautiful young serving woman" (Gaiman, 2017:66). In this situation, Loki's prerogative is to aid Thor in taking back the hammer that has been

taken from him. It does not seem that Loki cares much of the consequences of what would occur if Thrym and his people are to be punished for their wrongdoing.

The second society that Loki encounters in Jotunheim is the kingdom of Utgard and its leader Utgardaloki. The lord of Utgard recognizes him in the following passage, “*You* must be the famous Thor of the Aesir, which means *you* must be Loki, Laufey’s son. I knew your mother a little. Hello, small relation. I am Utgardaloki, the Loki of Utgard” (Gaiman, 2017:94). Before having audience with the king, Loki claims that his family comes from Utgard, but he has yet to visit the place. Utgardaloki challenges Thor, Loki and Thialfi, their bondservant, in several feats of challenges.

“Loki began to eat, starting at the far end of the trough and working his way inward. He ate hard, he ate single-mindedly, he ate as if he had only one goal in life: to eat all he could as fast as he could. His hands and mouth were a blur. Logi and Loki met at the middle of the table.” (Gaiman, 2017:94)

Loki is first to partake the lord’s challenge, and he seems cordial on participating it although he failed to his opponent, Logi. From this brief segment it seems that Loki does not act upon his mischievous antics whatsoever, perhaps because he is encountering a relative of his or a powerful lord that he has to give respect to. When the three travellers are told the truth about the challenges, Loki seem to be angry yet approve of the clever feat, “Loki’s green eyes flashed with anger and with admiration, for he loved a good trick as much as he hated being fooled” (Gaiman, 2017:101).

From the three social settings it can be seen that Loki has three similar personas that go well together in the sense of Loki's mischievous antics. It does not indicate that Loki halts any of his trickery lest when he is at Utgard, when his family once comes from. With the gods, he does his usual prankish nature and later violent acts towards them. The ogres are fooled by Loki's misdirection of being Thor's handmaiden, accounting again for his mischief. As just mentioned, Loki does not show any of his prankish deeds although he approves of the illusion that the giants did. This either shows that Loki gives a sense of respect to the giants of Utgard, or he knows better than to trick giants that are capable of such feats. Thus, these are the different personas in which Loki has in the narrative.

3.4.2. Loki's Shadow

As all individual, the Shadow is the darkness that is subdued in everyone. The first indication of Loki's Shadow is written in the introductory block in *Norse Mythology*, "It is a pity, then, that there is so much darkness inside him: so much anger, so much envy, so much lust" (Gaiman, 2017:15). The cited clause is the evidence of the existence of Loki's shadow, and it mentions the kind of darkness that he retains. Another darkness that Loki has and acts upon is in the chapter, *The Children of Loki*. The following is the suspicious movements that Loki has been doing as of late.

"Sometimes Loki would vanish for long periods and not return, and then Sigyn would look like she was expecting the very worst news of all, but

always Loki would come back to her, looking shifty and guilty and also as if he were very proud of himself indeed.” (Gaiman, 2017:51)

When Loki returns to Asgard, Odin calls him and tells a dream that he has been having. Odin then reveals what Loki has been doing, “You have been sneaking off to spend your days and your nights in the land of the frost giants with Angrboda the giantess. And she has borne you three children” (Gaiman, 2017:52). From this snippet it can be seen that Loki has been clearly unfaithful to his wife, Sigyn and has acquired a mistress to satisfy his lustful urges, calling back to the darkness that has been stated in the introductory block.

It can also be said that Loki’s shadow would manifest if ever he is drunk and his inhibitions are diminished, “Loki drinks too much, and he cannot guard his words or his thoughts or his deeds when he drinks” (Gaiman, 2017:15). This is a sign calling back to Loki’s deed of killing Fimafeng, one of Aegir’s servants in his halls in the chapter *The Last Days of Loki* (Gaiman, 2017:144). This darkness later overtakes Loki in *Ragnarok: The Final Destiny of The Gods*, where Loki is freed and participates in a battle that would end all things, “Of Loki’s legions, only Loki himself will still be standing, bloodied and wild-eyed, with a satisfied smile on his scarred lips” (Gaiman, 2017:158). In this snippet, Loki is seen pleased with the chaos that he has done against the gods. Not only is he content with the destruction of the folk of Asgard, but he also feels triumphant with the ending of the worlds, ““None of this matters. The world is burning,” says Loki. “The mortals are dead. Midgard is destroyed. I have won”” (Gaiman, 2017:159). He is content with

unleashing the shadow that has been suppressed inside of him in a chaotic way. Thus, it can be seen how Loki's shadow gets severe as time passes.

3.4.3. Loki's Anima

Though his feminine traits rarely surface, there is one event in which Loki took the form of a female horse to aid the gods in the chapter *The Master Builder*. Early on, the stranger is almost finish in building a massive wall for the gods of Asgard. The gods were fearful of what the price they must pay to the stranger, thus Loki took matters into his own hands.

“The other horse was a chestnut mare. The builder knew she was a mare immediately—he did not have to look between her legs. Every line of her, every inch of her, everything about the chestnut was female. Svadilfari wheeled as he ran across the meadow, then he slowed, and reared, and neighed loudly.” (Gaiman, 2017:47)

As it can be deduced, the chestnut mare is Loki that has shapeshifted. He tries to goad the stallion, Svadilfari, away from the builder to slow his progress down before he can complete in the designated time. Loki succeeds on seducing the stallion and thus is able to sabotage the stranger from completing his promise and gain any reward. After the stranger, that is actually a giant in disguise, is dealt with, Loki's whereabouts is unknown for a long time. But after a while, he emerges bringing in tow a foal. “It was a beautiful foal, although it had eight legs instead of the usual four, and it followed Loki wherever he went, and nuzzled him, and treated Loki as if he were its mother. Which, of course, was the case” (Gaiman, 2017:50).

This is a clear-cut case in which Loki took the time to “mother” or nurse the foal until it is old enough to be able to be brought to the gods. It is also astoundingly evident with Loki’s ability to not only shapeshift into another creature but also change his sex completely. This is an extremely special case but still classified as Loki’s anima playing a role on nurturing the young foal.

3.4.4. Loki’s Self

From the beginning of the narrative until the end of it, Loki assumes many behavioural patterns as well as a vastly diverse personality. This section of the study is analysing the totality of his actions and thoughts with the help of the analysis of his persona, shadow and anima. In the beginning, we understand that Loki is a man that is fond of mischief and pranks. It is in his nature to pull such elaborate antics whether the mark is either gods, dwarves, ogres, giants or etc. Due to his close approximation with the inhabitants of Asgard, most of the victims of his trickery would be the gods and the gods well know the history of Loki’s misdoings. This rings true in *The Treasure of The Gods*, where Sif’s hair is missing. If ever the gods, Thor primarily, threatens him, Loki would do anything in his power to free himself from harm’s way.

““Because, Loki Laufey’s son, if you do not put her hair back right now, I am going to break every single bone in your body. Each and every one of them. And if her hair does not grow properly, I will come back and break every bone in your body again.” (Gaiman, 2017:29)

As such, Loki would find any way for him to escape from Thor's beating. Thus, he suggests that he would fly to the dwarves in which they can make Sif her hair again. When he meets with the dwarves, the brothers Brokk and Eitri, they gamble with Loki by them cutting his head if they make treasures that would impress the gods. Of course, Loki himself, well within his nature, could not let this happen, "Loki, in fly shape, decided that there was no more time for subtlety. Eitri's masterpiece would be something that would impress the gods, and if the gods were impressed enough, then he would lose his head" (Gaiman, 2017:33). From this chapter, Loki's mischief and trickery is his bread and butter and he will keep doing so regardless of the consequences. If the mark that he tricked wished any harm upon him, Loki would use either his charisma or abilities to make himself escape from punishment.

Another thing to comprehend is Loki's darkness that he harbours within him. As previously mentioned before in *Loki's Shadow*, his darkness manifests completely in *Ragnarok: The Final Destiny of The Gods*. He revels in the destruction of the gods of Asgard, due to the torture and punishment he has to endure before his freedom. After Loki is locked deep beneath the earth, all manner of thoughts crosses his mind and in his monologue in the last moments of the battle, Loki reveals his frustrations.

"When I was bound beneath the ground, with the serpent's poison dripping into my face, with poor Sigyn standing beside me trying to catch what venom she could in her bowl, bound in the darkness in the intestines of my son, all that kept me from madness was thinking of this moment, rehearsing it in my mind, imagining

the days when my beautiful children and I would end the time of the gods and end the world.” (Gaiman, 2017:158)

In these last moments, Loki’s very being is to retaliate against his once trusted peers and inflict as much harm to them and, by extension, the world they rule. In this point in time, it can be deduced that Loki is in full harmony with himself. He does not feel a bit of remorse of engaging in conflict with the folks of Asgard and has fully accepted the person that he has become. He does not feel any social relationships that he once has with the gods and is completely one with himself.

3.4.5. Loki as The Trickster

The role of trickster is heavily portrayed by Jung’s mention of the alchemical being of Mercurius. It is imperative to compare the character of Mercurius with Loki to be able to perceive whether Loki is indeed a trickster figure. As previously mentioned, Loki is a being that is fond of his prankish antics and his love for practical jokes. He is able to shapeshift into a horsefly and a mare in two different stories. Loki also has exposed to severe torture with how his mouth has been shewn shut once and when he has to endure an immensely strong poison when he is locked beneath the earth. The trickster figure is also a being that is cloaked in shadow, true to Loki’s nature. Only by the end of the world did he experience complete harmonization, embracing the shadow he has and acts upon it with the destruction of the world. Thus, it is plain to see that Loki is in fact has fulfilled the requirements of the trickster figure in accordance with Jung’s specificity.