

PARADISIACAL HELLS. SUBVERSIONS OF THE MYTHICAL CANON IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *NEVERWHERE*

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RESUMEN: Según ciertas teorías, el Postmodernismo hace un uso consciente de la naturaleza cíclica de las narraciones míticas como respuesta a las ansiedades de fragmentación y aislamiento del individuo. Así, el Postmodernismo, por medio de sus propios mecanismos y técnicas, ofrece reconceptualizaciones de la estructura mítica aplicada a las condiciones sociales contemporáneas.

*El objetivo de este artículo es analizar cómo Neil Gaiman emplea conscientemente una estructura mítica en su primera novela, *Neverwhere* (1996), y cómo subvierte el propósito final de este patrón. Sostengo que *Neverwhere* es una novela postmoderna cuya estructura sigue el patrón cíclico del monomito campbelliano. Pero la naturaleza cíclica del mito es completamente transformada en la novela.*

ABSTRACT: According to certain theories, Postmodernism makes a conscious use of the cyclical nature of mythical narrations in response to the anxieties of fragmentation and isolation of the self. Hence, Postmodernism, through its own mechanisms and techniques, offers reconceptualizations of the mythical structure applied to the contemporary social conditions.

*The aim of this article is to analyse how Neil Gaiman consciously employs a mythical structure in his first novel, *Neverwhere* (1996), and how he subverts the final aim of this pattern. My contention is that *Neverwhere* is a postmodernist novel whose structure follows the cyclical pattern of the Campbellian monomyth. But the cyclical nature of the myth is utterly transformed in the novel.*

*PALABRAS CLAVE: Postmodernismo, estructura mítica, monomito, Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere*.*

*KEYWORDS: Postmodernism, Mythical Structure, Monomyth, Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere*.*

Neil Gaiman is a British writer coming from the world of comic-book production.¹ As a prose writer, he has published several novels and collections of short stories, and the non-fiction book *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams and the Hitch-hiker Guide to the Galaxy* (1987). *Neverwhere*² (1996) is the first of Gaiman's novels written on his own.³ It portrays the story of Richard Oliver Mayhew, a common citizen living in contemporary London, who, after saving the life of a young beggar, Door, loses his normal life and no longer exists for the rest of Londoners. His quest to restore the initial situation will make him discover that "reality" is not as simple as he used to think, and that below the streets of the city there exists a subterranean parallel world of dangers and adventures with its own strange rules.

The aim of this essay is to analyse how Neil Gaiman consciously employs a mythical structure in this novel, and how in many cases he subverts the final aim of this pattern. My contention is that *Neverwhere* is a postmodernist novel whose structure follows the cyclical pattern of the mythical hero's quest, that is, the Campbellian monomyth. But the cyclical nature of the myth is utterly transformed in the novel. Firstly, there is not only one, but three different heroes' quest with different aims and meanings: that is, Richard's adventures in the uncanny London Below; Door's quest for knowledge and revenge of her family's murder; and the fantastic adventures of the Marquis de Carabas, a cunning trickster who hires himself to them in exchange for favours. Secondly, none of their quests fits the pattern offered by Campbell (1988), since the initial situation is never restored.

The Concept of Myth and the Cyclical Structure of the Hero's Quest. The Mythical Structure in Modern and Postmodern Literature

A definition of myth shall prove helpful for the understanding of the following analysis. We can find religious, social, economic, anthropologic, ethnographic and psychoanalytic studies that define myth from their own theoretical perspectives. From

1. His best known work in this field, *The Sandman* (1988-1996), is a huge graphic novel that has promoted a new definition of the mainstream comicbook by means of conscious subversions of traditional comics narrations.

2. Originally, this story was first produced as a TV series by the BBC, but the final result did not reach the author's expectations. The novel is the original scrip with all those elements that were suppressed from the visual product, and, according to the author, were necessary for the complete understanding of the work's final meaning.

3. His first published novel, *Good Omens* (1990), was written in collaboration with Terry Pratchett.

the vast field covered by these critical analyses, I will just briefly introduce two of them: the social approach –myth in relation to society and social structures– and the psychoanalytical trend –myth projected from the inner psyche of the individual–.

According to social anthropology, myth is seen as a product of society, created to explain the social bonds established between individuals.⁴ The aim of myth in a particular community would be to provide unity inside the social structures, while at the same time, it takes its origins from those social bonds.⁵ Myth, hence, is the ideological product of a given community, and it provides everyday occurrences with meaning thus fostering the social coherence of the group. In this sense, through the narration *ab origine* or *in illo tempore*, myth offers paradigmatic models of human social behaviour that give significance to the social structures. As Mircea Eliade explains, myth is considered to be “sacred history”, the “true history” of a community, as far as it refers to essential “realities” (1991: 13). Consequently, every society creates its own myths according to the specific knowledge⁶ of that community.

Therefore, reason/knowledge does not depend on the individual, but on the specific social group (Bermejo 1979: 34), a precise group that varies according to the passing of time and the changes in space. These societies condition the way of thinking of individuals and produce their own myths.⁷

In contrast to this social vision of myth, psychoanalytic trends establish the origins of myths in the individual psyche, through a process of projection. Carl G. Jung, and Joseph Campbell are two of the most outstanding theorists of this approach. Both authors analyse myth and mythical narration as processes of individuation for the construction of the self, or ego. In 1959, Jung presented the archetypes –the basic elements for myths– as part of a “second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective uncon-

4. Those social relationships are what Lluís Duch calls “estructuras de acogida” (2002: 13), or “fostering structures”, that is, the social frames the individual is surrounded by from birth that will teach him/her how to continue the particular customs and rites that give cohesion to the community.

5. José Bermejo explains this socialising aspect by saying that myth has its own logic which elaborates a meaningful ideological structure whose aim is the maintenance of the social cohesion of the human group that created it (1979:77).

6. Instead of ‘knowledge’, we could employ Michael Foucault’s term, “episteme”, a word he uses in *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), to signify the mental system of every specific moment in time, made up by the sum total of rules, logics, from which science is organized. That is, “episteme” is the general knowledge of a particular age.

7. Therefore, myth cannot be perceived in terms of historical sequence of events, for it is always narrated in a mythical time, *ab origine* (Eliade 1991: 20).

scious does not develop individually but is inherited” (1980: 43). In this sense, the archetypes are “standard” projections of the individual psyche, and independent from the society where they are created. The archetypes, and by extension the myths constituted by them, are “patterns of instinctual behaviour” (1980: 44).⁸

Drawing on this type of archetypal approach, Joseph Campbell contributed a prominent work about the structure of the “monomyth”, or the mythical pattern of the hero’s quest. He develops Jung’s theory of archetypes placing them within the frame of the mythical narration of the hero’s quest. Campbell defines myth as “the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (1988: 3). The energies of the cosmos, the collective unconscious, find expression in the myth, created inside the cultural frame. In this sense, the basic themes in a hero’s quest are ready-made and standard, but their “inflection” –precise changes and variations– is culture-bound (Campbell 1991: 39). Thus, Campbell introduces an element absent in Jung’s scheme, the presence of culture as the final expression of the myth. Still, Campbell’s main aim in *The Hero* is to offer a standard cyclical pattern for mythical narration.⁹ And it is this structure that will be used in the following analysis of *Neverwhere* as a representation of the monomythic pattern applied to a contemporary novel.

In summary, there are two basic ideas from these perspectives that will be helpful for the development of this essay: first, myth’s definition, as well as its meanings and functions, depend on –and define– the social structure in which it is created. Second, the Campbellian cyclical pattern of mythical narrations, along with Jung’s archetypes, are helpful to establish a kind of canonical mythical text. Campbell offers a useful guideline that may be said to function as a transgeneric hypertext (in Gerard Genette’s terminology 1989).¹⁰

Considering myth in the field of literature, the mythical pattern changes its meanings according to the different ages. The Modernist movement, for example, consciously employed this structure with the aim of finding a unitary meaning for

8. Like instincts, they are unchanging hereditary factors, part of human nature and psyche, or examples of collective representations (*représentations collectives*, 1980: 5) emerging from the collective unconscious that is one and the same for all human beings.

9. His work can thus be seen as a psychoanalytic exercise, or as a structural approach to these narratives –comparable to Vladimir Propp’s analysis of narrative functions in *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968)–.

10. It is transgeneric for it goes beyond genre differentiation, acting like a “mode” (in Rosemary Jackson’s conception of fantasy 1991: 13). And a hypertext because it is a standard structure in which all the mythical texts can fit, regardless of the social structure in which they were written.

a catastrophic age.¹¹ Evans Lansing Smith analyses the reasons why Modernist writers attempt to recover the mythical pattern of the hero's quest, and relates the inner "breakdown" of the "crisis in the writers' lives" with the outer "cultural catastrophe of World War I" to justify the need to impose the unitary pattern of myth on their works (1990: 1). This critic seems to endorse the social trend in his approach to myth, for he justifies its Modernist recovery in terms of the outbreak of social forces over the individual.¹²

From the alienation of Modernism, the century moved on to the fragmentation of Postmodernism. The decadence of "metanarratives" or absolute Truths, pointed out by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), has led to the creation of a multicultural reality in which no code is inherently better than any other. But this "event" also means that the uniqueness of messages coming from the inside of the mind –as perceived by the Modernists– has become a collection of little chunks of information that instead of turning out to be meaningful, transform themselves into noise and misinformation.¹³ This noise has led some critics –such as Lyotard, Jameson, Baudrillard, Hassan, and many others– to define Postmodernism as a period that refuses to search for overall truths and has a basically anti-mythologizing stance. However, as Susana Onega notes, in contrast to critics and authors such as Lyotard, Elizabeth Wesseling or Angela Carter, contemporary British writers of historiographic metafiction:¹⁴

have repeatedly attempted to transcend the gap between self and world [...] by a return to myth. Through the application of a dualistic logic that recalls the findings of the New Physics, Jungian psychology and the mythical tension between chaos and cosmos, these novelists use parody, pastiche and the metafictional undermining of realism-enhancing mechanisms to suggest the fragmentation and isolation of the self, while simultaneously attempting to transcend this isolation and fragmentation in mythical and archetypal terms (1997: 187).

11. Thus, for example, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) or T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), two of the best examples of this literary movement, rely on this pattern.

12. Beneath the alienated mind of the Modernists, buried under those cultural catastrophes, there seems to lie an ultimate belief in the possibility of returning to the initial situation of unitary harmony, suggested by the circularity of the mythical structure. Therefore, the return to myth suggests the possibility of an optimistic way out of the general bleakness of the early twentieth century.

13. Only art can remain outside this noise, as Roland Barthes contends: "Everything has a meaning or nothing has. To put it another way, one could say that art is without noise (as this term is employed in information theory). This is what separates art from 'life', the latter knowing only 'fuzzy' or 'blurred' communications. 'Fuzziness' (that beyond which it is impossible to see) can exist in art, but it does so as a coded element. Even then, such 'fuzziness' is unknown to the written code: writing is inescapably distinct" (1990: 89).

14. Like John Fowles, Lawrence Durrell, Maureen Duffy, Charles Palliser, Peter Ackroyd and Jeanette Winterson, among others.

In Onega's account of these British writers, myth and social panorama again go hand in hand. The cyclical nature of mythical narrations in Postmodernism responds to the anxieties of fragmentation and isolation of the self. Myth is again used as a way to recover meaning in an age imbued in the feeling of the end of culture (Jameson 1984: 54), trying to escape from the agonistic Baudrillardian "simulacrum" (1997). Hence, Postmodernism, through its own mechanisms and techniques –"parody, pastiche and the metafictional undermining of realism-enhancing mechanisms" (Onega 1997: 187)– offers reconceptualizations of the mythical structure applied to the contemporary social conditions.¹⁵

Neil Gaiman's Neverwhere: The Three Quests of the Underside

Considered under the scope of this postmodernist trend with strong mythical component, pointed out by Susan Onega, *Neverwhere* may be said to be a conscious parody of the traditional mythical structure, not only creating "allusions to another author, another reader, and another system of communication, but to the relationship between the text, or discourse, and its social context" (Rose 1979: 44). Through the parodic use of myth, the novel highlights its difference from the "transgeneric hypertext" of the standardized myth, as mentioned before. The sense of parody in this novel is that of "repetition with a critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (Hutcheon 1985: 6). Hence, the novel is self-conscious of its use of this structure as well as of its ultimate aim to subvert the monomythical pattern, trying to mark the difference given by the changes in the social structures.¹⁶

In the following pages, we will go through the analysis of each one of the three quests and their connections with and subversions of the Campbellian structure. An idea has to be kept in mind: *Neverwhere* not only employs the mythical pattern, it also subverts and distorts its final basic principle: restoration of the ini-

15. Ihab Hassan gives an interesting representation of the relationship between literature and myth, through the image of Orpheus: "The dismemberment of Orpheus may be a continuous process, and literature may make and unmake itself forever. This view accords with the cyclical nature of myth" (1982: 247).

16. Therefore, by the application of the monomyth to the postmodern contemporary society, the novel seems to actualize the classical pattern, percolating it with contemporary ideas –such as the decadence of metanarratives like Reality or Culture– and techniques –such as pastiche and rewriting of canonical old stories and intertexts–.

tial situation.¹⁷ At the end of the novel, Richard, the main character, refuses to return to the “real” but decadent world of his everyday life, and breaks stability in favour of the underworld.¹⁸ Thus, the use of the myth in this novel seems to offer a wholly imaginative world/reality based on the detachment from rationality and realism, as an alternative to the world of common day.

The main subversion of the mythical pattern in *Neverwhere* lies in the fragmentation of the monomyth into three different quests –an echo of the fragmentation of reality in the postmodern world–.¹⁹ In contrast to the standard mythical narrations, characterized by the unitary adventure of a single hero, *Neverwhere* narrates three related stories that share common elements, but have different aims, structures and symbolic meaning. Each of these stories may be considered as a reflection of a different position toward fantasy and myth.

a) *Richard's Quest*

Richard Mayhew's adventure begins with his departure from “a small Scottish town” to go to London. Before starting his journey, he meets a homeless old woman –the “Mad Hettie” type, a kind of constant element in Gaiman's works²⁰–, who acts for him as an oracle telling his fortune. She becomes a proleptic element for the complete text, since she foresees his “long way to go” which “starts with doors” (Gaiman 1996: 3). The prologue, where these events are narrated, introduces most of the themes and ideas that will be later developed throughout the novel, to wit: the importance of doors, the names of London Tube stations, rats and his own journey in the mythical sense.

17. A comparison of the novel to other classical “tales”, such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking Glass* (1872), the fantasies of C. S. Lewis and his wonderland *Narnia*, as well as many others, would show, for example, that the quest of *Neverwhere's* main character does not result in a final restoration of the established order, but rather the contrary.

18. Hence, the figure with which the reader is supposed to identify, condemns contemporary society, its dullness, and its existentialist motto of acceptance –“Sometimes there is nothing you can do” (380)– in favour of the world of fantasy, danger, and a certain amount of primitivism.

19. As long as myth is a reflection of the society that gives it birth, Neil Gaiman's parodic use of myth may be said to respond to the postmodernist world-view.

20. Mad Hettie is an old beggar woman who appears in some of Gaiman's works, such as *The Sandman*, and *Death: The High Cost of Living*. She is a kind of immortal witch who dwells in the streets of London and seems to actualize the myth of the wandering Jew. However, this meeting narrated in *Neverwhere* also has an autobiographical basis, explained by Gaiman himself in Hy Bender's *The Sandman Companion* (2000: 150).

The hero's call to adventure takes place when Richard meets wounded Door lying dead-like on the pavement. Richard's girlfriend, Jessica Bartram, a character defined by her literality (12) and lack of imagination, becomes a symbol of the material selfishness of the city when she refuses to help Door. However, Richard, in his role of hero facing a damsel in distress, takes Door to his apartment, a decision that brings about not only the breaking up of his engagement with Jessica, but also the unwitting shattering of his own lifestyle and reality. Moreover, his decision to help Door forces his descent to the underworld, where he will search for the restoration of his initial situation. Thus, fitting the pattern of monomythic narrations, Richard's initial aim as a hero is to fulfil the whole cycle, thus bringing about the restoration of unity to his society/community.

In Richard's apartment, Door recovers her health, and sends him in search of the Marquis de Carabas, a prominent character of London Below, the world where she comes from. After the appearance of the trickster-like, feline figure of the Marquis (47), and after the presentation of the main antagonists, foxy Mr. Croup and wolfish Mr. Vandemar (43), Richard is left alone in a world that is no longer his own. He has lost his identity in the "real" London, and everybody there ignores his existence. Therefore, he is forced to cross the first threshold towards the underworld, with the "supernatural" aid of a street-beggar called Iliaster and the rat-girl Anaesthesia –a young girl that had escaped from London Above, and was taken under the protection of a rat-clan, the rat-speakers. She can be seen as a representation of the Jungian archetype of the *kore*²¹–.

Following the mythical pattern, Richard now undertakes a road of trials that begins with the entrance into the Belly of the Whale, "or the passage into the realm of night" (Campbell 1988: 36). This stage is represented by his crossing of the mythical bridge of Knightsbridge (Gaiman 1996: 96), which in the underworld is literally called Night's Bridge. According to Campbell, the "passage of the threshold is a form of self annihilation" (1988: 91). At this stage, the hero has to suffer a personal loss in order to prove his worth. However, instead of himself being wounded, what the darkness²² of the bridge does is to take his little partner,

21. According to Jung, "as a matter of practical observation, the *kore* often appears [...] as an *unknown young girl*. [...] The maiden's helplessness exposes her to all sorts of *dangers*, for instance of being devoured by reptiles or ritually slaughtered like a beast of sacrifice" (1980: 184).

22. Darkness is described by the narrator "as something solid and real, so much more than a simple absence of light. He [Richard] felt it touch his skin, questing, moving, exploring: gliding through his mind. It slipped into his lungs, behind his eyes, into his mouth[...]" (p. 105). This description brings to

Anaesthesia, leaving as a “present” for Richard only her necklace, the magical item that will help the hero to overcome his ordeal.²³

The first step in his road of trials takes Richard to the Floating Market at Harrods (111), a travelling trade-fair where all the inhabitants of the Underside meet to exchange and purchase goods. There Richard meets Old Bailey²⁴ who helps him join again Door, who with the Marquis's help, has just hired a bodyguard at the Market, named Hunter –the bravest warrior in London Below, who may be said to represent the boldest side of the hero, the “animus” facet inside the “anima”²⁵–. At this point, Richard becomes involved in Door's quest for knowledge and information about the killers of her family, a quest that takes them to the Earl's Court (163) and later on to the angel Islington via the British Museum.

In exchange for the information about the death of Door's family and to restore Richard to his old life, wonderful and almighty Islington asks them to bring him a key from the Black Friars. Thus, unconscious of the hidden plans of the wicked angel, they start their journey towards the monks' station. Richard's quest reaches the beginning of its apotheosis at Blackfriars and the Ordeal of the Key (239). It is there that Richard has to go through the ordeal not only to prove his courage but also his mental sanity and his right to be the hero of the narration. At this stage, Richard has to confront his own nemesis or “shadow” in Jungian terms. In fact, the ordeal summarizes the whole struggle between fantasy and reality, history and story, highlighted by the novel and this quest in particular.

At the beginning of the trial, Richard, depicted as a beggar in an underground station, has to suffer the scorn of a real upworlder, a little girl: ““Why do people

mind that of Henri in Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion*: “Real dark is thicker and quieter, it fills up the space between your jacket and your heart. It gets in your eyes. When I have to be out late at night, it's not knives and kicks I'm afraid of, [...] I'm afraid of the Dark. [...] Walking in the Dark is like swimming underwater except you can't come up for air” (2001: 33).

23. In Jungian psychology this event can be seen as the entrance into the depths of the sea, which are “dark (*mare tenebrositatis*). The darkness has its parallel in the alchemical *nigredo*, which occurs after the *coniunctio*, when the female takes the male into herself” (1968: 246).

24. Apart from his meaningful name, this character can be seen as a kind of Jungian “wise old man”, who lives on the top of the buildings along with his little birds, and dresses in feathers like a Daedalus-like birdman.

25. According to Jung's archetypes, the “animus” and the “anima” are representations of the male and female parts which have to be combined in order to create a complete self. Thus, Hunter, as a woman, exemplifies this mixture of elements in her female condition inside a commonly-attributed male role. She is an example of the divine *syzygies*, “the male-female pairs of deities [that] are as universal as the existence of man and woman” (Jung 1980: 56).

like that stay alive?’ she asked, curiously. ‘Not enough guts to end it all’ explained her mother. Melanie [the little girl] risked another glance at Richard. ‘Pathetic’, she said” (250). Once again, as in the case of Jessica –Richard’s ex-girlfriend–, the cruelty of contemporary society is reflected, this time in the words of a “prim little girl” (249). Childhood, the symbol of purity and innocence has been distorted here into a materialistic monster with a cold heart. Thus, the little girl, as the emblem of contemporary society, offers Richard a way to escape from “Reality” only through death.

As the next step in his ordeal, Richard meets his shadow, which tells him the same. Appearing in the manner of a triple deity or a multifaced Satan –first hidden under the face of his work-partner, Gary, then with his own face, and later with Jessica’s–, the shadow tries to seduce and tempt Richard with the words of “reality”, and with a repeated emphasis on the upper world’s established insanity: “you are starting to edge a little closer to sanity now” (251), “you’re already the closest you’ve been in a week to reality” (252), “you’re the closest to reality you’ve been” (253). Three times the shadow –Richard’s unconscious– offers itself to save the hero, and, as a Christ-like figure, three times Richard refuses the proposal. In fact, the shadow offers only a fatalistic escape: “Become an incident at Blackfriars station. To end it all. Your life’s a joyless, loveless, empty sham. You’ve got no friends” (255). Death, according to the shadow’s proposals, is the only escape from a materialistic world where there is no place for fantasy.

However, Richard’s conscious self or ego, which may be said to embody the powers and rights of the imagination, struggles to recover a little plastic troll –the symbol of the last remnant of fantasy in contemporary society–; he remembers young girl Anaesthesia by means of a bead of her necklace; and he finally takes the train of the dead –those who failed the ordeal– at Black Friars. The train, working as a psychopomp, fulfils the role of bridge-road between ontologies. It links the worlds of reality and Fantasy/Imagination, carrying the dead bodies of those who were destroyed by Materiality/Reality in the course of their ordeals.

At this point in his quest, Richard has gone through his own metaphorical death and has been reborn as a new hero. He has accepted his natural drive towards fantasy, as the only standing force against established reality. Thus, although it seems to be quite pessimistic in its analysis of contemporary society, *Neverwhere* offers an escape towards the world of the imagination that does not imply a symbolic –sometimes a physical– death.

After receiving the “Key to all realities” after the ordeal, Richard and his two helpers, Hunter and Door, follow their filthy brick road back to Islington, the

angel. They stop in the Floating Market at the HMS Belfast (279), where Richard experiences what Campbell calls the “Meeting with the Goddess” (1988: 109). In this case, the goddess hides herself under the name of Lamia, from the tribe of the Velvets. This character reflects the power of names. Hers suggests that two different cultures are combined in the same body. On the one hand, her first name, Lamia, refers to a classical Greek mythological figure, commonly represented with the head and breasts of a woman and the body of a serpent. The Lamias are said to allure youths and children in order to suck their blood. That is, they are the classical representation of the figure of the vampire, or the succubus. On the other hand, her family name, Velvet, suggests the richness and softness of a type of cloth associated with tempting women. Thus, by means of her name, Lamia and Velvet fuse the classical Greek mythology with the decadent and dangerous contemporary underworld of London Below.

Lamia, in her role of temptress (Campbell 1988: 120), as well as vampiric figure, literally sucks Richard’s life out of his body by means of a kiss. The hero faces now his physical death: “He could feel the ice of his lips. He stumbled back against the wall. He tried to blink, but his eyes felt as if they were frozen open. She looked up at him, and smiled delightedly. [...] His world began to go dark” (Gaiman 1996: 305). However, Richard is able to overcome his death with the help of the Marquis de Carabas, who forces Lamia to give Richard his life back. In this sense, the archetypal death and rebirth of the hero echoes John Keats’ narrative poem “Lamia”, a romantic adaptation of the Classical myth.²⁶

Just as old Apollonius does with Lycius in Keats’ poem, so the black Marquis in *Neverwhere* reveals to the naïve, seduced hero the real nature of that woman. However, a basic difference between the poem and this novel is that, although Gaiman’s work repeats Keats’ story, the events are transferred from one context to another. That is, from the Classical context of Keats’ poem to the decadent underworld of *Neverwhere*. This is one example of the pastiche technique that characterizes this novel as postmodern, in the sense of rewriting old stories within new contexts. The episode may also be considered parodic, in so far as it is an “ironic trans-contextualization” of events (in Linda Hutcheon’s sense 1985: 32). It is a rewriting of an old story, taken outside the original context of classical mythology, thus adding an ironic element of the new situation. That is, the irony

26. In part II of his narrative poem “Lamia” (1819), Keats presents young Lycius falling in love with mysterious Lamia, and it is his master Old Apollonius who unravels the real nature of the deadly dangerous woman. She is in fact “a palpitating snake” waiting to swallow him whole (1973: 433):

lies in the fact that the golden time of the original myth, narrated *in illo tempore*, is taken inside the decadent and primitive world of London Below. This episode trans-contextualizes the same story in order to actualize the situation to a mythical contemporary world –London Below–, where, as in its “real” counterpart, nothing is really what it seems to be.²⁷

Richard’s quest continues with his *descensum ad inferos* at Down Street. The road leads him to the entrance into a labyrinth. Accompanied by the Marquis and Hunter, Theseus-like Richard follows his way towards the lair of the Great Beast of London –the minotaur at the heart of the labyrinth–. This is a mythical place in the sense of the perception of time and space; the labyrinth is located *in illo tempore*, or *ab origine*, using Eliade’s expressions (1989). In fact, “the labyrinth itself was a place of pure madness. It was built of lost fragments of London Above: alleys and roads and corridors and sewers that had fallen through the cracks over the millennia, and entered the world of the lost and the forgotten. [...] It was an ever-changing place” (Gaiman 1996: 318). So, the labyrinth is not only a reflection of the “real” world in the sense of the duplicity of cities,²⁸ it is also the representation of the entropy of that world commonly established as “reality”. The labyrinth represents the puzzled history of reality, its breakdown and its degeneration in favour of contemporaneity. The labyrinth is the symbol of the “vanishing point” (Baudrillard 1997: 15) of the materialistic culture of London Above, the point where the subject escapes from Symbolic order to enter a subjective world,²⁹ in the course of which the hero goes, as the novel puts it, “beyond the world of metaphor and simile, into the place of things that are” (1996: 321). Reality ends up being monolithic in this place; in the labyrinth all realities, all chronotopes (time/space in Bakhtin’s terms 1988: 84) coexist and collide against each other without imposition of one over the rest. It is just the irrationality of chaotic nature

27. According to Ifor Evans (1985: 89), the argument of Keats’ poem suggests that the knowledge achieved through the imagination is truer than that achieved through reason. In fact, this is the basic opposition in Richard’s narrative: Reality vs. Fantasy.

28. The conception of a city having a divine archetype is as old as Plato’s *Republic*. Mircea Eliade analyses this fact, arguing that “every terrestrial phenomenon, whether abstract or concrete, corresponds to a celestial, transcendental invisible term, to an “idea” in the Platonic sense. Each thing, each nation presents itself under a double aspect: that of *mēnōk* and that of *gētik*” (1989: 6). The *mēnōk* is the celestial conception, the Platonic idea, which at this moment in the novel, inside the labyrinth, belongs to the image of the London Above. The *gētik* is the earthly actualization of this idea, the “real” material elaboration of that celestial image, which is represented in this decadent labyrinth where all the London Above falls chaotically.

29. In the manner of a jungle with its “huge mosquitoes” (321), reminiscent of the journey in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902).

emanating from the Great Beast of London that seems to have the role of Cerberus or of Minotaur, that is, of the guardian of the secret passage towards revelation.

The Great Beast of London has to be killed by the hero if he is to prove himself worthy of the title of “warrior”. To this end, Hunter, the warrior in charge of protecting the group, has to be sacrificed by the narration and avenged by the hero, who is already conscious of being the chosen one by means of several dreams of the Beast that he had had. Moreover, this episode contains several allusions and references to what is considered as the “History” of London, which are deeply symbolic. The complete episode of the Beast and the labyrinth evokes the magical rituals of the pre-Christian cult of Mithras –the god of light and truth, later, the sun.³⁰ In this sense, Richard may be said to suffer a kind of regression towards the primitivism of London Below when he holds the magical spear and by accident defeats the monster and its “darkness.” Thus, although he is not a real hero in the quest for the killing of the Beast –as Hunter was–, he becomes the accidental “Warrior” of the underworld.

Hence, the heroic and idealized nature of the original myth is subverted and parodied, becoming a symbol of the decadence of contemporary culture. The ritual of Mithras usually consisted in the killing of a bull or a bear, noble beasts, in contrast to oxen, which were “unworthy of sacrifice, existing only to break the ground” (Sinclair 1997: 111). However, the monster in London Below is neither a bull, nor a bear, nor even an ox. It is something even more debased and impure.³¹

Thus, in contrast to the nobility of the pre-Christian sacrificial animal, *Neverwhere* offers a vicious monster that has grown in and escaped from London Above, and therefore reflects its degeneracy and viciousness. As in the case of Anaesthesia, the poor piglet is forced to escape from reality toward the margins

30. As Iain Sinclair points out in *Lights Out for the Territory*: “Mithraism originated in Persia, making its way out of Asia Minor to Rome [being a major competitor of Christianity in the empire during the 2nd and 3rd centuries A. D.], and then on with the legions to London. It was a cult favoured both by the military and the mercantile classes. The energising symbol was the slaying of a bull in a cave by an initiate possessed by the spirit of the god: Mithras Tauroctonos” (1997: 115). Many contemporary pseudo-historical novels mention these rituals, for example, John M. Ford’s *The Dragon Waiting* (1983), winner of the World Fantasy Award in 1984, or Bernard Cromwell’s trilogy on King Arthur, *The Winter King* (1995), *Enemy of God* (1996), and *Excalibur* (1997).

31. Old Bailey, the birdman, narrates its story in detail, and reveals that the monster is “an old and big and nasty” piglet or something similar. “It fed on the sewage, and grew, and it grew. And it got meaner, and nastier” (Gaiman 1996: 172).

of civilization, toward the vanishing point of culture. And it is because it has to feed on the sewage of civilization that the animal grows meaner and nastier, becoming the ultimate example of what the contemporary world is leading human beings to. Therefore, Richard is not only passing through a ritual of initiation in the secret cult of Mithras, as he seems to imply when he first meets with the monster –“It was some kind of boar [...] but no boar could be so huge. It was the size of an ox, of a bull elephant, of a lifetime” (324)–, he is also fighting against the decadence of the real world, embodying the supernatural powers of fantasy and the imagination, as he had already done during the ordeal of the key. Richard has to defeat the powers of “a lifetime” of reality, the evil of the darkest side of civilization. In this way, the primitivism suggested by the novel, that craving for a return to a mythologized past, is rather a call to attention to the powers of the imagination to keep on creating realities, against the monolithic/monologic world of contemporary civilization.

This is the fulfilment of the apotheosis of the hero, his last trial for the ultimate boon. After it, Richard is given both recognition as a warrior, and the power to perceive the “real” way –a reference to the boons embodied by Mithras– that he gets by means of anointing his eyes and tongue with the Beast’s blood. Therefore, Richard, as the new hero of London Below is ready to leave the underworld and to start the final process and completion of the mythic circle. This is the reason why the traditional rhyme of *The Lyke Wake Dirge* that appeared at the very beginning of the novel as an introductory quotation (along with Chesterton’s), is repeated at this point: “This aye night, this aye night / Every night and all / Fire and fleet and candlelight / And Christ receive thy soul” (331).

These lines are part of a traditional rhyme, commonly sung by mourners in funeral wakes. The meaning of the interpolation of this rhyme at this moment in the novel is to reinforce the cyclical nature of Richard’s quest, that is, the possibility of restoration or awakening in a better world. The redemption of the mythical hero, his atonement with the Father (Campbell 1988: 126) is made by means of his purification through death (*descensum ad inferos*), by fire and water (the “fleet” of the rhyme), also employed by T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*. Thus, this is the moment of *Apokatastasis*.³² This is the stage of supreme regeneration –fire

32. According to Jung, this stage means “a restoration of the lives of [the hero’s] ancestors, who now, through the bridge of the momentary individual, pass down into the generations of the future” (1980: 188). It is also a term employed by Gaiman in his graphic-novel *Signal to Noise* as the name of the posthumous production of a dying film director.

destroys the old personality of the hero—, purification —water and the fleet purify and anoint the newly-born hero—, and communion with the ancestors by means of illumination and revelation —the candlelight clarifies the future roads the hero will have to choose, with the same function as the boons given by Mithras by means of the Beast's blood—.

This is the end of the heroic process that Richard suffers. In order to complete the circle he just has to return to London Above and become master of the two worlds. In fact, the very end of his adventures in London Below, that is, the revelation and destruction of the angel at Islington's chamber and the healing at Black Friars, is not really part of his quest. He accidentally witnesses the moment of apotheosis of Door's quest, her victory and vengeance, although he does not interact with her through this last trial —he was “manacled and chained between a pair of iron pillars” (Gaiman 1996: 336)—. Therefore, Richard's quest ends with the symbolic destruction and defeating of the Great Beast of London, his victory over the monster of reality that transforms everything surrounding it into chaos and death. Now Richard has to face his return to the “upper” sphere, a quantum leap to a different ontology.

Just as little Dorothy in Frank L. Baum's narration,³³ the supreme figure of knowledge in the Underworld, the Abbot at Black Friars informs Richard that he had already acquired the power to return since his success in the ordeal of the key: “The key is the key to all reality. If Richard wants to return to London Above, then the key will take him back to London Above” (357).³⁴ Nevertheless, it is not after the complete fulfilment of the cycle that knowledge is acquired and revelation achieved. This fact involves an upper level of meaning: everyone can choose either good or evil; it is only ignorance that makes human beings go through the most difficult roads. This implies an element of free will which contrasts with the closed structure of the mythical pattern. Indeed, what really determines the hero's behaviour is not an absence of free will, but rather the desire for knowledge, the need to escape from reality. It is this need that makes the hero move in a cyclical, never-ending pattern. Therefore, every human being has her/his own capacity to make decisions, choosing either Paradise or Hell, and it is only inside everyone that both of them exist. Thus, in the Greek myth, Sisyphus chooses to roll his stone uphill once and again, and is happy to do so, as pointed out by Camus in

33. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900).

34. Likewise, Dorothy already had the magical shoes to go back home from the very beginning of her quest —when she accidentally lands with her house over the wicked witch—.

The Myth of Sisyphus (1942).³⁵ It is only by our own acts of volition that our inner world can be filled with Paradisiacal Hells, or Hellish Paradises.

Thus, by means of the Key to all reality, Richard is ready to return to his own world by his own decision. Almost all the dwellers of London Below he had met appear again one by one to say farewell to the “Warrior.” Then, becoming the new Orpheus of contemporaneity –“Don’t look back” (365)–, Richard returns to his world, a reality characterized by an enervating noise, “like the maddened growling of a thousand enraged beasts” (365). He leaves the underworld to enter the paradisiacal hell which is reality.

Back in his world, the invisible machinery of contemporary society has to reorganize the structure of reality in order to rationalize Richard’s absence, and to make him a better supporter of the system. With this aim, “reality” employs several artful strategies meant to bribe the prodigal son. He is not only given his life back, but even a better one, with a better social status. He is promoted at work with a better office,³⁶ given a new flat –“much nicer than the one he had left behind” (374)–, and Jessica returns to him asking for a second chance for their relationship. However, despite all these improvements, Richard in fact has just returned to the same situation he found himself in before starting his journey to

35. Gaiman exploits this idea of the inner Hell in most of his narratives, very explicitly in *Seasons of Mists* (volume 4 of *The Sandman*) where we find a character called Breschau who does not want to leave Hell because he has chosen it willingly as the place for his own punishment. Another striking example of this would be that of the Consul in Malcolm Lowry’s novel, *Under the Volcano* (1947).

36. It is also important to point out that he is even given a new name. On page 26, the reader is informed through Jessica’s words, that his name is Richard Oliver Mayhew, but after his return to reality (371), his name on the plaque at his new office reads R. B. Mayhew. Several interpretations can be made of this fact, but I consider this change as another word-game by the author, playing with the nature of his characters’ names (as with Lamia, analyzed above). Richard’s surname, Mayhew, brings to mind the nineteenth-century journalist Henry Mayhew (1812-1887), who, along with Charles Dickens and Harriet Martineau, is the main source of information about the life of the poor in London (through his work *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1851-2). On the other hand, his second name, Oliver, echoes another important novel of that century, Charles Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* (1838). In this sense, when Richard returns to reality, and is offered a better place in order to make him forget the fantastic world, he may be said to stop being a child (*Oliver Twist*) to become a rational adult –for instance, Mr Bumble in Dickens’ novel, sometimes also called Mr. B., the beadle of the house where Oliver is first taken, “a fat man, and a choleric one” (1996: 50)–. Just as Dickens criticised in his novel the social system and the inhumanity of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, Gaiman attacks the alienation that the individual suffers in order to enter the system, as well as the compulsory transformation that “reality” imposes on the self. Finally, as Saintyves argues in his analysis of *Le Chat botté*: “La demande en mariage comporte une première particularité tout à fait caractéristique. Le futur époux et futur roi prend un nom nouveau. C’est la règle pour une aspiration au trône” (1987: 403). Therefore, to return to his old world, Richard has to suffer the transformation of his name.

London, and it is by means of the use of this structure of circularity that the idea of the unavoidability of reality is reinforced.

At the beginning of the novel, when he was in his original Scottish town, he was with some friends in a pub, “celebrating” his farewell party. Now, at the end of the story, he is again in the same situation, and furthermore, he is also offered by the invisible machinery of the system a nameless “girl from Computer Services” (379) to fulfil the role of lost Jessica, “and it would not be a bad life. [...] Sometimes there is nothing you can do” (380). Once again, Richard has to escape from the turmoil to stay alone in the streets of London –repeating the very beginning of the novel–. Thus, to keep the cycle of reality closed over the young man, an old beggar woman appears on the scene –she really resembles the old tramp of the beginning of the novel, to the point of even carrying a “once-white umbrella” similar to the one Richard had given her (385)–.

In the monomyth, the return of the hero with the precious boon he has conquered utterly transforms the “world of common day.” His return brings about the greening of the waste land, and the beginning of a new cycle. However, Richard cannot stand the impact of the real world and so he makes conscious use of his free will to choose his own paradisiacal hell. Monologic reality is not enough to reduce and control the powers of Richard’s imagination, and thus he escapes towards the underworld, towards a place that makes much more sense than structured reality. In this sense, the hero of this quest does not transform his original community. The boon he has conquered does not imply a change of the hero’s society, and thus he fails to transform the world of reality into a better place. Richard has found the treasure of the powers of the imagination, but these powers cannot exist in the real, accepted world.

Therefore, Richard’s quest symbolises the freedom to choose one’s destiny as well as one’s world for good or evil. In this way, the cyclical pattern of the hero’s quest is not fulfilled but subverted. That is, instead of perceiving it as a restoration of the initial situation presented at the beginning of the story, Richard’s adventures form the shape of a spiral, where the cycle is never closed. Thus, from the never-stopping process of the monomyth we have a never-ending movement, a never-ending story.³⁷

37. Such as Michael Ende’s *Die Unendliche Geschichte* (1979)

Considering Richard's quest as a whole, we may say that he behaves as the hero of a classical Greek romance, as described by Mikhail Bakhtin:

[The hero of Greek romance] is nevertheless a living human being moving through space and not merely a physical body in the literal sense of the term. While it is true that his life may be completely passive –“Fate” runs the game– he nevertheless endures the game fate plays. And he not only endures –he keeps on being the same person and emerges from this game, from all these turns of fate and chance, with his identity absolutely unchanged (1988: 105).

At the end of his quest, Richard's natural inclination towards fantasy remains unaltered; on the contrary, the social pressure of reality reinforces it. In the classical Greek romance, the “initial equilibrium” that the hero's adventures have to restore is not the situation at the beginning of the novel, but rather the situation at the beginning of the hero's life. This is precisely what happens to Richard, as suggested by the fact that he remembers the rhyme he heard as a child at his moment of apotheosis (Gaiman 1996: 331). The repetition of that song does not lead the reader back to the beginning of the novel, where Richard is in “equilibrium” with reality, but to the beginning of his life –if we take the quotations preceding the novel to symbolize this beginning–, where, as a child, Richard is in “equilibrium” with fantasy. Therefore, the restoration of the situation means the return to that childish state and the restoration of the imagination –in a kind of pre-Symbolic order³⁸–. It is in this sense that Bakhtin's description of the unchanging nature of the Greek romance's hero may be said to apply to Richard. The “Fate” [which] runs the game” in *Neverwhere* is the silent, invisible machinery of reality, fulfilling the task of keeping the order of the socially constructed convention of the real world. In this sense, Richard Mayhew does not really change his basic nature. What he does is to return to a world ruled by the imagination. Therefore, the initial situation that had been destroyed and later restored is the “communion” between the human being and Fantasy. Richard's quest is a process of deconstruction of his reality, of liberation of social chains; it is then, what can be called a *Regredierenroman*, a novel about the hero's process of regression, in contrast to the *Bildungsroman*, a novel of education and maturation.

From a Lacanian or a Freudian perspective, this regression to a pre-Symbolic stage would be alienating, producing a kind of death-like return to the maternal womb. However, from a mythical perspective, the return to a childish condition indicates the achievement of superior knowledge. For all this, Richard's

38. Lacan called this pre-Symbolic order “the Imaginary”, in contrast to “the Symbolic” (1966: 89-97).

“regression” does not imply the achievement of the boons of the gods to become the master of the two worlds. Far from that, his quest symbolizes a definitive return to the world of the imagination, condemning the materialistic existence of the “Real” world. Moreover, this new structure of the myth is meant to influence the reader in order to understand the story. The willing suspension of disbelief affects both character and reader, as usually happens in utopic and fantastic works.³⁹ The reader is also supposed to be transported to Richard’s paradisaical/hellish world, and to accompany him in his regressive return to the pre-symbolic stage of fantasy.

b) The Marquis de Carabas’ Quest

The second quest in the novel is that of the Marquis de Carabas. Like the previous adventure, this one may also be said to follow the pattern of one of the types of ancient novels in Bakhtin’s classification, in this case, “the adventure novel of everyday life” (1988: 111). This type shows the transformation of an individual into something other than what he was, by means of exceptional events that take place throughout his complete life. Bakhtin defines the nature of this type of ancient novel by saying that: “[It] depicts only the exceptional, utterly unusual moments of a man’s life [...]. But these moments shape the definitive image of the man, his essence, as well as the nature of his entire subsequent life” (116).

Neverwhere presents the Marquis de Carabas in his own world, without a clear proper quest for himself, rather he participates in Door’s quest casually, doing what he usually does: hiring himself for a favour. Therefore, the story presents those exceptional, utterly unusual moments in the Marquis’ life, events that make him evolve throughout the novel, from a selfish and materialistic position to a more open-minded vision of the world and a more sympathetic attitude to other living creatures.

A first point that offers itself to discussion about this character is the nature of his name. Calling him the Marquis de Carabas, Neil Gaiman is overtly introducing an intertext not only “as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect” (Jameson 1984: 67), but also as a complement for the whole meaning of

39. Such as Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931), Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), Douglas Adam’s *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* (1979), Frank L. Baum’s *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), C. S. Lewis’ narratives, Clive Barker’s stories, Alice’s adventures by Lewis Carroll, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, and many others.

the novel. The original Marquis de Carabas is a fictional character created by a cat in the folk tale “Le maître chat ou le chat botté” (“Master Cat or Puss in Boots”) by Charles Perrault in 1695.⁴⁰ This is a very short tale that starts with the classical recurrent situation of the partition of a father’s possessions among his three sons. The first and the second respectively receive a mill and an ass, while the youngest is given a cat.⁴¹ However, the cat, as a proper figure of a fairy tale, thus able to speak, asks his master for a favour in order to start its intrigues –just as the Marquis in *Neverwhere* usually does–: “Ne vous affligés point, mon maistre; vous n’avez qu’à me donner un sac et me faire faire une paire de bottes pour aller dons les broussailles, et vous verrez que vous n’êtes pas si mal partagé que vous croyez”⁴² (Saintyves 1987: 380).⁴³

According to Saintyves’ classification of Perrault’s tales, “Le chat botté” belongs to the type of “contes d’origine initiatique” –along with “Le petit Poucet”, “La Barbe-bleue”, and “Riquet a la houppe”–. That is, the tale is about a young man who has to learn how to behave in a newly-acquired status. The cat’s master has to become the Marquis de Carabas, he has to change his name in order to fulfil a new role –like Richard after his return, see above–. In this way, “Puss in Boots” becomes an intertextual reference to Richard’s story in so far as both imply an initiatory movement of transformation.

Moreover, the role of the Marquis de Carabas, as a character in *Neverwhere*, is rather similar to the function of the Maître Chat in Perrault’s tale. Even his physical aspect and clothes are remarkably alike –the Marquis wears high black boots and is constantly characterized as feline from his first appearance in the story⁴⁴–.

40. Although its original source comes from a popular oral tale, whose written origins go back to 1576 and Pierre de Larivey.

41. Once again, the separation of the world into two opposite sides is here presented: the rich, as those who are given the best part, and the poor, who are given the apparently least valuable item in the distribution.

42. “Do not afflict yourself, my lord; you only have to give me a sack and make me a couple of boots to walk through the brushwood, and you will see that you have not been given as bad a part as you think” (my translation).

43. By means of this and many cunning tricks, the Maître Chat helps his master acquire the status of future king through his marriage to a princess. The cat gives him a new name, The Marquis de Carabas, and plays wonderful tricks to convince the king to give his daughter in marriage to the youngest son of a miller.

44. “He wore a huge dandyish black coat, that was not quite a frock coat nor exactly a trench coat, and high black boot, and beneath his coat, raggedy clothes. His eyes burned white in an extremely dark face. And he grinned white teeth, momentarily, as if at a private joke of his own [...]. The man who called himself the Marquis de Carabas walked restlessly up and down the alley. He was always in motion, like a great cat” (47).

The Marquis becomes that figure who introduces the hero into the “other” world. As happened in the case of Maître Chat, the Marquis follows Richard’s initiation, helping him to the point of even saving his life after receiving Lamia’s deadly kiss.

Tracing the literary origins of the character in the tale, Pierre Saintyves offers an interesting approach to the history of his name. De Carabas was originally an oriental name given to a poor madman from Alexandria who used to walk naked in the city (1987: 403). The original Carabas, a poor lunatic, is projected over Neil Gaiman’s character as an eccentric figure who, in the eyes of Richard, belongs to the world of insanity.⁴⁵ Thus, we may say that the Marquis happens to be predetermined to behave as he does in *Neverwhere* from the very beginning of the novel. Through this character Gaiman creates a parodic or bitextual synthesis, in Linda Hutcheon’s sense of the term, which “resembles metaphor” and requires that “the decoder construct a second meaning through inferences about surface statements and supplement the foreground with acknowledgement and knowledge of a backgrounded context” (Hutcheon 1985: 33). Hence, in terms of parody, *Neverwhere* may be said to present an apparently monotextual contemporary text, in which Perrault’s text is contextualized as a “backgrounded” reference.

Up to this point, the Marquis’ narrative, as we have seen, is an adventure of everyday life –Bakhtin’s second type of ancient novel– with the form of an initiation process, which is contained within another mythical pattern. Analysing his quest systematically following the development of the narration, it can be stated that the Marquis receives the Call to Adventure when he meets Richard in London Above. They go together to another level of the city, the roof world, in search of Old Bailey,⁴⁶ who is given by the Marquis a little silver box containing his life.⁴⁷

45. He even explicitly asks the Marquis about this: “I know this is a personal question. But are you clinically insane?” ‘Possible, but very unlikely. Why?’ ‘Well [...] One of us must be’” (Gaiman 1996: 54).

46. The old wise man in the guise of a birdman; he becomes the supernatural aid for the hero –in this case, the Marquis– at the beginning and the end of his adventure.

47. This is a traditional fairytale type that brings to mind Jeanette Winterson’s *The Passion*, where Villanelle explains how she talked with a character called Salvadore “about the valuable, fabulous thing that everyone has and keeps a secret. ‘Here’, said Salvadore, ‘look at this’, and he took out a box enamelled on the outside and softly lined on the inside and on the inside was his heart.

‘Give me yours in exchange’.

But she couldn’t because she was not travelling with her heart, it was beating in another place” (2001: 98).

On the other hand, the fact of having one’s life inside a box, is a recurrent topic that appears in many of Gaiman’s works. In his graphic novel *Death: The High Cost of Living* (1994), where Death, one of the “Endless” of *The Sandman* is presented on her day of mortal incarnation, is asked to find the lost heart of

Then, his story continues at the “associative” house with Door where he accepts the invitation to join her quest. Thus, he crosses the first threshold in his adventure.

Going to the Floating Market at Harrods’ in order to hire a bodyguard, The Marquis and Door meet Hunter and Richard, and the newly formed group moves to Bank Tube station. At this moment a new intertextual character is introduced in the narration: Lear, the saxophone player. The name of this character clearly echoes Shakespeare’s play, *King Lear* (1608), whose basic plot presents the same classical situation as “Puss in Boots” –or also “Cinderella”–.⁴⁸ Three daughters, like the three sons of the miller, and the three stories inside *Neverwhere*, are given different parts of the king’s dominion. As in the French tale, it is the youngest daughter, Cordelia, the one who is given the worst part,⁴⁹ and it is the youngest daughter who proves to be the most valuable of the three. The presence of this character, Lear, in the Marquis’ narrative not only creates a reference to an important intertext, it also reinforces the idea that those who seem to have nothing at all are in fact richer than the wealthy materialists.

In exchange for a tube timetable, the Marquis offers Lear a song –a magical reel– that “would charm the coins from the pockets of anyone who heard it” (141). The main aim of this and some following episodes –such as his adventures

Mad Hettie: “[Death:] What do you want? [Hettie:] I hid something a long time ago. And I want you to find it for me. [Death:] Today? Mad Hettie. I’m nobody special today. [Hettie:] You’re special enough for me. [Death:] So what do you want me to find? [Hettie:] I want you to find me heart for me, will you? Will you please find it? I’ve tried ever so hard, and I can’t do it on me own. I want you to find me heart” (1994: 28). Another direct reference to this separation between life, heart and body, is Gaiman’s contemporary actualization of the classic tradition of Italian *Commedia dell’arte* in the form of a graphic novel entitled *Harlequin Valentine* (2001). In this story, Missy, the actualization of the character of *Columbine*, literally swallows *Harlequin*’s heart, provoking a change of roles, becoming herself in this way the new *Harlequin*. At this precise moment of transformation, she seems to evoke the Marquis de Carabas of *Neverwhere* when she says: “I have things to do. Tickets to take. People to dream” (p. 27). These sentences have their parallel in the Marquis’ words: ‘I’m a very busy man. Things to see. People to do’ (p. 82). This fact points to the common nature shared by both characters in the different works, they are both actualizations of old characters, of old traditions of classical literature: trans-contextualizations in a parody system (in Linda Hutcheon’s terms 1985: 32).

48. According to Propp, in his *Morphology of the Folktale*, “tales possess one special characteristic: components of one tale can, without any alteration whatsoever, be transferred to another” (1988: 7). The Russian formalist analyses this initial situation as one of two possible types: “One may distinguish two basic forms of initial situation: (1) a situation including the seeker together with his family (a father and his three sons); (2) a situation including the villain’s victim, together with his family (the tsar’s three daughters)” (1988: 85).

49. In fact, she is given nothing, highlighting the difference between those who have and those who are dispossessed of everything.

in Earl's Court⁵⁰ – is to show certain sample events that form part of the common life of the Marquis in the Underside, being just an example of his “adventure of everyday life” (Bakhtin 1988: 111). The Marquis offers things in exchange for favours; he likes people being in debt with him. Nevertheless, he is known as somebody unreliable – just as his French counterpart in Perrault's tale –, as an “old trickster” (Gaiman 1996: 142) and an unreliable negotiator.

In other words, up to this point, the narration has offered a first vision of the Marquis' everyday life at London Below, reason why I classified this adventure as belonging to the second type of Bakhtin's ancient novels. However, it is from this moment of the story on that those exceptional moments, those that “shape the definitive image of the man, his essence, as well as the nature of his entire subsequent life” (Bakhtin 1988: 116), begin to make their appearance.

After leaving Lear, and after having heard Old Bailey's account of the story of the Great Beast of London, the first unusual event in the Marquis' narration is his entrance into the Belly of the Whale, in the mythical Campbellian pattern. At this moment he visits Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar, the henchmen of the wicked angel Islington, in the cellar of an abandoned Victorian hospital.⁵¹ Using a T'ang dynasty sculpture that Lear gave him, the Marquis makes a deal with Mr Croup.⁵²

50. The description of the Earl, as a man wearing “an eye-patch over his left eye, which had the effect of making him look slightly helpless, and unbalanced, like a one-eyed hawk” (154), with a “red-grey beard” (154), who “exploded to his feet [in front of the Marquis], a grey-bearded volcano, an elderly berserker” (157), can be seen as a recreation of a degenerated vision of the Teutonic pantheon, specifically of the leader of the anthropomorphic *Aesir* gods. Thus, comparing the Earl with Odin, and therefore, the Marquis with Loki, Gaiman goes beyond intertextuality, meaning the relationship to other texts, to enter interculturality, or the relation with other cultures, considered as textual constructions. Gaiman explored this field of intercultural connections in mythical grounds in his novel *American Gods* (2001).

51. Significantly, the two evil characters, which Richard, Door and the Marquis have to face, are directly related to a Victorian environment through their location at the Underside. Again echoing the opposition between *Oliver Twist* and Mr Bumble discussed above, Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar embody the ideology of Utilitarianism, a form of materialism that is radically confronted to the freedom of fantasy, represented by Richard. This opposition can also be applied to the distinction between the two Victorian writers that seems to be present all along the novel: Mayhew and Dickens. Whereas Henry Mayhew wrote his work in a journalistic style, trying to portray society in a realistic manner, Dickens gives free rein to fantasy and the imagination. Once again, as almost everywhere in the novel, *Neverwhere* creates an explicit confrontation between Reality and Fantasy.

52. Mr Croup is a “collector” of T'ang dynasty sculptures (215), in the same way as Clegg is a collector of butterflies, and later on, of women in John Fowles' *The Collector* (1963). In all the fictions of this author, there is an opposition between Collectors and Artists. Collectors are materialistic and egotistic consumers of beauty. Artists are fully imaginative creators of beauty. The first are deadly, the second life-givers. Thus, Mr Croup embodies this deadly aspect of a materialistic collector. The narration in

In fact, Mr Croup is granted the power of “talking,” in contrast to Mr Vandemar who is characterized by his physicality; that is, they are not just a team, but rather the embodiment of a split self corresponding to Jung’s concepts of ego and shadow.⁵³ The Marquis, by means of the deal, tries to get information about the killer of Door’s family, Islington. However, they tell him nothing, and he has to flee from the lair of the monsters before he is himself killed.

After escaping from this evil couple, the Marquis strides southwards of the Tyburn, the hangman’s river. Although I am consciously avoiding analyzing all the specific names that refer to actual London places or tube stations, it is important to stop here for a moment to consider the name of this river and its connotations throughout the history of London. In *London, the Biography*, Peter Ackroyd points out that “from the twelfth century the favoured site for a hanging was Tyburn, the first (of William Longbeard) being noted in 1196 and the last (of John Austen) in 1783” (2001: 291). He adds: “At the church of St Giles-in-the-Field the malefactors were ritually handed jugs of ale. After the prisoners had quenched their thirst, the procession moved forward down Broad St Giles, into Oxford Street, and on to Tyburn itself” (293). Therefore, from the historical point of view, the path the Marquis follows as he escapes from Mr Croup and Mr Vandemar is literally taking him towards his own execution. In this way, the character seems to be trapped in a deterministic world controlled by the figure of the author. This historical fact adds an intertextual dimension to the Marquis’ narrative, which, for the reader who knows the history of the Tyburn, functions as a prolepsis reaching the “real” world beyond the written text. Once again, Gaiman’s use of history and culture as a constructed text makes the narration cross the boundaries of intertextuality to enter those of interculturality. Only through a previous knowledge of London history and culture is the reader able to give a new dimension to the reading

Neverwhere explains this event as follows: “Mr Croup examined the figurine minutely [...] ‘T’ang dynasty indeed. Twelve hundred years old, the finest pottery figurines ever made on this earth. [...] There is not a twin to it in existence. [...] It adds a little wonder and beauty to the world’. And then he grinned [...] and crushed its head in his teeth, chomping and chewing wildly, swallowing in lumps. [...] He gloried in its destruction, throwing himself into it with the strange madness and uncontrolled blood lust of a fox in a hen house” (216). Both Fowles’ Clegg and Gaiman’s Croup are collectors of beautiful but dead objects, they represent the power of the monolithic vision of the world swallowing the world of life and creation. In this sense, Mr Croup is a projection of the void that destroys the world of fantasy in Michael Ende’s *Die Unendliche Geschichte* (1979), or of those grey men who destroy happiness in *Momo* (1973).

53. They look like a projection half way between a humorous pair like Abbot and Costello or Laurel and Hardy and Beckett’s Vladimir and Estragon, imbued with the Baudrillardian ability to destroy history.

of the novel, a deeper sense of meaning and interconnection. From this perspective, the Marquis' escape is already bound to end up in his death.

However, the Marquis himself was already conscious of his imminent death.⁵⁴ In this sense, it may be concluded that it is not the author, but the Marquis who has organized his own sacrificial death. The fact that he knows he is going to be killed echoes Jesus Christ's willing sacrifice. Here the crucifixion is clearly parodied: like that of Dr Faustus, the Marquis' sacrifice is for knowledge, not for the salvation of humankind.

At the end of his road of trials, the Marquis achieves revelation by means of his martyrdom, crucifixion and death. His dead body is transported on a shopping cart, and later on, thrown into a deep channel of brown water.⁵⁵ From a mythical point of view, the Marquis' corpse may be said to be paradoxically purified by the filthy waters of the sewers. This is a new baptism for a new self. Following this road of the dead to its "end" is the prerequisite of his process of transformation, that utterly unusual moment that will shape his definitive image, his essence, and the nature of his entire subsequent life.

Thus, his quest fits the pattern of the adventure of everyday life. His floating corpse travels "west to east, towards the sunrise and the sewage works" (Gaiman 1996: 271). It moves towards a new beginning, a rebirth after an event, his death, which will transform his personality. Hence, in keeping with this vital metamorphosis, when he appears at the end of the novel to take Richard back to the Under-side, the Marquis does not ask him for a favour in exchange.

54. As the dialogue between the reborn Marquis and Old Bailey clearly shows:

'What did you have to go and get yourself killed for, anyway, that's what I want to know', asked Old Bailey.

'Information', whispered the Marquis. 'People tell you so much more when they know you're just about to be dead. And then they talk around you, when you are' (290).

55. At this point, Mr Croup reveals himself as nostalgic of the past: "It is saddening to reflect [...] that there are folk walking the streets above who will never know the beauty of these sewers, Mister Vandemar. These red-brick cathedrals beneath their feet" (268). The reference to "these red-brick cathedrals", parody the "red-brick universities" associated to the working-class literature of the Movement and the Angry Young men in the British literature of the 1950s, with authors like Philip Larkin, Kingsley Amis, John Wain, John Osborne, or Alan Sillitoe, among others. Most of them reacted against Modernism and the Romantic trend represented by Dylan Thomas and the Apocalyptic movement in the 1940s. They rejected the excessive use of the imagination, as well as the elitism and experimentalism of the Modernists. The average man and the rebel without a cause became their main emblems, favouring a recovery of the tenets of 19th-century realism. In the novel, this kind of Movement may be said to be associated to Mr Croup, who is totally opposed to the world of fantasy.

It is the sewer folk,⁵⁶ and specifically the sewer Dunnikin, who finds the Marquis' floating body. He takes the corpse to the Floating Market at HMS Belfast, in order to sell or exchange it in a good deal. Warned by the rats, Old Bailey purchases the corpse and takes it to "one of the last remnants of the London Wall" (287). Symbolically, the wall is an old remnant of an old frontier of the city, but it has lost its original function as boundary between spaces. This fact can be seen paralleled with the image of the Marquis' death. If Death is understood as a boundary between life and death, just as the wall was a barrier separating the civilized from the savage worlds, then, while standing over the Wall, in between realms, the Marquis –along with Old Bailey– happens to be at the same time in between life and death. Moreover, he is standing between his past and his future life, separated by his symbolic –as well as physical– death. Old Bailey gives the Marquis de Carabas his life back again by means of the silver box that appeared at the very beginning of his quest containing the large duck's egg that encloses the "essence" of his life.⁵⁷ After some hesitations, the newly-reborn Marquis utters some words that do not seem to belong to the pre-death personality of this character: 'What's it like being dead? It's very cold, my friend. Very dark, and very cold' (291). That is, a new Marquis has been reborn, from those utterly exceptional and unusual moments in his life. Considering his adventure from the perspective of the Campbellian quest, this is the moment of apotheosis of the hero, the moment of rebirth into knowledge.

The rest of his adventure contains his return to normal life, with his transformed personality after overcoming those extraordinary events, and concludes with Door's quest. At this moment he becomes a witness of the others' quests, as his has already been fulfilled.⁵⁸ For this reason, he is almost forgotten and nearly

56. A kind of people belonging to the London poor, according to Henry Mayhew's analysis in his *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-1852). Henry Mayhew includes the sewer folk in the subtype of the Street-finders: "or those who, as I said before, literally 'pick up' their living in the public thoroughfares. They are the 'pure' pickers, or those who live by gathering dogs'-dung; the cigar-end finders, or 'hard-ups', as they are called, who collect the refuse pieces of smoked cigars from the gutters, and having dried them, sell them as tobacco to the very poor; the dredgermen or coal-finders; the mud-larks, the bone-grubbers; and the sewer-hunters" (1985: 7).

57. Thus proving that everything was planned by the Marquis.

58. Although he actively he saves Richard's life –thus becoming the actualization of the figure of old Apollonius in Keats' poem "Lamia"–, he does not take part in any other important event. He becomes a witness of the moment of Richard's apotheosis in the labyrinth, as well as of Door's victory over the evil angel –the Marquis was manacled, and could not actively participate.

reduced to the status of a secondary character. However, it is the Marquis de Carabas who, at the end of the novel, opens a door to the powers of the imagination, for he returns to take Richard back to the Underside.

c) Door's Quest

The third and last mythical quest presented in the novel is Door's search for knowledge and revenge. Although her story is not as deeply clarified as Richard's,⁵⁹ her quest is in fact the most important one; she is the origin of all the other characters' problems. In her story the other characters are introduced one by one. Taking this fact into account, it might be stated that Door's quest belongs to Bakhtin's third type of ancient novel: ancient biography or autobiography (1988: 130). In Bakhtin's classification, Door's quest may be described as a Platonic biography in the sense that it responds to the chronotope of "the life course of one seeking true knowledge" (130). That is, Door's is a quest for knowledge and revelation, with the ultimate aim of discovering the truth about her family's murder.⁶⁰

In contrast to Richard's quest, Door does not suffer a complete mythical dislocation of place in her journey. Campbell's pattern of the monomyth usually implies a change of place for the hero/heroine, as is said in the novel, from "somewhere small and sensible that ma[kes] sense, for somewhere huge and old that [does not]" (Gaiman 1996: 3). Richard, in his role of mythical hero –rather anti-hero, or accidental protagonist– suffers this displacement from his "world of everyday" to the mysterious underground realm. In contrast, Door is not completely displaced from her common environment, although she also follows the pattern of development and revelation towards a change of perception of her world. That is the main reason why her narration is shorter than Richard's. Richard is the displaced character with whom the reader identifies, therefore, he is the character who requires a lengthier explanation of the situation.⁶¹ In any case, the pattern offered by Campbell can be applied to the development of this heroine's quest.

59. For obvious reasons, because he is the focalizer, the main character, and the source of identification for the reader.

60. At a higher level of symbolic meaning, what Richard does when he "rescues" Door and enters into her quest, is to open a metaphorical door to a new reality, to the world of the imagination. Like Door, Richard starts a journey to the source of meaning, to the origin of realities, a search for true knowledge.

61. This is a usual and recurrent motif employed in fantastic and utopic novels to describe a completely new world, by authors like Swift, Huxley, Orwell, Adams, Tolkien, Carroll, or Anne Rice.

The Call to Adventure for Door coincides with the massacre of her family by Mr Croup, Mr Vandemar and Mr Ross. Her story starts *in medias res*, as Door is already running away from the villains after the death of her family. Some time later in the narration the reader is given the real beginning by means of the analeptic memories imprinted on the walls of the “associative” house (84). In London Above, Door receives the supernatural aid of Richard the upworlder and the Marquis de Carabas, to recover her strength, cross the first threshold, and go to the British Museum in search of the Angelus. Thus, she enters the Belly of the Whale –the first episode in her quest– and begins her road of trials, meeting several archetypal figures: the Magna Mater –angel Islington–, the temptress –Serpentine–, and the friendly aid of Hammersmith –at the Floating Market in H. M. S. Belfast–.

Like that of Richard, her *descensum ad inferos* is initiated at Down Street and continued through the labyrinth. This is just a transitory state for the heroine, leading to her own apotheosis.⁶² Door is led by Croup and Vandemar through the labyrinth to the angel’s chamber where, in the presence of Richard and the Marquis, she fulfils her vengeance and achieves revelation. She opens a “false” door with a cunning copy of the Key to all realities, sending the villains to somewhere “halfway across space and time” (354). This is her final victory, her crossing back to her own world, and her reaffirmation as heroine of the Underworld and rightful heir to her father’s legacy and objectives –to unify the Underworld–.

Her apotheosis, the end of her quest, is, therefore, the end of the whole adventure story-line in London Below in the book. Door’s, then, is the first-level story, within which Richard’s and the Marquis’ adventures are embedded. However, as in the case of Richard’s quest, the mythical structure is again subverted at the end of Door’s journey. Her quest remains incomplete, both structurally, since the initial situation is not restored and the mythical cycle is not closed, and thematically, since the information about Door’s biography is never completed.⁶³

Therefore, whereas Richard’s quest ends up with his endorsement of fantasy against reality and symbolic order, Door’s adventure is based on Portico’s legacy: the unification, communion of the two worlds. Her task is to put an end to the distinction between the London rich and the London poor, already pointed out by

62. Richard’s apotheosis is achieved in the labyrinth.

63. Right before being furlled into the void, the wicked angel Islington reveals that Door’s sister is alive. This information leaves open the ending of Door’s quest for total knowledge.

Henry Mayhew and Charles Dickens. This London rich/London poor dichotomy simply symbolizes the Utilitarian/Fantasy worlds of rationality/myth; that is, the Newtonian world of “single vision”/the Blakean visionary world of the Imagination. They are all metaphors for the central idea in the novel, the archetypal dual world of reality/world of shadows. Thus, what Portico and Door have to do is what all mythical questers have to do: to restore harmony to both worlds by unifying them. This reunification involves the rejection of materialism, which is the value Islington and his henchmen defend.

The main symbolic aim of the heroine's quest is to favour the link between the two opposed worlds, that is, the materialistic world of pre-quest Richard and the Marquis' fantasy world. Symbolically, this implies the unification of the upper world of Reality with the realm of Fantasy and imagination, breaking with old regimes and harmonising them in a balanced existence. Both worlds should exist at the same time, interrelated and becoming just one world. Consequently, Door's aim is to create a third hybrid space, made of both fantasy and reality.⁶⁴

As her name suggests, Door is the source of ontological hybridity between the two opposed worlds of London. Her task is to make the whole Underside develop out of the medieval system of fiefdoms, in order to enter a “third space”, which will create new structures and political initiatives, leading to communal democratization. In this sense, she is also a point of union of the two different narratives from the two opposed realities. Then, she is also the ‘third principle’ for the narrative of Richard (Reality) and the story of the Marquis (Fantasy). She embodies hope in a new conception of the world.⁶⁵

In this sense, the image of the “associative house” of Door's family is very meaningful. Described on page 84, the house is placed outside time and space, but

64. This idea brings to mind Homi Bhabha's concept of “the third space” applied to multicultural societies: “For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom” (in Rutherford 1990: 211).

65. In contrast to the passivity of the heroine of the book to which she is constantly related, Jean Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814). Twice in the novel is Door seen reading Jean Austen's book: first in Richard's flat, he sees her reading a copy that he “had not previously known that he possessed” (41); and later on at Black Friars', a copy “that Richard was certain the friars had not previously known that they had” (354). The common characteristic between *Mansfield Park* and *Neverwhere* is the presence of a female protagonist, Fanny Price and Door, respectively. As in the case of Door, Fanny stands in between two worlds, her poor mother's house and her aristocratic uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Bertram.

at the same time it is at the very centre of the Underworld.⁶⁶ Symbolically, then, the House and, by projection, Door, is the centre of the imagination, the world's navel or *omphalos*, in Campbell's terms, the symbol of continuous creation. As such, it is the organizing place from which the confronted imagination and reality are to be bonded together into a unitary and all-encompassing new world order –the third space–, existing *in illo tempore*, outside concrete place and chronological time.

From this perspective, Door's father, Portico, as the originator of these utopic ideas, is both the Emperor, the unifier of the world, and the Magician, the principle of fantasy. The bust in his study clearly reflects this duality, as the Marquis does not fail to realise: "Caesar as Prospero" (92). Door willingly inherits both roles: "My father wanted to unite London Below [...] I suppose I ought to try to finish what he started" (364). In this way, she becomes a regenerated image of the role of her father and, therefore, the source of hope in the paradisiacal hell of the Underworld.

However, as Ihab Hassan has stated, "new beginnings do not always coincide with old ends" (1982: 247). That is, Door's "kingdom" is not a repetition of her father's, but a reorientation of old ideas. A new way is opened by means of which reality and fantasy will be joined. From our postmodernist perspective, this can be seen as a projection of contemporary literature and arts in general –historiographic metafiction, reinterpretations of history from the margins, magic realism...–, where monolithic reality has been broken up into many different realities which do not compete for pre-eminence against each other, for all of them are "real" in their fantasy.⁶⁷ Therefore, Door's quest and her final inheritance is a hopeful ending for a new beginning in the conception of the real world.

Concluding Remarks

Although the structure of *Neverwhere* follows the classical, standard pattern of the hero's quest, the novel introduces important variations on this topic, becoming a conscious subversion of the monomythical scheme. The trinity which the three different narratives create in the text as a whole becomes an apposite

66. Like the *axis* or *umbilicus mundi*, or also the Ivory Tower, all of which are images recurrently used in literature from the Middle Ages, through Shakespeare and Robert Browning to T. S. Eliot, Joyce and Michael Ende, to mean the centre of inspiration and imagination, the source of imaginative creation.

67. As happens, for example, with the artwork by Dave McKean, where "real" photographs and drawings are mixed to the point of being indistinguishable.

symbolic transposition of the actual world in which we are living. A classical Greek Romance, a Platonic biography and an adventure of everyday life, become the composite symbol of the contemporary confrontation between the worlds of Fantasy and Reality. Although the story is outside time, *Never*, and outside space, *Where*, Gaiman's text is clearly optimistic, impregnating the story with a utopic feeling of belief in a better world, in a third space of integration, where the Imagination is the most important element in the construction of a reality that is seen as complex and many-sided.

In this sense, the function of myth in this novel, as well as in other works by Neil Gaiman, is double: on the one hand, the mythical structure in *Neverwhere* reproduces a psychological development of the characters. Hence, Richard's regression, The Marquis' transformation, and Door's acceptance of her new role are stories of development and change in psychological terms. On the other hand, the symbolic analysis of the novel, the triple structure of monomyths, shows the relationship of the novel, and therefore, of the myth, with the "new" social situation and reality. Thus, Neil Gaiman does not offer new mythologies for this Post-modern world. He rewrites and adapts classical traditions and myths to new perceptions of reality. Therefore, the conscious subversions of the mythical canon have the function of redefining the myth adapting it to the world-view of the post-modern world, as well as it has the function of explaining the new social perceptions of reality by means of the rewriting of classical myths. Finally, at the structural level, the fragmentation of the monomyth in *Neverwhere* echoes the fragmentation of other contemporary metanarratives aimed at expressing the post-modern ethos.

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