

Minding the Gap: Time in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and the Hermeneutical Inquiry

Timothy Andrew John Peoples

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Margot Backus, Ph.D., Director
Maria Gonzalez, Ph.D., English Department Reader
Dan Price, Ph.D., Honors College Reader

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ABSTRACT

I begin this thesis with a discussion of Neil Gaiman's career and my interaction with his first novel, *Neverwhere*. I define time in the novel as the succession and interrelatedness of events and divide this definition into two perceptions: immediacy and graduality. I apply the former to the novel's separate worlds, which are called London Above and London Below. London Above, in the perception of Richard Mayhew, the main character, favors immediacy and rejects graduality. Though his perception is incomplete, the nature of London Above makes him unsuitable for life there. London Below, on the other hand, exhibits both perceptions. Graduality's influence on the two worlds shows a departure from Western conceptions of time that makes London Above and London Below a symbiotic that cannot be unified. This symbiosis can be allegorized as the hermeneutical gap. After examining similar concepts in Gaiman's *Stardust* and *American Gods*, I conclude that Gaiman's writing states that the permanently separated hermeneutical gap allows humanity to reflect upon itself.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

This thesis, being the result of my four years spent in higher education, is dedicated to all the professors who have taught me so much about academics and about myself. I single out the following: Dr. Andrew Hass (who taught me how to critically examine, well, everything), Dr. Margot Backus (whose patience, kindness, and guidance led to the successful completion of this thesis), Dr. Ross Lence (whose frank criticism opened me to new ideas), Glenn Blake (who respected my vision of the world), Dr. James Pipkin (who taught me the value of a severely marked-up paper), Dr. Sharon Zivley (who taught me that economical writing is successful writing), and Dr. Eduardo González (who taught me the beauty of language and its power to unite). I thank you all.

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Chapter One

Into the Deep

“A page turns. Destiny continues to walk... He is holding a book. Inside the book is the Universe.”

—“Destiny: Endless Nights” (*Sandman* 147)

Years ago, I was a member of the Science Fiction Book Club, from which I would regularly receive at least one mailing per month. These mailings had specials on new books and, often, package deals with two or three or four books related by either similarity or polarity to each other. I bought one such package that paired a book (I have by now forgotten the title) by comedy-fantasy author Terry Pratchett with *Neverwhere*, the first solo novel by Neil Gaiman. Gaiman, at that time, was known more for his acclaimed comic book series *Sandman* than for his fiction writing, though he had success in that field.

The pairing with Pratchett was, at that time, clearly in Gaiman’s favor—Pratchett was and is still among the most well known fantasy-comedy writers in the world (a sort of Douglas Adams for fantasy), while Gaiman sported a vibrant, but still underground following centered mostly around comics and cult-classic stories. The two were paired as “light and dark,” with the marketing hope that fans would remember the two authors’ collaboration on the quirky apocalyptic novel *Good Omens*, one of the aforementioned cult classics. In my case, the scheme worked. I had not read *Good Omens*, nor had I heard of Neil Gaiman, but I was eager to try out a Terry Pratchett novel. I did, and it was entertaining, but now largely forgotten. *Neverwhere*, on the other hand, left me astonished.

What impressed me most about *Neverwhere* was its uniqueness. I loved the prose style, which was full of witty, descriptive oddities that, surprisingly, did not call attention

to themselves on the first reading. I felt that even if I could not completely understand the novel's mechanics—and I could not, at the time—I could at least understand what it was like to live there. But I could not understand how time worked. I wrapped my head around a world where all that is abandoned and forgotten goes—that was easy enough. I lose things all the time; for all I know, there is a “Houston Below” populated entirely by trinkets and pens and textbooks I have lost in the course of my studies here. I could likewise understand the separation between this world and the world we all seem to inhabit. Time, though, is a progressive march away from an irretrievable past and toward an irretrievable future. I will never re-achieve *this singular moment* during which I write this paragraph. The reader will never re-achieve *this singular moment* during which he or she reads this paragraph. Gaiman presents a different, more confusing vision of time in *Neverwhere*, though. It is one populated by time as a physical presence rather than a mere state in which we live. It is a separation, a unification, and a paradox.

When I thought about it further, I wondered what Gaiman intended to say with such an elaborate construct. Gaiman, though not opposed to his work being scrutinized by critics and scholars, is not himself a critic—neither of his own work, nor of anyone else's. He once told the BBC, “What keeps me going is the fact that there are all these stories that nobody's ever heard before. And I know them, and I feel like it's my job to tell them to people” (qtd. in Sanders). But, as I have realized through critically examining literature, his works naturally express a point of view with *hermeneutical* implications. I believe that hermeneutics—the art or the science of interpretation—“goes to the very heart of our existence” (“Re: Question”). Part of this belief is the point of view that everything in the world is a sort of “text,” in dialogue with other texts. Hermeneutics

sees texts as co-dependent and inter-dependent. In literature, this idea means that fiction (or non-fiction, for that matter) is influenced by philosophy, theology, the sciences, social structure—in short, everything. Gaiman’s work naturally dialogues with other texts—the author (and his beliefs, experiences, and perceptions) with the novel, the novel with the author’s other works, the novel with the literature that inspired it, the novel with the reader, etc. I thus wanted to examine *Neverwhere* in the context of Gaiman’s *oeuvre* to discover for myself, through hermeneutics, where his dialogue with the world’s “texts” has brought him.

***Neverwhere* and Neil Gaiman**

When I first read *Neverwhere*, I had not read anything else like it—as I began to pay more attention to literature, I recognized its conventionalism. My discovery did not diminish my love of the novel; rather, it informed my reading of it. In my research for this thesis, I found that Gaiman agreed with my perception:

Neverwhere is a Boy’s Own Adventure (Narnia on the Northern Line, as someone once described it), with an everyman hero, and the women in it tended to occupy equally stock roles, such as the Dreadful Fiancee, the Princess in Peril, the Kick-Ass Female Warrior, the Seductive Vamp. Each role is, I hope, taken and twisted 45% from skew, but they are stock characters nonetheless. (“All Books”)

Using stock characters is not always a bad thing, though. In the case of *Neverwhere*, stock characters help make the story accessible, thus showcasing the “weirdness” of London Below. The oddities Gaiman constructed were not lost in a sea of incomprehensibility, as often happens with novels of this genre.

Part of reading *Neverwhere* in context is recognizing its conventionality as contrasted with Gaiman's other novels and his larger oeuvre. Gaiman told John Krewson of *The Onion A.V. Club* the following:

I have not yet written a novel I was satisfied with. *Stardust* [sic] is the nearest I've gotten: I was much more satisfied with that than I was with *Neverwhere* [sic], with which I was not terribly happy. It was a good start.

I agree with Gaiman here. Both *Stardust* and *American Gods* are much better novels—particularly the latter, which will perhaps be remembered as one of the great novels of the postmodern age. In fact, Gaiman has stated elsewhere that *American Gods* is the closest he has come to satisfaction. By acknowledging this fact, I am not deriding Gaiman or his work, but showing my awareness of where *Neverwhere* stands. It also gives me validation for writing my thesis about this particular novel, rather than about one of his others. *Neverwhere* is a “good start”—through it we see the thematic framework for his later novels.

Examining this thematic framework is important because this thesis has the lofty goal of examining a theme that spans across Gaiman's larger body of work. Such a task becomes complicated when one considers that Gaiman's list of published works includes six novels, creation or work on over sixty comic series or graphic novels, a major comic book series lasting seventy-five issues, two collections of short works, two biographies, over eighty short stories or poems, a television miniseries, an episode screenplay for *Babylon 5*, the screenplay for the American dub of *Princess Mononoke*, two rock songs, two short children's books, a short movie (as director and writer), three edited anthologies, and much more to come (“Bibliography”). Within this impressive list is a

further variety that makes even the broadest examination impossible in this analysis. I am therefore obliged to examine one specific theme within one novel.

Separation between the real and the unreal, one of the dominant themes in fantastic literature that is likewise dominant in Gaiman's work, is very clearly laid out in *Neverwhere*. The main character, Richard Mayhew, descends from the world we know—known in *Neverwhere* as London Above—to the world of London Below after he aids a young lady named Door. Door, on the run from assassins, escapes using her family's ability to open doorways where they do not exist. The assassins, Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar, killed her family and are, in the novel's opening pages, attempting to kill her as well. She seeks someone to help, and, in doing so, entangles Richard in her world. Richard is a non-entity to London Above once he helps her—his friends and colleagues have completely forgotten him. Thus he joins Door's quest to find out who killed her parents alongside the enigmatic marquis de Carabas and Hunter, their bodyguard. Their travels take them, eventually, to the Miltonic angel Islington, who, imprisoned in London Below, orchestrated the murder of Door's family and her subsequent quest. After driving Islington into what is presumably outer space, Richard briefly returns to London Above. The novel ends with his frustration with his home and his eventual return to London Below.

London Above, in which Richard resides for a few chapters at the beginning and one at the end, is largely portrayed through the main character's steadily declining sense of wonder and amazement at all he sees in London Below. When Anaesthesia tells him that if they go an alternate route to the Floating Market, "the market won't be there," Richard reacts as the reader might. He asserts, "But that's ridiculous. I mean,

something's either there or it's not," to which his guide shakes her head (*Neverwhere* 89). This wonderment begins to collapse as he descends deeper into London Below; by the time he reaches the Earl's Court (a sort of parody of a medieval court), he remarks to himself, "The longer he was [in London Below], the more he took at face value" (*Neverwhere* 143). Richard's perspective becomes our perspective, and London Above is clearly shown to be our world by its contrast with London Below. *Neverwhere's* use of the "everyman" convention allows the reader to interact with London Below on a basic level. It allows the reader to have the strange environment explained and, at the same time, to pace the reader's understanding of that environment.

Separation is important because time in *Neverwhere* emerges from the dichotomy between London Above and London Below. This dichotomy makes the social separation between the "haves" (London Above, populated by the upper and middle-classes and, perhaps, the upper echelons of the impoverished) and the "have-nots" (London Below, populated primarily by the homeless). Gaiman shows the alienation between the two groups by making their separation literal: upworlders do not notice underdwellers, while underdwellers appropriate the Upworld for their own purposes. At the same time, there is a profound dignity to the inhabitants of London Below—Gaiman thus seems to say there is a dignity to the homeless that we do not often see. London Below (as we will see) also is essential to London Above's existence—the homeless are, in this cursory reading, essential to the social structure that oppresses them. This reading, however, is too readily apparent for my taste. Gaiman's social criticism is meritorious and is accomplished well, but I am more interested in the more complex dichotomies the author uses in *Neverwhere*.

A more complex reading of the separation of systems and perceptions of time between the two worlds is, therefore, the primary subject of this thesis. I have found dichotomies implicit in the text within the more explicit ones. These dichotomies separate time into dual, opposing perceptions. These perceptions—immediacy and graduality, I term them—are favored by different characters throughout the novel. Immediacy seems to be favored by London Above, while London Below is presented in the novel as having a more complex perception. I am cautious in making these statements, since the novel filters almost all pertinent sensory information through Richard Mayhew and through his own biases. Richard is also confused about London Below for a good portion of *Neverwhere*, and it is therefore difficult to come to a reasonable conclusion about how London Below—and, particularly, its system of time—works. Still, an attempt is made, and time is shown to be a physical presence that falls through the cracks, contradicting most standard Western interpretations of time. Immediacy and graduality seem to exist together in both worlds, in different ways. The differences show London Above and London Below to be in a symbiotic relationship. They are necessary partners, and, therefore, they can never unite.

The nature of time in *Neverwhere* in effect declares that the boundary between the real and the unreal—allegorically, the hermeneutical gap—is one that cannot be crossed. This concept is also present in *Stardust* and *American Gods*, Gaiman's other adult, solo novels. The three novels, which are different in both genre and concept, form an arc and, more importantly, a development. *Neverwhere*, in Gaiman's own words, is a "good start," *Stardust* is an advancement, while *American Gods* is the most satisfying of the three. Over the course of the three novels, Gaiman's vision is defined more and more

strictly, culminating in the vision in *American Gods* that the gap is wholly inaccessible. Through this consideration of *Neverwhere* and Gaiman's two other solo, adult novels, however, we see that the gap's inaccessibility is far from an impediment. Such a gap, though it cannot be crossed, allows us to consider the interaction between reality and our imagination and, ultimately, to reflect upon ourselves.

Methodology

This thesis is the product of four years of education. My methodology for analyzing *Neverwhere* will take that into consideration. Most of the analysis will be a close examination of the patterns (and how the patterns break down) in the text, and what those patterns suggest. I am not, however, attempting to divine an objective meaning à la New Criticism because that method restricts me to the text itself. My interests are too broad and my mind is too digressive to restrict myself to using only *Neverwhere* to explain *Neverwhere*.

I will, then, use secondary sources. They will be concentrated in a few sections, according to my interests in the subjects. I will, of course, use Gaiman's commentary on his own work to illuminate my discussion. I am amazed at the honesty and clarity of this author's perception of his own work. On the other hand, while using my basic understanding of literature by providing basic parallels for clarification, I will shy away from the guesswork involved in identifying specific references. Aside from a singular reference to *Great Expectations*, Islington's similarity to Milton's Satan, and parallels between Richard and James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, I confess that I was unable to identify any such references. In short, I do not wish to guess at all of Gaiman's

influences. Similarly, I am painfully unaware of the nuances of critical theory and will stay clear of that subject altogether.¹

My analysis is also relatively light on texts dealing with hermeneutics, though that art/science is the basis for my conclusions about *Neverwhere* and Gaiman's other works. My goal, though, is not to prove that hermeneutical theory is valid by its own sake—I wish rather to show it in action. I use *Poetics of Critique* by and an email from Andrew W. Hass, an authority in interdisciplinary studies, to summarize the larger concept. I use Gaiman's texts to show their interaction with each other and with other texts.

Christian theology, being an ever-increasing interest of mine, will appear in this thesis, but will be restricted only to passages where its use is necessary. Although Gaiman is not a Christian writer² and *Neverwhere* is not a Christian novel, he is an English writer and *Neverwhere* is an English novel. England, though in the midst of a “post-ecclesial” age, is a historically Christian society, with a bit of paganism mixed in here and there. *Neverwhere* often reflects this heritage often. In the spirit of postmodernism, though, Gaiman has twisted Christian imagery, like his stock characters, “45% from skew.” A perfect example of this is the community of Black Friars, whose name comes from the “Blackfriars” Underground station. The Black Friars are obviously suggestive of a Catholic monastic order in that they have the hierarchy of one (a group of “brothers” led by a “father abbot”), wear “the black robes of a Dominican monk” (that is, of the monastic branch of a religious order founded by Saint Dominic in the middle ages), are seen praying to God, and are referred to as an “order” (*Neverwhere* 205-210). They

¹ One should also bear in mind that Gaiman is contemporary and relatively unknown to academia; as a result, research on his work is at this point scant.

² “[Gaiman] describes his religious upbringing as ‘multitudinous’ and ‘especially complicated by being a Jewish kid in a High Church of England school’” (Hogan).

do not, however, invoke the Trinitarian God or Its persons, but “the Temple and the Arch”—an unexplained religious symbol distinctive to *London Below* (*Neverwhere* 227). In the Black Friars, there exists what we would expect to see in a monastic order combined with elements we would not expect to see. This is also the technique Gaiman has used in creating the angel Islington, whose adherence to and divergence from standard Christian beliefs about angels I will examine below. For this analysis, I will use short quotations from the early Church Fathers and from Sacred Scripture, both of which have formed the beliefs of liberal and conservative Christians alike.

I will also protect myself from embarrassment by not attempting to explain the whole novel. Gaiman does not feel the need to explain all of his ideas: “I make them up,” he asserts, “Out of my head” (“Where”). There are simply things that I do not wish to explain. I do not know why the Black Friars invoke the Temple and the Arch, and I do not know the origin of that phrase, for example. These are perhaps references to things archaic or well known, perhaps “made up” out of Neil Gaiman’s head; I will leave them alone, no matter their true origin. My first reason is because Gaiman has alluded to the eventual release of a sequel, tentatively titled *The Seven Sisters*, and I do not wish to make outrageous claims and find them all disproved when this book appears (“FAQ”). More importantly, though, I believe in the respectful silence a scholar must sometimes observe when analyzing another’s work. Though this is my thesis, my analysis, my opinion, it is based on Neil Gaiman’s novel. I have the most profound respect for his work and for him, and I will attempt to honor that respect and, in so doing, honor him.

Chapter Two

Time in Neverwhere

“It’s not from the *future*, you see...No...or maybe it is. But just a bit of *one* of them. I mean, there are so *many* of them. Like wiggly worms, millions and billions and squillions of wiggly worms, all wiggling in different ways to get to the same place.”

—“Destruction: On the Peninsula” (*Sandman* 136)

A wide range of factors determine how a character perceives the passing of the seconds, minutes, and hours that make up a novel’s actions. *Neverwhere* plays with and contrasts many different perceptions of time. It is, essentially, a chronological work—it begins on a Friday, and ends several weeks or months later. In between, however, hours and days merge together, making it difficult to determine just how much time has passed. As we discuss time as a theme, therefore, it becomes necessary to define time as it operates in *Neverwhere*.

A Definition of Time

London Above, as presented in the beginning of *Neverwhere*, is based on the reader’s reality. There is a past, a present, and a future. Day and night are defined by natural phenomena outside the control of the characters. The present is marked by years, days, hours, minutes, and seconds—all of which are closely kept track of by the characters. There is a natural progression of time during which one ages and eventually dies. Most of this information is not explicit in the text, but these assumptions are made by the narrator, who, like us, is perplexed when the assumptions are violated in London Below.

These assumptions are best explained in Saint Augustine of Hippo's observations on the nature of time in his *Confessions*. His observations create a dichotomy between the existent present and non-existent past and future. He writes,

Take the two tenses, past and future. How can they 'be' when the past is not now present and the future is not yet present? Yet if the present were always present, it would not pass into the past: it would not be time but eternity. (XI.xiv.17)

The present is defined by its existence, but also by its passing away into the past. Both the future and the past are non-existent, since the latter has ceased to be and the former has yet to take place. True prediction of the future cannot rightly exist under Augustine's model, since "nothing can be known if it does not exist" (XI.xviii.24). Future events, likewise, since they have not yet happened, cannot be seen. Augustine only allows foresight of future events in that one might see "their causes or signs which already exist" in the present (XI.xviii.24).

Augustine also states that past events are measured through "memory which stays fixed there" (XI.xxvii.35). The memory is measured as it is recalled, since past events cannot be measured because of their inherent non-existence. Augustine accounts for causality through the present moment's effects on subsequent moments: events are interconnected in that the present affects an immediately following present. More than merely philosophical musings on time, though, these observations are profoundly religious. Influenced by Neoplatonism contemporary to the fifth-century environment in which the Catholic bishop wrote his work, Augustine sees time as subordinate to the beatific vision. Augustine writes: "I had no desire for earthly goods to be multiplied, nor

to devour time and to be devoured by it,” to which an editorial note is added, “Several texts in Augustine speak of the successiveness of time as that from which the divine eternity saves us” (IX.iv.10, 10n). Time itself “devours” the human person, eternity “saves” it; the perfect spirit saves the sinful body. This view of time is more or less the one that drives western culture, although its Manicheeistic body-spirit opposition has gradually reduced due to the rise of humanism. Though the shift to humanism has made mortality in a sense positive³, it has not reduced the gravity of death of which Augustine and his followers were so aware.

Part of the wonder of *London Below*, then, is its almost total disrespect for the rules of time that the reader (and, as a lens for the reader, Richard Mayhew) take for granted (i.e. Augustinian time). The two are not diametrically opposed, though: Old Bailey, while on his rooftop home in *London Below*, remembers

when people had actually lived here in the City, not just worked; when they had lived and lusted and laughed, built ramshackle houses one leaning against the next, each house filled with noisy people. (*Neverwhere* 148)

Thus we see that there is a past, a present, and a future in *London Below* and, therefore, causality exists as well. All these concepts act differently, however. Another example: when Richard first enters this fantastic world, he is led by the marquis de Carabas into the sewers at night. He climbs up a ladder and, while on the same ladder, he is suddenly on the side of a building in daylight (*Neverwhere* 42-43). There is no indication that the

³ People today are more likely to have *Carpe diem* as a philosophy, rather than simply looking past this life to the next, as Augustinian theology advocates.

marquis de Carabas has some sort of magical ability to make time change, and there is little explanation in the text for this and similar phenomena. London Below's system of time allows such abnormalities. Indeed, after this instance, Richard never questions the odd demarcation of days and nights precisely because there are no such demarcations beyond "today" and "tonight"—which are used sparingly. Furthermore, aging is non-existent, as can be seen in the example of Old Bailey above.⁴ Also, the marquis de Carabas resurrects himself by storing his life away and restoring it to himself with the help of Old Bailey (*Neverwhere* 252). While time is clearly finite and (in a sense) causal, it is not governed by London Above's rules.

When we define time in *Neverwhere*, then, we must consider both the traditional concept of time and the opposing force of London Below. Little is constant between the two except for causality, which marks the progression and influence of one event to another. Events and happenings are the language of time in *Neverwhere*, not days and weeks and months—indeed, it is never clear how long the story takes.⁵ Days and nights, months and years do, in a sense, take place in both London Above and London Below, but the inhabitants of London Below seem to care little, if at all, for such distinctions. Events, however, do take place in both London Above and London Below under the effects of the aforementioned causality. Causality implies both succession—one event taking place before another—and interrelatedness—all events being connected to and

⁴ Old Bailey is clearly referring to the time before the Great Fire of London in 1666, which destroyed the city as a result of the poorly constructed, compacted housing used at the time ("Great Fire"). Architecture, as a result of the fire, changed dramatically and thereafter could not have been described as "ramshackle houses leaning one against the next..."

⁵ The time Richard spends in London Below is only referred to when he partakes of the Ordeal and the pseudo-Jessica tells him he "had a nervous breakdown...A couple of weeks ago" (*Neverwhere* 220). There is only one clear indication of how long the novel progresses after Richard's return to London Above: Gary, Richard's co-worker and friend, remarks that Richard, after calling Gary a "Bastard," sounds "a lot more like Richard than he had in recent weeks" (*Neverwhere* 330).

influencing succeeding events. Therefore, when we speak of “time” as a theme in this analysis of *Neverwhere*, it must be understood that we are referring to the succession and interrelatedness of events, and the ways in which they influence characters and major themes.

Because this definition is so broad, it allows us to examine time in *Neverwhere* in several different ways and, in turn, to subdivide the definition into two perspectives of time. The subdivisions used in this analysis will be “immediacy” and “graduality.”⁶

Immediacy and Graduality

Immediacy in *Neverwhere* is the perspective of time in which a character or group of characters isolate the present moment from its preceding and following actions.

Immediacy is seen most often as a panicked moment in which characters are threatened by a real or imaginary danger. It is also characterized by the perception on the part of a character or a group of characters that after the obstacles at hand are past, all will be well. Immediacy, therefore, blinds the characters in the novel to the larger contexts of events. In such panicked moments, characters care little for anything beyond the present moment. It is important to note that this perspective of time is not defined simply as the present event, since characters often do not isolate their present actions from those which precede or follow them. I will term a specific character’s perspective on the present (i.e., whether he or she isolates it from other events) a “mode” of immediacy.

Graduality, by contrast, is time seen as an arc of interrelated, though not necessarily strictly chronological, events. It refers to all the events which led up to the present one, as well as related future events. Thus, an immediate moment (the present)

⁶ Both immediacy and graduality are terms created by myself for the purposes of this analysis.

shows graduality when combined by the character with its antecedent events (the past), and the possibilities and/or goals which may or may not follow (the future). As a unit, the past, present, and future constitute a “gradual arc.” These terms would seem to imply that to characters who favor this perspective of time, events take place slowly and methodically. Though sometimes this is the case, it often is not. Connecting with our working definition of time for this analysis, a gradual arc is not defined by the time period itself but rather by the events themselves. When a character favors graduality in his or her mode of immediacy, he or she considers the present in conjunction with both the past and the future as one gradual arc. By the same token, a gradual arc can also be a series of events which took place in the past: it need not consider the present moment as part of that arc, though the present moment may be connected in some significant or insignificant way. A gradual arc may therefore be isolated from or composed partly of the present event.

Examples may help in explaining these terms. We will consider two, one positive and one negative: a soldier and a corporation.⁷ When the soldier is carrying out an operation, he⁸ centers his mode of immediacy on orienting all his individual actions toward the larger gradual arc (formed both by his experiences until the operation and those he plans to undertake). He will not, for example, take revenge on an opposition leader if it does not serve his superiors’ larger purposes. If his orders tell him to retreat when ambushed, his mode of immediacy changes in such an event. When ambushed, he will orient the immediate moment to survival and retreat. Conversely, the corporation⁹

⁷ These examples are not meant as social commentary; they are merely examples that came to mind.

⁸ We shall assume this soldier is male.

⁹ We shall assume this corporation is corrupt.

might use illegal practices to gain short-term profits, thus favoring the present moment in its mode of immediacy, rather than a gradual arc. The gradual arc, in this case, is composed of many factors. It involves the possibility of future bankruptcy if it is caught, the immediate needs and desires of its employees, the future loss of income of its investors, the stigma attached by the corporation's reputation to laid-off employees searching for new jobs, and the eventual loss of services to consumers.

Thus we see that graduality, unlike immediacy, thus illuminates the nature of time in *Neverwhere*. Immediacy is always and everywhere an experiential perspective: it is one moment experienced by one or more characters, and that moment passes away. Its isolation restricts its influence. Graduality is not only seen in a certain character's perspective on one event's connection to other events but, more profoundly, in the way time is constructed. Gradual arcs often take place in the novel in the form of flashbacks, reflections, or, more commonly, in simple causality in the plotline. Characters access such gradual arcs, which take place entirely in the past, through memory. Immediacy passes and becomes part of a gradual arc. Memories of gradual arcs, as representations of the past rather than the past itself, are changeable, just as a character's mode of immediacy is changeable. The gradual arc itself, however, remains immutable. Of course, we only receive flashbacks through accesses into gradual arcs, whether by the characters or by the narrator. Still, as shall be explained below, the novel supports the immutability and existence of the past outside of its persistence in present memory and records.

The distinction between these two perspectives of time is important because each type determines the way a character will react to a situation. They are also important

because both immediacy and graduality occur in London Above and London Below. The two Londons do, however, carry different concepts of both perspectives, and the characters in the two cities react in sometimes similar, sometimes opposing ways. Thus, examining the entire novel in terms of immediacy and graduality is cumbersome at best. We are therefore obliged to examine immediacy and graduality within London Above and London Below separately.

Chapter Three

Immediacy in London Above

“There was a moment, then, when it all came back to her — how it was to be young: to have a firm, slim body that would do whatever she wanted it to do; to run down a country lane for the simple unladylike joy of running; to have men smile at her just because she was herself and happy about it... ‘Put that apple away,’ she told Galaad, firmly. ‘You shouldn’t offer things like that to old ladies. It isn’t proper.’”

—“Chivalry” (*Angels* 23)

London Above’s generalized mode of immediacy is seen through Richard Mayhew, who provides a lens for examining London Below’s mode of immediacy. *Neverwhere*, in terms of character narration, falls somewhere between a traditional third person omniscient narrative and a subjectivist approach like James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*. The world is, for the most part, seen through Richard’s eyes, while the narrative occasionally shifts to another character’s perspective—a technique used mostly to provide dramatic irony.

Richard thus provides the reader’s perspective of London Above and, specifically, of Jessica Bartram, his fiancée, when the novel begins. Jessica, as the center of his attention in those first scenes, is the exemplar of London Above in her attitude and her behavior. Jessica orients all her actions toward social advancement and a comfortable lifestyle, goals which are judged by Richard as meaningless. Richard’s interaction with her and the point of view she represents provides the reader with his perception of London Above’s mode of immediacy. This perception is not complete, though, since Richard fails to consider Arnold Stockton, Jessica’s deceptively complex boss. Mr. Stockton, though an overtly satirical character, somewhat redeems London Above because he shows that one can resist the actions of London Above’s majority.

Cohesion of Action

Immediacy in *London Above* is often a controlling force over the characters' lives. We first control see this in Richard Mayhew's struggle with his job, which demands of him an apparently important report, and his fiancée, who is simultaneously pressuring him about an important dinner with Mr. Stockton. "It was a Friday afternoon. Richard had noticed that events were cowards: they didn't occur singly, but instead they would run in packs and leap out at him all at once" (*Neverwhere* 12). Richard here expresses a profound insight into time in *London Above* for those under the control of others. Several individuals and organizations exert control over Richard.

The most apparent locus of control—and, incidentally, the one that almost causes him to be tardy to his dinner appointment—is his job. Richard is working on the "Wandsworth report, which was overdue and taking up most of his head" (*Neverwhere* 12). Meanwhile, Richard "knew that if he were only left alone to finish it...if...the phone did not ring..." that all would be well (*Neverwhere* 12). But the phone rings, and pressure is exerted upon him by Sylvia, the managing director's personal assistant, who uses the authority of her superior to rush Richard's work. Richard feels certain that he could finish the work given no distractions, but he is besieged by them.

As he must deal with this pressure, Richard must also coordinate a dinner with Jessica, his fiancée, and her boss, Mr. Stockton. The narrator observes, "It was, as Jessica had pointed out to him at least a dozen times in the last month, the most important day of his life" (*Neverwhere* 12). Jessica uses immediacy here to push him to privilege the immediate event—the dinner with Mr. Stockton—over any other event in the gradual

arc of his life. The problem is that Richard does not remember her emphasis on this event. The narrator notes:

[D]espite the Post-it note Richard had left on his fridge door at home, and the other Post-it note he had placed on the photograph of Jessica on his desk, he had forgotten about it completely and utterly. (*Neverwhere* 12)

Honest forgetfulness seems to prevent him from remembering the event. At an unconscious level, however, Richard seems to subtly rebel against the controls placed on him by his fiancée.

While he is rushed to finish an important report for his superior, Richard finds time to call the restaurant and reserve a table. This takes at least two phone calls, since they hang up on him on his first try. Had he confirmed the reservation earlier, it would not have taken as long, but his reminders, placed in two seemingly obvious places, have failed. These reminders are significant, since they illustrate Richard's reaction to the control placed on him by Jessica. It is believable that he would disregard the note on the refrigerator, but it seems impossible for him not to glance at a picture of his fiancée once or twice a day. Yet, he does not confirm the reservation, thereby enabling him to remove the Post-it note, thereby enabling him to see the image of his fiancée. Instead, he "kept meaning to, but there had been so much to do and Richard had known that there was plenty of time" (*Neverwhere* 14). Thus, we see that this goes beyond simple forgetfulness; Richard privileges his work responsibilities over his responsibilities to his fiancée.

The true significance of these events for our discussion of time is that Richard feels forced to choose one responsibility over another. Most importantly, it seems that he

must make a choice; otherwise, he cannot function. London Above is portrayed through Richard's eyes as a fast, confused world in which events are clumped together haphazardly, irreconcilably. Richard, on the other hand, shows a resistance to London Above's mode of immediacy in his forgetfulness and disorganization—he quips that “if ever...they made disorganization an Olympic sport, he could be disorganized for Britain” (*Neverwhere* 16). His difficulties are deeper than disorganization, however; they seem to derive from a stifled but intense frustration with the simultaneous deadlines and pressures of his world. He can deal with no more than one task at a time and is barely able to function in London Above, a world in which irreconcilable priorities demand his exclusive energy and attention. As a result, he concentrates for as long as possible on one task—for example, the aforementioned Wandsworth Report—in hopes of accomplishing it and thus lessening the overall pressure. London Above demands that he work toward multiple tasks at the same time—it demands both dynamism and singularity. Richard lacks dynamism: he can do one thing at one time effectively. His actions exhibit the requisite singularity for survival in the Upworld, but such singularity avails him little without the complementary dynamism, or cohesion.

Richard's inability to deal with the pressures of immediacy in London Above is made especially clear when he is compared with and contrasted to Jessica. After Richard has entered London Below, a scene from Jessica's point of view shows her coordinating an art exhibition launch for Arnold Stockton, her boss. She is nervous because Mr. Stockton is late, and it is revealed that,

It was just as well she didn't have a boyfriend, she would tell her friends.

There'd be no time for one. Still, it *would* be nice, she thought, when she

got a moment: someone to go to galleries with on the weekends...

(*Neverwhere* 163)

There are several similarities between Jessica's situation and Richard's situation in the scenes examined above. It is notable, firstly, that Jessica, too, feels pressure from immediacy in London Above; specifically, she is pressured by her obligations to Mr. Stockton, the angry crowd outside, and her insistence on perfection (*Neverwhere* 164-65). She also seems to choose one larger "pressure"—her work—over another potential pressure—having a boyfriend. Finally, Mr. Stockton controls her through immediacy—this is evident in his insistence on a "private viewing before the event begins" and his half-hour tardiness (*Neverwhere* 164). Here, we see Jessica not as "the Creature from the Black Lagoon," but rather as someone caught up in a system (*Neverwhere* 16). In this scene, Jessica's struggles are explicitly equated with Richard's. While Jessica's character is certainly unappealing, in this scene we see her personality as an effect of London Above's environment. She, like Richard, suffers under the tendency of her world to impose multiple urgent and incommensurate pressures at the same time.

Neverwhere does portray Jessica, however, as the antagonist to Richard as protagonist. Jessica tells her friends that "[t]here'd be no time for [a boyfriend] if she had one" after Richard has gone Below. This statement, however, is proven false when one considers her actions before Richard goes Below. In the opening exposition of the novel, "Jessica was in the process of organizing a traveling exhibition of Mr. Stockton's angel collection..." (*Neverwhere* 11). Even then, Jessica is busy organizing the exhibition; even then, she would, if her statement held, have no time for a boyfriend. Yet she makes

the time by treating her relationship with Richard as an extension of her own interests.

The opening exposition states:

Richard found himself, on otherwise sensible weekends, accompanying her to places like the National Gallery and the Tate Gallery....On weekends when they did not go to art galleries or to museums, Richard would trail behind Jessica as she went shopping... (*Neverwhere* 9-10)

Both actions—going to museums/galleries and shopping—are clearly against his will.

The narrator wryly remarks that at museums and art galleries, Richard “learned that walking around museums too long hurts your feet...” (*Neverwhere* 10). The verb “trail” when describing Richard’s accompaniment while shopping is likewise clearly negative.

We see here that Jessica does indeed have time for a boyfriend, so long as she controls the actions that are important to him; she makes his sense of immediacy change to meet hers. Another example is when she assures him that a dinner with her boss would be “the most important day of his life” (*Neverwhere* 12). Here we see her method of dealing with immediacy most effectively. Jessica is obsessively concerned about the way Mr. Stockton perceives her, as seen in her insistence that Richard not interrupt or disagree with him and that he laugh when Mr. Stockton makes a joke (*Neverwhere* 21). Jessica’s mode of immediacy is driven by a desire to advance in her job and, more specifically, to please Mr. Stockton. Therefore, she integrates Richard into her mode of immediacy, controlling and dictating what drives him. In doing so, she piles more pressures on Richard. Since Jessica is, in Richard’s perception, symbolic of London Above, we can see that this cohesion of all pressures is the primary and preferred way that upworlders live their lives.

Richard, on the other hand, does not seem to know how to integrate all the aspects of his immediacy into one another. In the single scene before he goes Below, he rushes from pressure to pressure at the whim of those around him. Thus Jessica laments that his “potential” would fulfill itself, “[i]f only he were a little more *focused*...” (*Neverwhere* 11, emphasis mine). Jessica here judges his personality correctly; Richard suffers in London Above because he lacks a focus—a way to streamline his entire existence into one cohesion. Instead, he aims to achieve his goals sequentially while others are combining their struggles so as to manage them better. Therefore, the basic nature of immediacy in London Above is revealed: for personal and professional fulfillment in London Above, its inhabitants must constantly multi-task while constantly integrating those tasks into one another. Richard’s aforementioned singularity of action thus prevents him from achieving fulfillment in London Above.

Meaninglessness in Action

The most profound frustration that Richard has with the lifestyle of London Above, however, is its meaninglessness. This is first hinted at in the prologue, in which the narrator notes that Richard’s friends are celebrating his departure from his Scottish home town to London “with an enthusiasm that, to Richard, was beginning to border on the sinister” (*Neverwhere* 2). The party is clearly being thrown for its own sake, rather than for Richard’s. Later in the novel, there are other hints at London Above’s meaninglessness—for example, Richard never mentions enjoying his job in London, although he places extreme importance on it. Richard’s frustration, though, it is not fully realized until he returns from London Below to London Above. Richard rejects Door’s offer to remain in London Below to help her “unite London Below” because he feels he

belongs in a world in which “the most dangerous thing you ever have to watch out for is a taxi in a bit of a hurry” (*Neverwhere* 315-16). After the novelty of Upworld luxuries wears off, though, Richard finds himself detached from those pleasures. He does not unpack his possessions and spends his nights staring out into the night after which, “Eventually, reluctantly, he would undress, and climb into bed, and go to sleep” (*Neverwhere* 325, 328).

An office get-together after he has returned from London Below to London Above showcases the futility he perceives in his home world. When he cannot concentrate on the conversations at a bar, Richard realizes that “he was not interested in any of what he was able to hear” (*Neverwhere* 329). He also resists his coworkers’ attempts to match him with “the new girl from Computer Services” (*Neverwhere* 329). Richard then sees “the rest of his life”: he and she would go to his apartment that night, make love, unpack his possessions together, marry, have two children, and move to the suburbs.¹⁰ Richard reflects, “And it would not be a bad life...Sometimes there is nothing you can do” (*Neverwhere* 330). In reaction to the life he foresees, Richard leaves the pub—an echo of his flight from the meaningless farewell party in the prologue—and subsequently leaves London Above for London Below. Immediately before this abandonment, Gary, a friend and co-worker, tells Richard, “Give me boredom,” so long as he can provide for himself, as if that is the ultimate end to which one is to strive (*Neverwhere* 332). Comfort and survival, which Gary and all of London Above deem

¹⁰ “[T]he girl from Computer Services” is not given a name, which furthers Richard’s growing anxiety about Upworld romantic relationships. Her namelessness, combined with Richard’s vision of their life together, seems to say that *who* one marries is not as important as *that* one marries a reasonably attractive, compatible partner. His friends are not trying to set him up with her because they see promise in their union, but because they see both as lonely, quiet, single people.

all-important, are purely concerns of the immediate moment, of immediacy. London Above, in Richard's eyes, isolates the current moment and places an undue importance on it. What is more, Richard feels he is powerless to escape living this life ("Sometimes, there is nothing you can do."), even though he also sees the good in it ("And it would not be a bad life."). He feels that London Above is constructed in such a way that those who want to aim toward something higher than comfort or survival cannot do so. He sees no one around him who, like Door and others in the Underside, strives for high ideals. Instead, they live out and have conversations about their meaningless lives. Their concern is for the present: for comfort, for security. What Richard ultimately rejects in London Above, then, is the city's preference for immediacy and its perceived rejection of graduality.

Richard believes his rejection is of London Above and its people, not his perception of it. He does not, however, search for meaning in this world—he sees none around him and leaves. Just as the negatives of Ireland and the Catholic Church force Stephen Daedalus out of his homeland in Joyce's *Portrait*, the negatives of London Above force Richard to leave. But just as Stephen Daedalus focuses on the evils of his society, so too does Richard. One sees, even in Richard's narration, that London Above's existence is not totally meaningless.

While it is true that London Above, as Richard experiences it, generally rejects graduality, the character of Arnold Stockton provides a hint that the whole world may not be this way. Mr. Stockton, Jessica's boss, is portrayed as someone who asserts his importance on everyone. He is a media giant, a "caricature" of real-life mega-executives, and owns, through Stocktons PLC, "a little bit of everything" (*Neverwhere* 172). He is

also a minor character: he appears physically in one scene, and in conversation in another. Contrary to his portrayal as a capitalist behemoth, however, he collects various representations of angels. This collection forms the exhibit, *Angels over London*, that Jessica organizes for him. Mr. Stockton says that when he, as a child, looked at a certain angel carved into a door—the Angelus, or the door to the angel Islington’s prison—he felt as if “it knew what I was thinking” (*Neverwhere* 173). Mr. Stockton sacrifices his resources to restore the angel in question (the restoration took “a shitload of money,” in his words) and puts it on display so that “it maybe can inspire some other little penniless brat to start his own communications empire” (*Neverwhere* 173). Thus we arrive at another, more poignant interpretation of his motives, since nowhere is it mentioned that Mr. Stockton profited significantly from the exhibition. We can assume that such a venture *could* be profitable, but we can also assume that such profitability would be a relative drop in the bucket when compared to his other holdings.¹¹ It certainly would not merit him spending so much of Jessica’s time on the venture. We can thus take him at his word, that he intends to inspire other young people as he was inspired. Mr. Stockton’s goal in this exhibition is to restore and make available to the public the art that influenced him as a child.

While Mr. Stockton and Jessica are preparing to open the exhibition, Richard is looking for the Angelus with Door. He pays little attention to Mr. Stockton or to what Mr. Stockton has to say. He does not reflect on Mr. Stockton later, which is significant. One reason is Jessica’s perception of the angel collection. She compares the collection to

¹¹ “Stocktons [PLC] owned a little bit of everything: satellites, newspapers, record companies, amusement parks, books, magazines, comics, television stations, film companies” (*Neverwhere* 172).

Richard's unintended troll collection, convincing herself that both are a mark of "endearing eccentricity" and that "great men always collected something" (*Neverwhere* 11-12). Jessica's interpretation of the angel collection as eccentricity would be Richard's, since, having earlier chosen to help Door over having dinner with Jessica and Mr. Stockton, he never met the corporate behemoth. Richard would thus be blind to the good in Mr. Stockton's intentions, both through his obliviousness at the moment it is shown and by Jessica's interpretation. Not only are his intentions at least partly good, but they are part of a larger goal. Mr. Stockton could spend his (and Jessica's) time on more profitable measures, but he chooses to make the art exhibition a priority. The exhibition, as a goal of his life at that time, thus becomes part of Mr. Stockton's mode of immediacy. Within this mode of immediacy, we see that graduality is included in it, as he takes an inspiration from his childhood, refurbishes it, and preserves it for the future.

London Above is therefore not as bad as Richard thinks it is, but he is unjustified in leaving. As we shall see in the next chapter, his experience in London Below gives him an opportunity to make graduality part of his mode of immediacy, which he could not accomplish in London Above. The controls placed on him in his home world are too strong for him to escape, even though it is evident that not all are so constrained as he.

Chapter Four

Immediacy in London Below

“An image from somewhere: a scribbled drawing, of two angels in flight above a perfect city; and over the image a child’s perfect handprint, which stains the paper blood-red. It came into my head unbidden, and I no longer knew what it meant.”

—“Murder Mysteries” (*Angels* 165)

When we speak of London Above’s preference for immediacy and tendency toward futility, we naturally contrast that statement with London Below. When Richard Mayhew rejects London Above, he embraces London Below and the chance to find meaning in the events of his life. It should not be construed, however, that the dichotomy between the two cities is so simplistic in *Neverwhere* that London Below diametrically opposes London Above. Gaiman has composed an elaborate, complex pair of worlds within his elaborate, complex novel. While all the characters in London Above seem, in Richard’s perception, to be fixed on a meaningless immediacy, London Below contains characters that both exemplify and oppose this ideal. On one side, there are those who commit their immediacy toward a singular goal—these dedicate each passing moment toward that goal and endure what they must to achieve it. For the most part, they concentrate on the present to achieve one all-important goal in the future. When that goal is accomplished, they have another, larger goal to which they dedicate themselves. On the other side, there are those who do not have an overarching goal in their immediacy. The latter are similar to Richard’s portrayal of the inhabitants of London Above.

Because of the considerable arc of the novel set in London Below, we can discern divisions in these groups. Within both groups—that is, those who do and do not have a goal to their immediacy—there exist those who commit their lives to a purpose beyond

themselves and those who commit their lives to self-interested gains. This division is not simplistic, and many characters seem to fall into both categories at different points. In the course of the novel, however, their affinity for one or the other shows through. Similarly, the division is not one between good and evil—heroes and the more ambiguous characters fall on both sides of the fence, while villains remain firmly self-interested. One can be good or neutral and be self-interested, while one cannot be a villain and serve a higher ideal than oneself.

Immediacy Toward a Purpose: Benevolence

Those who seek a larger goal than themselves are, in *Neverwhere*, the heroes: Door and Richard. This mode of immediacy—one could call it benevolence—entails a number of aspects, some of which are positive, some of which are negative, all of which are present in both characters. These attributes include unconditional commitment to the goal, contrasted with an often easily-provoked fear of danger; perception of the steps necessary for their goal, contrasted with blinding naïveté; trust in others to help achieve their goal, contrasted with sometimes trusting the wrong people. These traits are important, but not as important as the characters that possess them; similarly, the characters of Door and Richard are not as important as the ways they exhibit their chosen mode of immediacy in London Below.

Before Richard goes Below, he has no purpose to his existence, but he develops one through the course of the novel. He begins his time Below, understandably, with a desire to “get back to normal again” and wants “to know how to get [his] life back” (*Neverwhere* 112). This desire does not disappear throughout the novel, although it does fall to the back of his mind once he joins Door and the marquis de Carabas on their quest

to find out who killed the House of Arch—Door’s family. Surely, this return to normalcy is what Richard believes to be his primary reason for acting in London Below. When Richard is asked by Islington what he wants, Richard tells the angel, “I want my life back. And my apartment. And my job” (*Neverwhere* 181). When the quest is over and he is resting in the halls of the Blackfriars, Richard asks the group, “What about getting me home?” (*Neverwhere* 308). Before this question, though, we see his concern for the others on his quest, as he asks the Black Friar abbot about each of his friends and, just before he asks about himself, asking Door and the marquis if they have attained what they wished. He is concerned for them, but also feels that it is only fair that he receives what he believes he has been seeking.

In aiding Door’s quest and in seeking his return to London Above, Richard finds a meaning to his life that is larger than the one he previously had. Thus, I believe that Richard only *believes* he is seeking re-entry to London Above. Richard certainly desires to regain his home on a literal level in the novel: at roughly the beginning of his journey in London Below, he mentally writes a diary entry that ends with “*I want to go home*” (*Neverwhere* 121). Nearer to the midpoint of the journey, he tells Hunter, Door’s mysterious bodyguard hired at the Traveling Market, that he is “trying to get back to the real London, and my old life” (*Neverwhere* 203). At other points in the course of the quest Richard has similar thoughts, but they are not constant—Richard becomes detached from what he believes his quest to be. For a man who is “far out of [his] depth,” Richard’s few comments late in the novel on his desire to return home are, with few exceptions, made only in response to direct question (*Neverwhere* 277).

When Richard is escorted into a library on the subway carriage domain of the Earl, he remarks on his lack of amazement: “The longer he was here, the more he took at face value” (*Neverwhere* 143). This statement could be stretched to include his outlook on immediacy. Richard’s unsuitability to London Above, as shown above, is derived partly from a tacit rejection of the mode of immediacy it entails. He seeks meaning, but can find none—hence his immersion in work and in the life Jessica plans for him. In London Below, he need not search for meaning—it surrounds him on all sides. In London Below, when he takes things at face value, he can take immediacy and, therefore, time itself, at face value. Therefore, the two goals—Door’s quest and his return—merge and find their conclusions almost contemporaneously. After they have been achieved, though, he must find a new goal; he has changed, as he tells Jessica in definitively ending their relationship (*Neverwhere* 326). He has changed in that he now must seek meaning, wherever it lies.

By the end of the novel, Richard’s mode of immediacy differs little from that of Door throughout the novel. Door begins the novel in a “harum-scarum tumbling flight through passages and tunnels” away from Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar (*Neverwhere* 6). She begins her quest, at the marquis’s insistence, in the House Without Doors, her family’s home, watching the video journal entry that her pursuers made at Islington’s orders to lead her to the angel. She asks the marquis whether they are “doing the right thing” in entering the home (*Neverwhere* 70). At this point, she seeks protection, and searching the House Without Doors seems to be a pointless and painful tangent to this purpose. She changes her opinion, though, when the computerized image of Lord Portico, her father, implores her, “You must believe in Islington...Avenge us. Avenge your

family” (*Neverwhere* 87). While she does not seek revenge, she naïvely believes the words to be genuinely his.¹² She is dedicated to her father’s wishes, but fails to see the unlikelihood of her father, who fought for unity and thus peace in London Below, demanding vengeance. Furthermore, she appears to have no inner turmoil while she advances on this perilous road. Instead, she follows this road to its end in Islington’s chambers without hesitation and without reflection on why she is doing so.

Immediacy Toward a Purpose: Self-Interest

Richard and Door are contrasted in *Neverwhere* with those who have a purpose motivated by self-interest, principally Hunter and Islington. Hunter, particularly, embodies the immediacy of London Below. When threatened with confinement by the Blackfriars as Richard undertakes the Ordeal of the key, she calculates

the odds of getting Door over the side of the bridge first unharmed, then with only minor injuries, and lastly with major injury to herself, but only minor injury to Door. (*Neverwhere* 212)

As this scene shows, she always places her frame of mind in the present moment, which is most often a fight. Still, her life is oriented toward killing the great beasts of the world’s underground cities. When Richard asks her, “What are you after?” she tells of how she has killed mythical beasts in New York, Berlin, and Calcutta. She says, “And I shall slay the Beast of London...I will kill him, or I will die in the attempt” (*Neverwhere* 203-4). The Beast is an ancient creature that ran to the sewers and eventually grew into an unstoppable killing machine. It guards the Labyrinth, which leads to the angel

¹² Door tells the Earl, “Vengeance?...Yes, that was what my father said. But I mostly just want to understand what happened, and to protect myself” (*Neverwhere* 140).

Islington's prison. Hunter's goal is important because it lacks reason. She gives no explanation for why she wishes to kill these beasts, and none is asked. She has a purpose, but it is a self-serving one.

Hunter's mode of immediacy, as seen through her actions and interactions, combines a dedication to the present moment with a constant awareness of what she eventually wants to achieve. She believes that "Hunting, like life...consists chiefly of waiting" (*Neverwhere* 191). Because she is patient, she can defer her goal until the moment arrives and thus is able to spend each moment in concentration. Hence her betrayal of Richard and Door to Islington and their subsequent lack of suspicion, though warned much earlier by Croup and Vandemar, "There's a traitor in your nest" (*Neverwhere* 158). She concentrates at each moment on achieving the present goal with such abandon that she makes the rest of the party believe that is all she truly cares about. They know of her hunting, but she never speaks of it except in response to direct questions. She seems to be detached from it—and she is, until Croup and Vandemar give her a spear capable of killing the Beast in return for her betrayal. When she must give the spear up, she stays calm. Though she is in effect held captive by the marquis's crossbow, she walks a little ahead of them and "sa[ys] nothing" (*Neverwhere* 273-74). She stays silent and reserved until she meets the Beast and, "in a voice that was pure joy, she said, 'Yes. At last'" (*Neverwhere* 280). Hunter defers her goal until she can fully indulge in it.

Hunter's goal is problematic, however, because of its blindness to everyone else and, more importantly, to its own inadequacies. She confesses that she "did a bad thing...And now I make amends," just before she sacrifices herself so Richard can kill the Beast (*Neverwhere* 283). This act is meritorious in that it is sacrificial, but it is not

truly self-giving. Hunter cares for the instant of the hunt, not the victory. When in Bangkok, she gives away the Great Weasel's pelt to "a girl who had caught her eye" to pay, the text suggests, for sex¹³ (*Neverwhere* 192). She tells the marquis that she does not keep her life hidden away because hunters "don't go in for that kind of thing" (*Neverwhere* 282). Hunter cares only for a moment of battle with the great beasts of the world. The possibility and finality of death enhances the moment of combat. When the moment is over, she only cares for the next battle in the next city. Every other moment is mere waiting for the next battle.¹⁴ Hunter thus directs her entire life toward intermittent moments of immediacy.

The angel Islington, another character whose mode of immediacy favors self-interest, is similar in its combined patience for and fanatical obsession with attaining its goal.¹⁵ Islington seeks freedom from an indefinite prison sentence in London Below and then to invade Heaven. To do so, Islington needs Door and the key from the Blackfriars so it can open the door to Heaven in its prison (*Neverwhere* 293-94). When it walks in its prison, its face is "pale and wise, and gentle," contrasted only with appearing perhaps "a little lonely" (*Neverwhere* 119). Herein we see patience with the term of Islington's imprisonment. It manipulates people to achieve its goals, and waits serenely for the plans to take effect—it has been waiting probably "thirty, forty thousand years"¹⁶ in punishment, and can certainly wait longer (*Neverwhere* 179). When Islington gives

¹³ It is strongly implied elsewhere in the novel that Hunter is a lesbian. When she meets Serpentine—whose wrecked wedding dress is obviously associated with the man-hating Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*—she "reached out a white finger and gently stroked Hunter's brown cheek with it, a gesture of affection and possession" (*Neverwhere* 196).

¹⁴ Recreation—such as the aforementioned prostitute—would only be acceptable for Hunter after the kill.

¹⁵ Islington, as an angel, has no sex and is therefore referred to (both here and in *Neverwhere*'s narration) as "it."

¹⁶ Islington's estimate on how long ago it received the wine of Atlantis as a gift.

instructions to Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar, it is short and direct, interrupting Mr. Croup's characteristic "toadying and crawling" (*Neverwhere* 65). Finally, when Richard and Door reach its chambers through the Angelus, it admonishes them to obtain the key from the Blackfriars while using its last bottle of wine from Atlantis to intoxicate them (*Neverwhere* 178-182). Islington, therefore, knows the value of spending as little time on a task as possible. It does not wish to waste time with Mr. Croup's flatteries and does not want Richard and Door to ask any questions about the task it appoints to them.

Islington is also similar to Hunter in its disregard for morality in achieving its goal. Islington is asked by Door why it had her family killed, and it replies, "Not all of you...There was always the possibility that you might not have...worked out as well as you did" (*Neverwhere* 292). Islington's slaughter of Door's family is certainly motivated by revenge because Portico, Door's father, laughed at its request to aid its escape. More importantly, though, it needs one of Portico's family to escape, and thus forgoes total revenge in favor of its goal (*Neverwhere* 292-94). We see, then, the same commitment to achieving a goal at the expense of both morality and self-gratification that is found in Hunter.

As an angel, Islington is influenced by Christian imagery, but is not in total conformity with that imagery. Indeed, *Neverwhere* does not equate the symbol of an angel with Christianity. Mr. Stockton's angel collection is described in this way:

There were modern and classical angels...Western angels, Middle Eastern angels, Eastern angels. Michelangelo angels. Joel Peter Witkin angels, Picasso angels, Warhol angels. (*Neverwhere* 168)

Thus Islington, while lacking wings,¹⁷ still is “unmistakably, an angel” (*Neverwhere* 119). It conforms to several recognizable aspects of mainstream Christian imagery such as agelessness,¹⁸ dominion over an earthly domain,¹⁹ and viewing Lucifer as foolish, as expressed in its assertion that the fallen angel was an “idiot” and “wound up lord and master of nothing at all” (*Neverwhere* 291).²⁰ Islington is similar to Lucifer in that both are punished for their respective actions; however, Islington’s punishment seems to be temporal, while Lucifer’s is eternal.²¹ Islington’s punishment seems temporal because its punishers gave it the door to its prison, “[a]nd they took the key to the door, and put it down here too” (*Neverwhere* 293). This temporal punishment is inconsistent with Christian doctrine of the fall of angels, which states that such punishment is eternal.²² Islington’s symbolic origins are perhaps the most complex of any character in *Neverwhere*.

Islington also shows a remarkable complexity in its character and intentions. While it believes that its destruction of Atlantis was merited (“*They deserved it.*” [*Neverwhere* 292]), it is disturbed by a dream of that action. Afterward, it “walked through the chambers of its hall, . . . touching things, as if to reassure itself of their

¹⁷ Tertullian: “Every spirit possesses wings. This is a common property of both angels and demons” (Bercot 15). Gaiman seems, therefore, to purposely deviate from the traditional Christian angel.

¹⁸ Lactantius: “The angels neither allow nor wish themselves to be called gods, since they are immortal” (Bercot 17). Lactantius writes here of heavenly angels, not fallen ones.

¹⁹ Origen: “In the Holy Scriptures, we find that there are princes over individual nations. . . . By the nature of the passage, these princes are clearly shown *not* to be human beings. Rather, they are certain [spiritual] powers” (Bercot 16). Islington’s domain is Atlantis.

²⁰ Saint Irenaeus: “The creation is not subjected to his power, since indeed he is himself but one among created things” (Bercot 593). Lactantius: “From the beginning, [God] had given the devil power over the earth” (Bercot 594). Lucifer/Satan is given the power to tempt humanity (hence, “power over the earth”), but not to alter the creation.

²¹ Irenaeus: “For this reason, too, God has banished from His presence the one who of his own accord stealthily sowed the tares [i.e. Lucifer/Satan]” (Bercot 592).

²² “And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, [God] has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day” (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Jude 6).

existence” (*Neverwhere* 229). The angel seems here to identify with the dead of Atlantis. It smiles at Richard as he enters the angel’s prison and Richard remarks, “That was the most chilling thing of all: the gentle compassion, the sweetness of that smile” (*Neverwhere* 288). The narration never questions Islington’s sincerity in its affectionate treatment of those it wishes to exploit, yet its evil is likewise unquestionable. Just as Hunter is able to at once dedicate her life to her employer while betraying that employer to achieve her goals, Islington can have compassion for human beings while justifying their massacre and rejecting its punishment for that massacre.

Islington’s goals are as complex as its symbolic makeup. Islington wants to leave the temporal prison in which it is trapped and invade Heaven. Heaven in Christianity—and, indeed, in most Western conceptions—is a place which transcends time; as such, the angels who inhabit it are not bound by time as earth is. Augustine advocated this vision: “Nor are any times or created thing coeternal to [God], even if there is an order which transcends time [That is, the order of angels]” (XI.xxx.40, 40n). If the angelic order residing in Heaven is above time, then they would not experience immediacy or graduality. Immediacy requires an event immediately after the present one, toward which one is striving; graduality requires a past, present, and an unforeseen future. When Islington’s prison is described from the angel’s perspective, the description emphasizes temporal qualities: the door “had tarnished, over the centuries, almost to black”; the candles had illuminated its passage for “tens of thousands of years”; it walked on “smooth channels its bare feet had worn, over the centuries, in the rock” (*Neverwhere* 119, 230). In the two scenes from Islington’s perspective, these are the most specific details besides those of Islington itself. We can thus surmise that temporality is part of

the torture of its imprisonment: in the language of this analysis, it suffers from a constant immediacy with no apparent end. This is distinguished from Heaven, which, as it is above time, has no past or future.

The climax of the novel sees Islington ending in failure in a manner that is similar, but still distinguished from, Hunter's failure. Islington resents and attempts to reject its imprisonment, and its prison term "ends" with Door sending it "[h]alfway across space and time" (*Neverwhere* 307). This action traps the immortal Islington in the same sort of prison in which it suffered for so long: eternal immediacy without graduality. Hunter wishes to kill the Beast, or "die in the attempt"; as stated above, she dies aiding Richard in slaying the Beast (*Neverwhere* 204). The connection between these two is that neither achieves their goal; the difference lies in the differing degrees of acceptance of their fates. When Door opens the entryway to Heaven "[a]s far and hard away" as she can, Islington first threatens to kill her and then offers to tell Door her living sister's location (*Neverwhere* 299-300). Hunter sacrifices herself once she realizes she "did a bad thing," thereby giving up her dream to kill the Beast (*Neverwhere* 283). She goes further by giving up the title, "Warrior," to Richard, even though it was only through her sacrifice that he could have earned it. Though she cares little for titles or even victory, Hunter's sacrifice transforms her into a benevolent character rather than a self-interested one. Richard's affinity for her knife once he returns to London Above is therefore significant. He places it on the mantelpiece and uses it as a letter-opener, both times calling it "Hunter's knife" rather than his own (*Neverwhere* 324, 328). His tenderness suggests remembrance, not a romantic attachment: when Jessica asks if he has met someone, he thinks of Hunter but decides she and the other women of London Below aren't

“someones in the way she meant” (*Neverwhere* 326). Islington, by contrast, is not mentioned at all in Richard’s London Above remembrances of London Below. He remembers Hunter’s sacrifice with reverence, while he forgets Islington’s self-centered plans.

One thus sees in London Below a preference for those who practice benevolence over those who are motivated by self-interest. Door asks Richard to stay in London Below, imploring him to help her practice benevolence there. His presence is desired in London Below, and his heroism is heralded by the most significant characters in that world as he leaves (*Neverwhere* 310-15). At the end of the novel, though, Richard turns back to London Below, though he thought he belonged in London Above (*Neverwhere* 336). He does so because only in London Below can he truly make a difference. A preference between saving others and saving the self is thus clearly shown, though there does not seem to be such a distinction in London Above. The preference is primarily seen through Richard, who sees Door as a friend, Hunter as a heroine, and Islington as a monster.

Immediacy Toward No Purpose

While the action in *Neverwhere*’s London Below is centered on characters who work toward some purpose, there are many supporting characters who do not share this mentality. They are still to be distinguished from the mentality in London Above that Richard rejects, however. Gary, after Richard has told him about London Below, says, “Great. Give me boredom. At least I know where I’m going to eat and sleep tonight. I’ll still have a job on Monday” (*Neverwhere* 332-33). Inhabitants of London Above strive toward a goal which means nothing except comfort and survival. In London Below,

those who do not have an over-arching goal to their lives have much more complex motives. There are many such characters, but the most important to examine are those affiliated with the Traveling Market, Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar, and the Beast.

The Traveling Market has a tremendous influence in the plot of *Neverwhere*, though it is the setting only for two scenes and one flashback. It is the only explicit marker of time in London Below: the market is at a set time, at a set place. That set time is only referred to as “tonight,” and the time and place is spread entirely by word of mouth. It is suggested that the Blackfriars supervise it, as Richard sees “a large black man, wearing the black robes of a Dominican monk” tolling the bell to end the Harrod’s market (*Neverwhere* 111). The market would be a likely “ministry” of the Black Friar order, but this suggested origin matters little: to the market’s participants, it is almost an organic event. The characters never refer to the next market until sometime that “day,” suggesting (even if it is not the case) that somehow all of London Below spontaneously agrees on its time and place (*Neverwhere* 235-36). Certainly, London Below agrees on a market truce which bars all disputes from becoming violent (*Neverwhere* 245). “The market’s special,” Door says, which means that no one can lie about when it is being held and, similarly, no one can break the market truce (*Neverwhere* 236). It instills unity and, for a time, morality into London Below, even though they are so divided: “There was something deeply tribal about the people,” Richard remarks (*Neverwhere* 99). Still, the market allows any type of sale without judgment, from dreams to weapons to rubbish (*Neverwhere* 98). The market truce, then, imposes basic civility, while the market is economically unregulated. This environment makes the market conducive to those who

seek no over-arching goal in their mode of immediacy. Two such characters are Old Bailey and the marquis de Carabas, both of whom are closely associated with the market.

Old Bailey, a fairly simplistic character, clearly shows how constant trade is an acceptable means of existence, even if such a life does not allow a goal outside itself. His existence is simple, but it is his choice. Old Bailey wants to remain out of things which do not concern his simple existence of trade and talking to his birds (the marquis's stored life gives him "the creepy shivers, having it around" [*Neverwhere* 150]). Though an underdweller, he lives on various rooftops of London, having "fled the world at ground-level so long ago" (*Neverwhere* 148). He is of indeterminate age, expressing fondness for St. Paul's Cathedral, a building that "had changed little in the last three hundred years," suggesting that his memory extends back at least that far (*Neverwhere* 147). Similarly, it is not clear when the market began: the last time the Market Truce was violated is estimated by Hunter as "about three hundred years ago" (*Neverwhere* 245). It, like Old Bailey, "moves" to "[d]ifferent places" when it wishes (*Neverwhere* 88). It is also, as examined above, nonjudgmental about what is sold; it gives its attendees the opportunity to buy and sell without real regulation. Therefore, just as the market organizes its seemingly endless "life" around the people it serves while retaining the freedom to choose its location, so Old Bailey orders his seemingly endless life around trade at the market while retaining the freedom to live where he wishes. He thus becomes not merely a representative of the market, but an exemplar of its practices.

The marquis de Carabas provides a more complex image of the market, and provides a commentary on its mode of immediacy. The comparison and contrast between the marquis and Old Bailey is obvious in their three interactions. In the first, the latter

greeted the former this way: “You’re not wanted here, de Carabas. Get away. Clear off” (*Neverwhere* 45). Old Bailey is aware both of the marquis’s reputation and, probably, the reason for his visit. The marquis wishes to call in a favor (namely, for Old Bailey to keep his stored life safe and revive the marquis if necessary), which is his trade of choice—it is the price he charges for his services and, also, what he sometimes gives in return. This is sometimes too high a price, as seen in their second meeting. When Old Bailey offers to give the marquis information for a favor, he replies, “Much too expensive, in the long run” (*Neverwhere* 149). Thus, we see the marquis is a hard bargainer, aware of what an owed favor might cost him in the future. He is equally aware of the value of a “really big favor” owed to him by the right person—namely, Door. The marquis calls in favors from Old Bailey and, apparently, the Golden,²³ to obtain one favor from Door.

This sense of economy is indicative of the marquis’s complexity. He tells Mr. Croup that his reason for helping Door is that Lord Portico saved his life. “I never paid off my debt to him,” he says. “I prefer debts to be in my favor” (*Neverwhere* 187). Door trusts him because her father advises her that although the marquis is “a fraud and a cheat and possibly something of a monster,” he will protect her because “[h]e has to” (*Neverwhere* 212, emphasis omitted). The marquis owes this debt, yet Door offers him, and he insists upon, a “really big favor” in return for his protection. The marquis does not “give freebies,” he asserts, although he owes a debt to Door’s father (*Neverwhere* 41). His debt is to Lord Portico, though, not to Door—there are thus two transactions. There is a one-to-one trade to Lord Portico and a one-to-one trade with Door. These trades

²³ The Golden, a commune of rats, help in the effort to retrieve the marquis’s body and bring it to the market. After the marquis has been revived, a rat under orders from them leaves to tell the Golden: “all favors had been repaid, all debts were done” (*Neverwhere* 252).

indicate that the marquis, in terms of immediacy, is always concerned about the next step. His mode of immediacy is one which considers the past, the present, and the future in conjunction—he remembers his debts, calls them in when necessary, and works to advance himself. In short, his mode of immediacy favors graduality, and he is perhaps the only major character to have that perspective.

The marquis is not entirely consistent, though, as shown in the third meeting between the marquis and Old Bailey, which also allows us to ascertain the market's mode of immediacy. After he has been saved from death by the roof-dweller, the marquis, "perhaps a little sadly," says, "It would seem, Old Bailey, that I owe you a favor" (*Neverwhere* 254). Old Bailey has fulfilled his debt, but the marquis offers another favor unasked. Thus, the marquis's mode of immediacy is inconsistent. While we can make a general statement about his perspective on time, the marquis's actions sometimes contradict it. Just as his individual actions sometimes divert from his general sensibility, the market has a general mode of immediacy that is often broken by its characters. It exists for trade, and is used throughout the novel for social advancement, for social good and for social evil.

The Traveling Market's complexity contrasts starkly with the simplistic modes of immediacy of Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar. Croup and Vandemar do not want social advancement or notoriety, but, rather, the opportunity to kill and eventual payment for their services. Mr. Croup complains when Islington instructs them to protect Door, rather than assassinate her. One detects a hint of hurt pride when he wonders why Islington would "hire the two finest cutthroats in the whole of space and time, and then ask them to ensure a little girl remains unharmed" (*Neverwhere* 230). When they are first restrained

by Islington, Mr. Croup wishes to kill the angel. He is calmed by Mr. Vandemar, who says, “Not yet...He’s our boss. For this job. After we’ve been paid, maybe we could have some fun on our own time” (*Neverwhere* 129). They do not *need* to be paid to kill (as their numerous “leisure” murders attest), but are paid for reasons that are never quite explained by the text. There is no specific mention of how they are paid anywhere in the novel, and they seem relatively unconcerned with it until the payment appears to be in danger. Furthermore, Croup and Vandemar are faithful to their obligations to their employer while employed, despite their frustrations; after their payment, however, Mr. Vandemar suggests they are free to do as they please. This may or may not include killing their former employers for enjoyment—the text is never clear on this, but it is not out of the realm of possibility.

Still, Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar follow orders from Islington, despite their disagreement. They do not wish to create a sphere of influence outside their realm of destruction, and it seems as if their reward is the act of killing, just as Hunter receives her reward in the act of hunting the great beasts. In this way, they forsake the future altogether, existing solely “to do what [they] do best”—to “[k]ill someone” (*Neverwhere* 231). They do what they must to achieve that end—for example, bribing Hunter—and, at the same time, killing for fun. Croup and Vandemar amuse themselves by causing more death—such as their slaughter of the marquis de Carabas. Still, they are not free even in that—Mr. Croup feels the need to ask Islington permission to kill him after they have already done so (*Neverwhere* 230). They appear to have the power to make themselves leaders, but they choose to remain mercenaries, a status they have maintained for centuries.

Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar are ancient, like the Traveling Market and the Great Beast.²⁴ Their credentials include the burning of Troy, the plague in Flanders, and the assassination of “a dozen kings, five popes, half a hundred heroes and two accredited gods” (*Neverwhere* 129). Their agelessness appears to be, literally, the result of some superhuman ability to heal. More than that, though, it parallels the agelessness of the Traveling Market and the Great Beast. After the marquis asserts that the Beast “must have died three hundred years ago,” Old Bailey remarks, “Things like that, they’re too vicious to die. Too old and big and nasty” (*Neverwhere* 150). One could say the same of Croup and Vandemar, as well—their lives are bent around death, much like the Beast. The market opposes them in that it is based around trade, unity, and nonviolence. Still, such unity and nonviolence are never permanent, as evidenced by Door’s observation that there is “a lot of sorting out to do in London Below” (*Neverwhere* 315). And just as the market’s influence is not permanent, neither is the deadly influence of Croup and Vandemar and the Beast. The latter is slain by Richard/Hunter, while the former are sent far away by Door.

The market, Croup and Vandemar, and the Beast also represent constants in London Below. They are representative of the best and worst traits of the underside. At the same time, they are ageless in the sense that they exist despite the efforts of others to destroy them. That they cannot and do not wish to rise above themselves indicates their commonality. Croup and Vandemar, the Beast, and the Traveling Market show the existence of evil and the opportunity for good in London Below. Their mode of

²⁴ Islington is excluded from this list because its agelessness derives from being “above” time. It does not, therefore, parallel the other characters in London Below. Moreover, Islington’s mode of immediacy has a goal, whereas these do not. Similarly, while Hunter is described as very old, she is not ageless in the same way these characters are.

immediacy—that is, one without an overall goal—is, by their thematic blend of constancy and commonality, that of most of London Below. They reject graduality just as readily as those in London Above whom Richard Mayhew rejects in favor of London Below. They live for a moment in time, but do not aspire to something greater, even if it is for self-advancement. These characters are representative of the majority of underdwellers. They are unique, but they are tied by a common mode of immediacy.

Richard Mayhew, London Below, and Immediacy

Through these characters, we see that Richard Mayhew’s rejection of London Above does not mean that life in London Below is always and everywhere meaningful. It is often not meaningful, as shown by the above characters. Croup and Vandemar, the Beast, and the Traveling Market are similar to those Richard sees in London Above who organize their entire lives around one over-simple goal—such as Jessica’s quest for social advancement and Gary’s quest for self sufficiency. Both reject graduality in their lives. Whether Richard acknowledges this similarity between the two worlds or not is a question the text leaves for us to wonder: his judgment of London Above as uninteresting contrasted with the wonders of London Below suggests otherwise.

Richard may not realize how similar the two worlds can be, since London Below is exotic to him, as a foreigner “in the sewers and the magic and the dark” (*Neverwhere* 113). When Richard returns from London Below, he reminisces about the exoticisms he misses—talking rats and the Velvet Lamia, for example. He also, as discussed above, keeps Hunter in his memory. He completely forgets those aspects of London Below that are mundane to other underdwellers and are similar to London Above.

Richard does see, however, that he has the opportunity in London Below to do something above and beyond the common—to harness his moments of immediacy to a larger goal. When he sees London Above’s habits of mindless conversation and dull lives, he sees that he cannot fulfill himself in the way he can Below. The only character in London Above to achieve the mode of immediacy Richard desires is Arnold Stockton; but Richard is blinded to that potential by circumstances beyond his control. Besides, Mr. Stockton is of a significantly higher class than Richard. If Richard does not notice the similarities between the two worlds, it is because he was one of the masses in London Above, whereas he is the Warrior in London Below. London Below therefore represents Richard Mayhew’s potential to excel and to be recognized for it. He chooses London Below because only there does he have a choice. He rejects all of London Above, whether good or bad, whether he fully notices either. Thus he goes “back into the darkness, leaving nothing behind him; not even the doorway” (*Neverwhere* 336).

Chapter Five

Graduality in the Two Londons

“Once every year they forced him, sobbing and protesting, into Endless Night. During the journey he would stand near every child in the world, leave one of the dwarves’ invisible gifts by its bedside. The children slept, frozen into time.”

—“Nicholas Was...” (*Angels* 26)

This analysis has shown that the two Londons each have distinctive modes of immediacy which favor or disfavor particular attitudes. London Above, as seen through the eyes of Richard Mayhew, favors total immediacy, whereas as London Below allows for both immediacy and graduality. Graduality is, in Richard’s perception, rejected by upworlders who seem primarily concerned with a comfortable lifestyle. Graduality in London Below seems more complex and the characters exhibit that complexity in their actions. Some accept graduality, while others reject it. Richard is blind to these complexities, for the most part, and generalizes both worlds in his considerations by allowing certain characters to represent the whole of each. Door’s idealism and Hunter’s redemptive sacrifice represent London Below; Jessica’s controlling nature and Gary’s thirst for comfortable living represent London Above. In examining modes of immediacy, we have shown how the characters and the worlds of *Neverwhere* use or do not use graduality in their respective existences.

Graduality is much more complicated than a character’s or even a world’s outlook, though: as stated in the beginning of this analysis, through it we see the nature of time in *Neverwhere*. Graduality, unlike immediacy, is a perspective of time that is not chained to specific moments. A character can reconstruct a gradual arc through connecting the present moment to the past and the future or through memories that happened entirely in

the past. The past often resurrects itself in memory and narration to illuminate and provide parallels to the present moment; this is a literary convention. *Neverwhere* uses this convention, but takes it a step further. While the past merely disappears in London Above, it is given a physical presence in London Below. The contrast between the two worlds is thus made starker through this separation. At the same time, connections are made between the two worlds. We are then left with the question of whether the two can coexist as one or must remain separated forever.

London Above, London Below, and Augustine

Augustinian time has dominated the novel form since its inception. I do not wish to claim that Augustine's specific explanation of time originated this dominance, but wish rather to show that the dominance does indeed exist. Aphra Behn's *Oronooko*, among the first examples of this literary form, exhibits Augustinian time in the following passage:

I was my self an Eye-Witness to a great part, of what you will find here set down; and what I cou'd not be Witness of, I receiv'd from the Mouth of the chief Actor in this History, the *Hero* himself.... (8)

Behn constructs her narrative from her memories and from those of Oronooko, the hero, and presents them chronologically. As the novel progresses, the events connect with one another, but the past stays in the characters' memories and the future remains unknown until the final page. Although she states that *Oronooko* is a history, she admits that she measures not the past, but a memory. Not much has changed in this aspect of the novel form since Behn's seventeenth-century novel. The conception of time postulated by Augustine held most literature to its linear, past-tense roots until the twentieth century.

Though his writing is postmodern, which often rejects linear narrative, Neil Gaiman does not diverge from this form in *Neverwhere*. The novel is told in the past tense, in a basic linear fashion—events happen, pass into memory, until a climax and a falling action end the novel. Richard Mayhew and his companions do not mark days and nights because they are in constant flight; nevertheless, days and nights are marked in London Below. It is not clear how demarcation takes place, but it clearly does: for example, the Traveling Market begins and ends at a certain time. The marquis de Carabas, anxious to get to the market on time, says to Door, “Mister Time is not our friend” (*Neverwhere* 87). Characters also mark years, as the previous chapter attests. Since London Below is for the most part below ground level, however, it does not have the same clear demarcations that the sun gives to London Above. It is never explained to Richard (and thus, to the reader) how London Below’s time-keeping system works. Richard’s digital watch goes blank soon after entering London Below. He surmises that either the batteries died or “more likely, time in London Below had only a passing acquaintance with the kind of time he was used to” (*Neverwhere* 96). There is, therefore, a clear differentiation between the two world’s systems of time, though they clearly have such systems.

This differentiation is seen in the two systems’ relation to Augustine’s conception of time, which London Above appears to exemplify. As has been shown, London Above is, for Richard, uncomfortably fast-paced. While preparing for dinner with Jessica’s boss and attempting to finish his work, Richard constantly must advance to the next project, to other events—which, to his chagrin, “run in packs and leap out at him all at once” (*Neverwhere* 12). He spends so much time being anxious in the present because he must

worry about the immediate future. Richard's anxiety is caused by all the things he must do to reach future events—for example, booking a table for his dinner with Jessica and Arnold Stockton. The future is reached through a step-by-step process in the present, after which it becomes the non-existent past. The past's non-existence is seen in its irretrievability. For example, Richard “*had* made the reservation” for the dinner, but “he had not confirmed it” (*Neverwhere* 14). He cannot go back and confirm the table; he is stuck with the present situation, and must compensate for his past mistakes. This mode of immediacy, by isolating the present from its antecedent and following events, starkly contrasts the existent present with the non-existent past and future—the essence of Augustine's model.

The future, as explained above, is similar in London Above and London Below. The only apparent contradiction of Augustinian time in this regard is the old woman who, in the prologue, reads Richard's palm. She foresees his passage into London Below—“Not any London I know”—but can only tell him that his journey “starts with doors” (*Neverwhere* 3). As explained above, Augustine writes that one can only see the causes in the present which point to the future, and not the future itself. The homeless woman's prescience is therefore interesting, but is limited and represents only a minor departure from Augustinian time. In fact, Augustine's views on the future (and their consistency with London Above) are later exemplified when Richard uses the circumstances of the present to predict what would happen if he couples with the girl from Computer Services (*Neverwhere* 329). The first scene could be explained if one considers that while the homeless woman may be part of the Underside of the small Scottish town she inhabits, she has not experienced London Below. She reports that she has been to London, but this

may have been before she was forgotten by the world and fell Below (*Neverwhere* 2). Given the difference between the two worlds, it is not unreasonable to assume that she would not recognize London Below.

London Below's construction of the past in relation to London Above is not completely consistent, however, with Augustine's model. Past memories, past places, and past time are all physically present in London Below. The first such example is the House Without Doors. Constructed from locations throughout London Below, it is only accessible to the family who inhabits it. When the marquis de Carabas and Door enter it, they are assaulted by a memory of Door returning home to find her family dead. When they enter Portico's study, they experience the murder of Door's mother and sister (*Neverwhere*, 71-72, 79). Door explains, "Memories....They're imprinted in the walls" (*Neverwhere* 72). These "memories" are not necessarily the entrant's: Door only witnessed the first of them. These memories are, more likely, those of the family and are preserved by the House Without Doors despite the death of its inhabitants. As stated earlier, Augustine advocates leaving memory behind in favor of the beatific vision. In *Neverwhere*, memory manifests physically in the House Without Doors. For Augustine, memory is a physical part of the person that will be shed in reaching spiritual self-actualization; in *Neverwhere*, physical things such as memories can persist even if their antecedent causes do not.

Neverwhere goes further in contradicting Augustinian time in the physicality of past places and times. Door does not know where the rooms of the House Without Doors are located all over London. Since she says they are located in the Underside, or London Below, we can presume that they have fallen there from London Above. Door thus

considers it possible that “in the world outside, in London Above, the room[s] had long been destroyed and forgotten” (*Neverwhere* 71-72, emphasis omitted). Here, connections to forgotten places are forged deliberately. Such connections are also forged naturally. Two such examples are the London fog surrounding the Blackfriars monastery and the Labyrinth guarding the angel Islington.

The existence in London Below of London fog and the Labyrinth complete *Neverwhere*'s partial rejection of Augustinian time. London fog, a phenomenon resulting from the city's pollution, was reduced from its dangerous levels in the mid-twentieth century, but is present in London Below.²⁵ Door explains: “There are little pockets of old time in London, where things and places stay the same, like bubbles in amber....There's a lot of time in London, and it has to go somewhere—it doesn't all get used up at once” (*Neverwhere* 205). These pockets find their conflux in the Labyrinth, constructed of pieces of London Above. It appears to be a repository for lost things and lost time. The marquis de Carabas remarks that it is “one of the oldest places in London Below...Before King Lud founded the village on the Thames marshes, there was a labyrinth here” (*Neverwhere* 275). *Neverwhere* here provides an explanation for the passing of time. Augustine believed the past did not exist because it was not present. In this novel, the past can be present. Using the terms of this analysis, a past gradual arc can exist if it passes into London Below. The passing of moments of immediacy to other moments sometimes forces the past into London Below. *Neverwhere* rejects the perception that the past is non-existent by showing the conditions for its continued existence. This does not mean that *all* past is existent, but all that is not “used up” is. Neither Door nor anyone

²⁵ Hereafter, “London fog” will refer to the dangerous phenomenon occurring exclusively in London Below.

else explains what is meant here by “used up.” Part of the answer, though, lies in modes of immediacy.

London Above’s mode of immediacy, as perceived by Richard, forces its inhabitants to be constantly in motion. As one prioritizes, some events or places or even people are dropped or forgotten—they have not been used up. They exist, but the masses of London Above have moved on. These events, places, and people make up London Below. Once something has passed into the Underside, it cannot be used up, since it has nowhere else to go. London fog, for example, fell out of memory when London Above was cleaned up and thus stays Below. Gradual arcs that fall Below become stagnant, in a manner of speaking.

This explains, on a literal level, the suspension of aging in London Below. Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar’s agelessness appears to be superhuman—the Earl’s Court courtiers’, however, does not. The man-at-arms, the jester, and the guards are all marked by their advanced age. Richard imagines the earl “sixty, eighty, five hundred years ago” and sees the “wreckage” of a great man, all of which makes the elderly nobleman “so terrible, and so sad” (*Neverwhere* 145). When the earl and his court slipped into London Below, they stayed the same except for minor adaptations—inhabiting a train rather than a palace, eating candy and soda rather than fine meats and wines. They stay the same otherwise—warring with and making peace with rival courts (*Neverwhere* 133-144).

The earl’s vagueness and forgetfulness are likewise traits that he took with him from the Upworld. Old Bailey, who, like the earl, went Below centuries before, is neither vague nor unintelligent. If he were, he would not be able to justifiably claim, “If I don’t know it, it’s probably better off forgot” (*Neverwhere* 101). Old Bailey’s continued

intelligence shows that residing Below does not cause one's mind to deteriorate. Indeed, Old Bailey's knowledge of the Underside indicates that one can actually improve the state of one's mind, provided that one enters with one's senses intact. It is clear, then, that the Earl and his court entered in the same state of mind they presently exhibit. They carry on their existence as best they can under the conditions their world imposes on them. While death clearly has a place in London Below—it occurs fairly often, given the presence of Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar—but aging does not appear to exist as it does in London Above.

This stagnation of time has implications on underdwellers' living habits. Richard remarks to himself while in the Labyrinth, "He had gone beyond the world of metaphor and simile into the place of things that *are*, and it was changing him" (*Neverwhere* 277). This change is completed by the time he re-enters London Above. The chapter in which this takes place begins with long scenes centered on the initial elation of Richard's return and his newfound assertiveness (*Neverwhere* 318-24). The tone changes when he receives his belongings, and does not unpack the boxes: "As the days went on, he felt increasingly guilty about not unpacking them. But he did not unpack them" (*Neverwhere* 325). To unpack his belongings would presently be a pointless exercise—he spends nights alone, looking out at the city (*Neverwhere* 328). He does not need his belongings, and the only reason to unpack them is the eventuality that someone will come to his apartment.²⁶ His apartment serves his current purposes, and he does not feel the necessity

²⁶ When Richard imagines his life with the girl from Computer Services, he sees them "remove his possessions from the packing cases, and put them away" (*Neverwhere* 330).

to prepare for the future in this way. Richard is not concerned about meaningless social advancement; he is concerned with presently existing as he wishes to exist.

Both London Above and London Below thus favor immediacy over graduality, though in different ways. As an upworlder in London Above, Richard is anxious about the present moment because of an imminent, external deadline; as an underdweller in London Above, he has cut off the societal ties that created the newly unimportant deadlines, enabling him to focus totally on the immediate moment. The difference lies in accomplishment. An upworlder whose lifespan is delimited by death has a finite time to accomplish all of his or her goals. London Above therefore expects one to work toward accomplishing as much as possible before one dies. Mortality in London Above creates a need not present in London Below to be constantly mobile, constantly improving.

London Below expects that one exist *as is*. Dynamism and improvement are practically non-existent, because the vast majority of underdwellers simply cannot change. The Earl will forever be the Earl because that is the form in which he entered London Below. Lord Portico bemoans in his video journal, “what cripples us, who inhabit the Underside, is our petty factionalism” (*Neverwhere* 86). The problem that Portico faces is not just deeply entrenched factions, but also the very nature of his world. Underdwellers, whether they are the rabble of the Traveling Market or those with some larger purpose, *are* what they *are* at all times, for *all* times. Richard, once he has made the transition from an upworlder to an underdweller, exists as someone whose purpose is larger than a suburban home and a comfortable job. He cannot re-adapt to London Above because London Below has changed his mode of immediacy—and that change cannot be reversed. The nature of *Neverwhere* does not allow it.

Chapter Six

Minding the (Hermeneutical) Gap

“An artist comes on to the stage, carrying a big canvas, which he puts on an easel. It’s got a painting of a woman on it. And he looks at the painting and despairs of ever being a real painter. Then he sits down and goes to sleep, and the painting comes to life, steps down from the frame and tells him not to give up. To keep fighting. He’ll be a great painter one day. She climbs back into the frame. The lights dim. Then he wakes up, and it’s a painting again...”

—“The Goldfish Pool and Other Stories” (*Smoke* 93-94)

In the Gospel according to John, Pontius Pilate asks a beaten and ridiculed Jesus, “What is truth?” (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Jn. 18.38). Pilate, strangely, receives no answer, though he is portrayed by John as the single disinterested party in the Passion narrative. The silence creates a gap between the human and the divine, the profane and the sacred, *nomos* and *physis*, reality and illusion, inquirer and truth, reader and text. The silence between Pilate and Jesus is, allegorically, the oft-disputed “hermeneutical gap.”²⁷ Part of the dispute is whether or not we can or should bridge that gap. Andrew W. Hass suggests, “Let us keep respecting that gap, then. The Latin root of this verb ‘respect’ might help us: let us *see it again*, and again” (*Poetics* 29). Despite our best efforts, Hass tells us, we are still left with the gap. Human and divine, reader and text will always, necessarily be separated; this is precisely why we should explore its depth, its profundity, without imagining we have crossed to the other side.

Gaiman, in his examinations and re-examinations of separation, certainly “respects” the gap in the way that Hass advocates. Separation, on which the hermeneutical gap is based, has emerged as the dominant theme in this analysis of time in

²⁷ Cf. *Poetics* 26.

Neverwhere. I stated in the first chapter that the purpose of this thesis is to use an isolated issue—time—to explain the novel’s position on a larger issue—separation. Separation always and everywhere creates a gap. I believe Gaiman’s literature is built around the assumption that this gap is an essential part of existence. Hass has told me, “the hermeneutical gap is *not* simply a technical feature or function of a theory of interpretation. The gap goes to the heart of our very existence” (“Re: Question”). I see such a gap in *Neverwhere*, through my analysis of time.

Separation in *Neverwhere*

At one point in *Neverwhere*, the “gap” is literal. A loudspeaker reminds Richard and companions while waiting for a train to arrive to “Mind the Gap.” The “Gap” here is the space between the train and the platform. Richard ignores the voice and Hunter’s more emphatic repetition of the often-ignored warning. A “ghost-thing, the color of black smoke” wraps around his ankle and pulls him toward the Gap, and he is saved by Hunter (*Neverwhere* 126). Hunter says that only those in London Below are threatened by the creatures in the gaps. Here, what fills the gap is more dangerous to one group of people than to another group, though both groups experience the same gap.

Underdwellers must avoid the gap altogether for fear of an unnamed monster that lives there. Upworlders, having only an unlikely fall to fear, barely hear the warning to “Mind the Gap” anymore—to Richard, “it was like aural wallpaper” (*Neverwhere* 126).

Upworlders can approach the Gap; underdwellers cannot—in this way, the Gap is similar to the one between London Above and London Below. Upworlders—for example, Richard and Anaesthesia—can fall Below, but it appears that underdwellers cannot truly return to London Above. The marquis de Carabas tells Richard,

You can't go back to London Above. A few individuals manage a kind of half-life—you've met Iliaster and Lear. But that's the best you could hope for, and it isn't a good life. (*Neverwhere* 309)

Iliaster and Lear are beggars Above and cronies Below—for, respectively, the marquis and the Lord Rat-Speaker (*Neverwhere* 61, 142). Still, they are underdwellers—they are just more forward than their companions. One presumes that their begging forces upworlders to acknowledge them, if only temporarily. Such a technique works because, as Door explains, those in London Below are not noticed by those Above “unless you stop and talk to them. And even then, they forget you pretty quickly” (*Neverwhere* 167).

There is, then, a fallacy in the marquis's statement: there is no one living “between” the worlds. Iliaster and Lear live in London Below and attempt to force themselves on London Above—they are fooling themselves and, it appears, their companions. The “separateness” of this gap is finalized when Richard returns to London Above. Still, as has been (I hope) thoroughly explained above, he *cannot* stay in London Above, for he has changed into an underdweller. During this time, he is the closest anyone in *Neverwhere* gets to “straddling” the gap. Still, London Above has become inaccessible to him, though he wishes otherwise. The gap between London Above and London Below, therefore, can only be crossed from Above to Below.

The separation of immediacy and graduality in this analysis underscores this inaccessibility. One reason I have chosen to separate time this way is to show opposing aspects of the same moment. This separation is one that the characters cannot bridge. For example, Hunter focuses all her attention on actions that are unrelated to her larger quest to hunt the Great Beast of London, and separates it from her immediate attention.

She uses other moments—such as her unseen betrayal of her clients to Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar—to work toward a gradual arc. Hunter separates the present from the future because she knows the value of patience in her art. If she were to unduly focus on her future goal while, for example, battling the Black Friar, she might be bested in that encounter, which would in turn delay or destroy her chance to hunt the Beast. Patience and lying in wait separates the present from the future, and it is this trait that helps her achieve so much renown in the Underside.

Thus we see that separation in *Neverwhere* is symbiotic. In the above example, the immediate moment's dominance serves the temporarily submissive gradual arc. Hunter's downfall is affected when she betrays her companions, thus separating the moment she promised to "protect [Door's] body from all harm that might befall [it]" from her immediate desire to hunt the Beast (*Neverwhere* 154). As she makes the deal with Croup and Vandemar, Hunter *contradicts* the actions she has already undertaken. She does not allow immediacy and graduality to serve one another symbiotically. Sacrificing her life for Richard and Door's sake, on the other hand, connects the present moment to her earlier broken promise—immediacy submits once again to graduality. Immediacy and graduality must be submissive to each other at different moments because the perspectives are complementary. They serve one another's purposes, thus benefiting the needs and concerns of both.

This symbiosis is even more pronounced in the exchange of lost and forgotten time from London Above to London Below. When time falls Below, it separates irrevocably from its former "home." Such time—London fog, for example—no longer exists in London Above, except perhaps in history books. Richard knows of London fog

and of the ways it was eliminated, but is unclear on its nicknames or its deadliness, while Door and Hunter are educated on both points. Richard has knowledge of London fog as a memory, while Door and Hunter have experiential knowledge—in London Below, people still have to worry about encountering “Pea-soupers” and “London Particulars” (*Neverwhere* 205). It *exists* in one place and not in the other because, in *Neverwhere*’s system, time does not always expire once it is past. It must, as Door explains, be used up to expire. Yet another separation (and, it follows, another gap) is created between the time that is actively being used up and the time that is forgotten. This, according to Door, is an essential separation in *Neverwhere*: “There’s a lot of time in London, and it *has* to go somewhere...” (205, emphasis mine). The two types of time complement each other, but cannot, in *Neverwhere*, co-exist in the same world. Once time has been forgotten, furthermore, it appears that the stagnation effect in London Below does not allow it to “resurrect” itself, so to speak, and return to London Above. Like Richard, time cannot return Above once it has fallen Below because it *must*, for the sake of the system, stay the same until it is forcibly interrupted. Thus, through time, we see the true nature of London Above and London Below. They, like immediacy and graduality, like used time and unused time, are a symbiotic pair.

London Below is *not*, however, a sort of “trashcan” for time. Forgotten time is a different kind of time, not London Above’s waste. London Below is portrayed in *Neverwhere* with profound dignity, though Richard (acting as the reader’s eyes) spends much of his time in fear of it. This respect is shown, for example, through the virtues of

Door, Old Bailey, the Black Friars, and (in a retrospective sense) Hunter.²⁸ This is not to say that the Underside is perfect. To find fault in London Below is easy enough, given its violent nature. Richard understands this fault when he first sees Hunter fight:

It seemed utterly right, in this unreal mirror of the London he had known, that she should be here and that she should be fighting so dangerously and so well. She was part of London Below. He understood that now.

(*Neverwhere* 109)

Violence is built into London Below; it is not limited to the unlikely adventure Richard undertakes. London Above, by contrast, is characterized at first in almost caricaturist manner as vicious and confusing, primarily through Jessica. Once Jessica is gone, London Above is remarkably boring, remarkably pointless. Still, as has been shown, Richard recognizes its merits—“And it would not be a bad life. He knew that”

(*Neverwhere* 330).

This is the language of a man judging his home, such as the language used by Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s *Portrait* upon his flight from Ireland. Stephen describes Davin, a friend and an Irish nationalist, in this way:

He stood towards this myth upon which no individual mind had ever drawn out a line of beauty and to its unwieldy tales that divided against themselves as they moved down the cycles in the same attitude as towards the Roman catholic religion, the attitude of a dullwitted loyal serf. (Joyce

159)

²⁸ The marquis de Carabas could be included in this list, except that he is a much more ambiguous and ambivalent character. As Door says of him, “He’s a little bit dodgy in the same way that rats are a little bit covered in fur” (*Neverwhere* 155).

Stephen rejects the mob mentality of his people toward their traditions and their faith, and resents their imposition on him. Still, Davin is a friend to Stephen, as are his other classmates. Stephen recognizes beauty in his homeland, while he is aware he must reject it. Richard Mayhew, similarly, knows what he is leaving—comfort, security, assured companionship, and, most importantly, a place where “the most dangerous thing you ever have to watch out for is a taxi in a bit of a hurry” (*Neverwhere* 316). Like Stephen, though, Richard’s flight is hardly a choice—the construction of the world around him forces him to leave, though Richard (again, like Stephen) must enact his departure.²⁹ Richard’s departure, therefore, cements the understanding that the two Londons are both complementary and separated.

Gaiman and the Hermeneutical Gap

Through examining the nature of this separation, we can deduce, to some degree, Gaiman’s approach to the hermeneutical gap in *Neverwhere*. I read the separation between London Above and London Below as an example of this gap. The gap is often marked by a difference in hierarchy between the separated parties. Let us consider Jesus and Pilate once again. Politically, Pilate is above Jesus—“Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” (Jn. 19.10). In the religious context of John’s Gospel, though, Jesus is above Pilate—“You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above...” (Jn. 19.11). Pilate then allows Jesus’ crucifixion, but Jesus resurrects from the dead. The text (and, indeed, any reasonable interpretation of it) places Jesus above Pilate *ontologically*—but we still must wrestle with that moment

²⁹ Richard and Stephen are both forced to choose between fulfillment (by flight) or a lifeless existence (by staying). In Stephen’s case, the oppressive construction is the social, religious, and political establishment; in Richard’s case, it is the one-way separateness of London Above and London Below.

when humanity *epistemologically* has power over the divine. We must also acknowledge that, in a certain sense, Jesus needs Pilate (or a similar authority) to order Him to public death so that His public resurrection and private ascension can have meaning. Similarly, Pilate needs Jesus (or someone similar) to show to his Roman hierarchs that he can put down “rebellions.” All this suggests that hierarchy exists in the gap, but it is rarely static or readily apparent.

Such a complex hierarchy exists in *Neverwhere*. London Above determines whether time, places, or persons are “used up” or not. It therefore determines the elements that make up London Below. Furthermore, whether someone or something is forced or chooses to descend Below, it cannot “ascend” Above. This relationship gives rise to the names, “Above” and “Below” and to the simplest hierarchical relationship, which places Above “over” Below. While this is a hierarchy, it is not a direct master-slave relationship. London Below has its own social structure that is rarely in concert with the Upworld. It is self-ruling, distinct, and as content with its nature as London Above. Furthermore, whether they choose to reside Below (Old Bailey, for example) or are forced there (Anaesthesia,³⁰ for example), underdwellers never express desires to return Above.

The most striking complication in the hierarchy between the two Londons, though, is time. In *Neverwhere*, Gaiman has created a system in which London Below is essential—remember Door’s assertion that unused time *has* to go somewhere. In a relationship similar to that between Jesus and Pilate, London Above is, in an epistemological sense, over London Below. Still, London Above *needs* London Below,

³⁰ Cf. *Neverwhere* 78

just as Jesus needs Pilate (again, or a similar authority) to act as the catalyst for His mission to suffer, die, resurrect, and ascend. In this way, the Underside is, in an ontological sense, over the Upside, because the latter could not function effectively without the former. Or, put more crudely by Mr. Croup: “With cities, as with people...the condition of the bowels is all-important” (*Neverwhere* 232). London Below’s *existence* in the *Neverwhere* system creates this complication in the hierarchy. It remains, however, a mere complication, since London Below has no real power over its symbiotic partner. The text indicates that it will remain as such unless the Underside somehow is able to control what it receives into its boundaries.³¹

If we take London Above and London Below as opposite, hierarchic elements of the hermeneutical gap, we can attempt to ascertain Gaiman’s position on this separation. To surmise this position, I will analyze the perspective shown forth in his three adult, solo novels: *Neverwhere* (1996), *Stardust* (1999), and *American Gods* (2001). Gaiman has indicated, as I quoted in the first chapter, that *Neverwhere* was a “good start,” but was not satisfactory in the way that *Stardust* and *American Gods* were. *Stardust* is an adult fantasy novel centered on the English village of Wall, which is separated from the land of Faerie by the boundary from which the town receives its namesake. Citizens of Wall can and occasionally do go to the land of Faerie, but beings from Faerie cannot cross into the physical world Wall represents. In *Stardust*, vendors who stay in Wall for the once-

³¹ It should be noted that Richard’s entrance into London Below does not show such control. In the beginning of the novel, Richard has a choice to help Door after she opens a door to him. He stands up to Jessica as he chooses to help Door. His ensuing statement that “Sometimes...there is nothing you can do” refers *not* to his inability to choose, but to his perceived *obligation* to practice charity—and, ultimately, to his inherent unsuitability to London Above (*Neverwhere* 23). Richard is not forced out of London Above until after he has become an underdweller, a state that is antithetical to his home. London Below does not draw Richard to itself—Richard chooses it, and cannot leave.

every-nine-years fair come from other parts of the physical world (11). Meanwhile, Yvaine—a star who is a living, immortal creature in Faerie—is told by another inhabitant of the magical land,

[I]f you leave these lands [i.e. Faerie] for...over there [i.e. the physical world]...then you will be, as I understand it, transformed into what you would be in that world: a cold, dead thing, sky-fallen. (*Stardust* 289)

The two worlds are complementary in that a thing exists in both worlds, but in different forms. The ancient Greeks thought of natural occurrences as divine beings: their gods were not just on Olympus, but among them in nature. The gap between the human and the divine was accessible to them and, sometimes, the two were on equal footing.³²

Stardust creates a world where the things of the physical world have a Faerie, or fantastic, counterpart.

American Gods is a significantly more complex work that follows Shadow, the protagonist, in his employment by and interaction with forgotten gods, demigods, and cultural heroes. Wednesday, an Icelandic god né Odin, explains that immigrants brought their fatherland's gods with them. Soon, though, their people abandoned belief in their deities by forgetting them, or remembering them merely as "creatures of the old land" now defunct, now mere trivia or nostalgia. The forsaken gods get by as best they can, Wednesday says:

We have, let us face it and admit it, little influence. We prey on them, and we take from them, and we get by; we strip and we whore and we drink

³² William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," plate 11: "The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could perceive."

too much; we pump gas and we steal and we cheat and we exist in the cracks at the edges of society. (*American Gods* 107)

These beings constitute the “Underside” of *American Gods*: their status is determined by their believers (or lack thereof), and they compose the bottom echelons of society or, at times, the outskirts.³³ Like the persecuted immigrants they used to serve, these deities never advance economically or socially—unlike their supplicants, though, they *cannot* advance, for their nature prevents them from fully participating in human society.

Shadow, though he interacts extensively with the divine and is in a certain sense “messianic,”³⁴ never *becomes* a god. Neither, for that matter, does anyone else; instead, the gods conform to the physical world around them, their powers draining as their believers dwindle. The relationship between the human and the divine in *American Gods* is similar to that between London Above and London Below in *Neverwhere*. Humanity decides which gods it wants to keep and which ones it wants to relegate, eventually, to nonexistence. Unlike *Neverwhere*, though, there are absolutely no crossovers in *American Gods*. Interaction with Door brings Richard into London Below, but no amount of interaction will ever make Shadow into a god. Deities in *American Gods*, similarly, cannot become human, though they often exhibit the basest human emotions and instincts.

This is, in one sense, a throwback to the Greco-Roman tradition (or, indeed, other similar ones), in which Zeus/Jupiter raped young maidens, in which a disputed beauty

³³ Some of their occupations: slaughterhouse “knocker” (a war god), undertaker (a death god), taxi driver (a jinn), hitchhiker (Jesus), a whore (a sex goddess), a police chief who yearly commits infanticide (a god who has regressed into a kobold, or demented gnome). (*American Gods* 61, 140, 146, 162, 291, 444)

³⁴ In the sense that he is called back from death to spare the physical world from the war between the new gods and the old gods.

contest spawned a great war and, more significantly, two epic poems by Homer. At the same time, one important aspect is different: procreation between humans and gods. In *Stardust*, the hero, Tristan Thorne, is the product of a sexual encounter between a human father and a Faerie mother. Tristan crosses over to Faerie early in the novel and is immediately enveloped in the fantastical side of his world. Wednesday explains the opposing situation in *American Gods*:

Unfortunately—for the most part—people like me fire blanks, so there’s not a great deal of interbreeding. It used to happen in the old days. Nowadays, it’s possible, but so unlikely as to be almost unimaginable.
(190)

Wednesday’s statement shows a development in Gaiman’s implicit answer to the hermeneutical inquiry. In *Neverwhere*, interaction can incompletely bridge the gap; in *Stardust*, procreation can incompletely bridge the gap. *American Gods* breaks not only with Greco-Roman traditions in making his deities all but infertile: he also breaks away from the Jewish³⁵ and Christian³⁶ tradition—respectively, his own religious origins and those dominating his culture. In *American Gods*, the divine effectively cannot unify with the human, even if the two are unified sexually.

London Above in *Neverwhere*, the physical world in *Stardust*, and humanity in *American Gods*—collectively known hereafter as the real—are epistemologically above

³⁵ “The Nephilim [i.e. ‘products of divine-human intercourse’] were on the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown” (Gen. 6.4, 4n).

³⁶ “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth...No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known” (Jn. 1.14, 18). This union does not have an explicit (or, in my opinion, an implicit) sexual conation, but does point toward the possibility of unifying the human and the divine through the action of God.

their counterparts: London Below, Faerie, and the gods—collectively, the unreal. Ontologically, though, the hierarchy is reversed. The real are all based on the reality with which the reader is familiar: the homeless are “just” down and out; stars are “just” immense balls of gas light years away; the gods are “just” spiritual, incorporeal beings. The unreal is based on popular and mythic imagination, with Gaiman’s peculiar twist: the “homeless” are ageless; “stars” are beautiful, magical women who sing in the night sky; the “gods” are physical beings who lose their power as humanity forgets them. The three novels, in effect, form unique but similar hermeneutical gaps.

Although *American Gods* most effectively develops, between the three novels, the separation between the real and the unreal, *Neverwhere* most clearly portrays that gap through its system of time. This analysis has, I hope, shown the need for such a system in *Neverwhere*—London Above and London Below, by their peculiar nature, need each other. Similarly, I hope my brief discussion of all three novels has shown the impenetrability of the gap. These two analyses complement each other, in a sense, given the relative complexity of Gaiman’s three solo, adult novels. *Neverwhere* does not develop the separation between the real and the unreal completely. The separation is “tightened,” so to speak, in *Stardust* and finally made explicit in *American Gods*. On the contrary, *Neverwhere* makes a clear case for the interdependence of the real and the unreal, while *Stardust* and *American Gods* relegate this interdependence to, respectively, commerce and imagination.

These complementary values implied and explicated in the three novels help to create Gaiman’s conception of the hermeneutical gap. *Neverwhere* and *Stardust* feature characters crossing from the real to the unreal, but even these are already predisposed to

do so; in *American Gods*, there are no such characters and there are therefore no real crossings of the gap. A character, a thing, a time must be in some way part of the unreal to cross over to it. Furthermore, the real conceives of the unreal as *imaginary*, whereas the unreal is almost always³⁷ aware of the real. The real does not always recognize its dependence on its ontological hierarch; the unreal, on the other hand, recognizes its dependence on its epistemological hierarch. At the same time, the ontological hierarch does not lord its power over its dependant, which is a common practice of the epistemological hierarch.³⁸ The real and the unreal are always and everywhere symbiotic and are, more importantly, necessarily separated.

This dichotomy has deep implications. Gaiman was once asked “in what sense” he believes in angels and other literary devices. While he admitted he would not be surprised at their existence, he replied that he believed in them “[i]n a literary sense. Metaphors are incredibly powerful. Metaphors help us cope” (*Live*). The unreal, for Gaiman, is in our imagination and is therefore inaccessible except through stories. Religion and religious figures are included in his conception of the imagined, metaphoric unreal. This is what makes a “development” between the three novels possible: for Gaiman, the gods are just as unreal as London Below or the world of Faerie. We can say the novels develop a point of view because the three gaps, though different, are for their author examples of the same concept. The hermeneutical gap in these three novels is therefore between creation and reality—whether that gap is between reader and text or

³⁷ The only exceptions are, perhaps, the many Faerie beings in *Stardust* who do not attend the fair outside Wall. Many of the Faerie creatures in the novel, however, do seem to be aware of their counterparts in the physical world.

³⁸ For example, in *Neverwhere*, upworlders are ignorant of underdwellers, while underdwellers are often persecuted by upworlders.

between the real and the unreal—and is thus inaccessible. This does not mean, though, that Gaiman sees the interaction that occurs in the gap as a futile subject for study.

Gaiman, like Hass, believes the gap is not to be crossed, but embraced as an essential element to our existence. According to Hass,

[S]uch re-seeing and re-visioning is what theology, philosophy and art can offer, even if, in each of their disciplines, the glimpse is ever fleeing, and to the systematicians who mark their fields, a deep embarrassment.

(Poetics 29)

One embarrasses oneself, Hass tells us, only if one claims to have crossed the gap from the real to the unreal, since such a crossing is impossible. One achieves merit in these fields when one examines the interaction formed by the dichotomies that make up such gaps. Gaiman, too, believes in examining the gap through his art. In a poem about fairy tales, he writes, “We *owe* it to each other to tell stories,/as people simply...” (“Locks,” emphasis mine). Why does he believe this to be so important, though, if he believes in the unreal only in a restricted, literary sense? Why examine the unreal if it is composed of nothing more than “metaphors” to “help us cope”? What, to Gaiman, is the point of telling stories if he does not believe them to be true?

Gaiman’s clearest and most concise explanation for his art is contained in the introduction to his short fiction and poetry collection, *Smoke and Mirrors*:

Stories are, in one way or another, mirrors. We use them to explain to ourselves how the world works or how it doesn’t work. Like mirrors, stories prepare us for the day to come. They distract us from the things in the darkness. (2)

Stories, like metaphors, help us cope. Gaiman sees art (and, indeed, the unreal) as an illusion created by our imagination for profound self-reflection. Gaiman's comments place him in the category of a skeptic, but he still sees the value of what he does not believe. To paraphrase and misquote Marx, Gaiman seems to tell us that fantasy and fantastic art are not the opiate of the people, but their greatest strength, their greatest opportunity for self-advancement. Art is one of humanity's basic needs *because* it examines the gap that can never be crossed and offers humanity the opportunity to reflect on itself. We can never know the nature of the world around us unless we imagine that forgotten gods can be taxi drivers, that stars can be beautiful women. We can never know the nature of time unless we imagine a place where it has little sway, where it stagnates, where we do not devour it, where it does not devour us. We can never know ourselves, Gaiman seems to say, unless we consider and constantly re-consider those things we imagine, or wish, or believe are true.

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