The Liminal Quality of Portals: Between Confrontation and Consolation in the Other Worlds of Neil Gaiman's Neverwhere, The Graveyard Book and The Ocean at the End of the Lane

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Introduction

To linger between two worlds, to perceive the doorway to another reality and to cross—voluntarily or not—the threshold is often the destiny of the literary hero or heroine. This thesis critically examines the function of portals in such fiction and analyses the extent to which moving between the different realities facilitates character transformation for the protagonist. Over the past decades, Neil Gaiman has become one of the most successful authors of portal-fantasy; therefore, this thesis will focus on three of Gaiman's novels to determine the nature of the portals operating within them.

Chapter 1 will discuss the themes of escapism, alienation, and the desire to cross boundaries into unrealistic settings. Another concept to examine is the notion of liminality. Liminality is the state of being in between two worlds and belonging to neither, or belonging to both. The following three chapters will aim their attention at the portals that lead to liminal spaces in *Neverwhere* (1996), *The Graveyard Book* (2008) and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013). Each chapter contains three sections, which examine the nature of the portal that leads to the other world, the alien beings and concepts that the protagonist encounters in the secondary world, and the transformation that the protagonist undergoes during their experience of crossing into the these worlds. The thesis investigates the extent to which this transformation relates to the two worlds that the protagonist moves between.

Another aim of the thesis, relating to transformation, is to show whether the portals in these narratives lead into a literal and metaphoric darkness, where the protagonist is forced to confront a trauma or hardship, or into light, serving as a domain of consolation, or relief from anguish. The conclusion will show that the ability to traverse between two worlds through a portal in these novels reshapes the protagonists' understanding of the world around them in very different ways.

Chapter 1: Fantasy as Means of Escape

While reading a novel always entails entering into a fictional world, the fantasy genre offers powerful illusions of new entireties, worlds that do not exist and *cannot* exist in real life. As much as readers can immerse themselves in fantasy stories to escape reality, Greg Sharzer explains that society as a whole can show signs of this desire to escape. Such a desire does not have to be understood in negative terms: as an escape from confrontation with real-world problems. According to Sharzer, "[t]o escape is to achieve freedom" (1). Works of fantasy in which protagonists escape through mysterious portals into another, fantastic, reality can be fruitfully studied with Sharzer's theory of escapism in mind. This chapter will build on Sharzer's *Late Escapism and Contemporary Neoliberalism* (2021), as well as Farah Mendleshon's definition of portal-quest fantasy and liminal fantasy, as described in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), to investigate how stretching the boundaries of reality by traveling through portals into fantastic realms can be a meaningful form of escapism that allows for character growth. The focus point is the basic human desire to escape the restrictions of mundane everyday life in order to develop as an individual and the representation of this desire in fantasy fiction.

Sharzer points towards recent developments in global politics that can lead to worldwide longing for escapism:

> Pandemics, famine-inducing locust plagues, a global economic depression, the end or at least diminishment of humanity in a tumult of climate change-induced polar melting, extreme temperatures and agricultural collapse – anyone needing a reason to escape does not have to look very far. By definition, these threats cannot be escaped from: they are global, multiple and intersecting. Humanity is faced with challenges well beyond the scope of any individual, yet still possesses a basic yearning for

> liberation. In these conditions, contemporary escapism is the desire to run from circumstances that do not allow actual change. (1)

Here Sharzer describes the daunting problems that humanity must tackle, which can trigger frustration in today's society. Sharzer describes that the frustration felt about these problems does not produce necessarily the desire to search for a better place, where complications are absent; he foregrounds that simply leaving the present situation can sometimes be enough, whatever the new destination brings: "[e]scapism is not utopian, because it does not begin with an ideal destination in mind. It is far more concerned with leaving the Now than conceptualizing the Novum. In doing so, it can approach either utopia or dystopia, and it is that approach that gives it analytical value" (121). In fantasy fiction, especially portal-quest fantasies, this "Novum," a new environment or new world, can be approached deliberately or accidentally, and the hero will return to the Now as soon as their goal is achieved; in this case Sharzer's theory of wishing to be anywhere else but in the primary world is not always applicable. But some portal fantasies, for example Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, or Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* (1980), raise the subject of a protagonist who is not satisfied in their current social state and will find more happiness in another world. Building on Freud's and Marcuse's studies of estrangement and alienation, Sharzer concludes that "all [forms of estrangement/alienation] are forms of fantasy, a necessary articulation of desire for those whom capitalism entraps rather than uplifts" (140). In both *Neverwhere* and *The Beginning Place* the disillusioned young male protagonist flees his environment through a portal to another world to find solace there. The initial realistic setting allows the modern reader to identify with these characters, as one works in an office and the other in a supermarket where it is the dullness of everyday life that is the propelling factor that initiates their departure. Sharzer explains further how alienation results in escapism:

> escapism is not simply a cultural practice, to be observed and collated, but a necessary response to alienation. Its liberatory impulse suggests a world that cannot be realized in this society but also cannot be denied. Escapism must appear, because the straitened nature of work and reproduction in a capitalist society … spark resistance from its subjects. (141)

That a character is unhappy in their situation is not always evident, and the protagonist often needs an external force or an event to shake them up, to allow this resistance to grow, as it is the case in all three of the novels that this thesis examines.

Apart from the pressures of society that deprives people of their freedom, prompting a wish to escape, the individual can also be encouraged to flee into fantasy by a personal curiosity of the unknown. Engaging with discussions about parallel universes (*Neverwhere*), or the question of what happens after we die, and whether ghosts and otherworldly beings exist (*Graveyard Book*), or whether we live forever and will eventually know everything (*Ocean*), therefore, can provide the reason to read these stories. Fantastic stories with such speculative themes have their roots in myths, legends, romantic, gothic and folk stories. Both Manuel Aguirre and Lori Campbell mention folk stories as having had a significant influence on the fantasy genre. Aguirre argues that gothic fictions form a link between modern fantasy and traditional folklore: "the genre performs a threshold function in between literature conventionally so called and folklore" (296). According to Campbell, "[t]hen and now, deeply-ingrained folk rituals and beliefs fuel the fantastic as a way to transcend the earthly, to help people reconcile their place within the infinite and face their fears of what may or may not lie beyond death" (8). Therefore, fantasy, with its far-reaching roots and mixed forms of the fantastic, also to be seen in Gaiman's work, invites readers to escape into different realities.

Fantastic settings might seem to exist only in the author's and readers' imaginations. John Plotz debunks this idea, however, and claims that "secondary worlds depart less from our primary one than is generally assumed" (426). Plotz wonders whether "realism's failure herald[s] an efflorescence (an elfloresence?) of Tolkienesque fantasy worlds, which simply ignore the grit, awkwardness, and embarrassment of life as it actually is" (432). This is relevant in portal fantasy, where the primary, familiar world opens up to an alien secondary environment. Where these two worlds meet, according to Plotz, is where speculative fiction, or speculative realism is born (433). Plotz claims further that when realism and fantasy merge, this "certain kinds of speculative fiction may mark not realism's failure but its productive transfiguration" (434). For the reader "to feel not estranged but right at home: cosily off-world" (Plotz 430), the two worlds need to be connected. The connection of these two worlds, when real and fantasy overlap in the doorway, the opening of the is imaginary, is exactly what this thesis pivots around and what the next section will investigate more closely.

Portals, Liminality and Transformation in Fantasy

In *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), Farah Mendlesohn proposes four headings to categorise fantasy narratives, to group the stories according to common characteristics within the "fuzzy sets" (2) of existing fantasy narratives:

> These categories are determined by the means by which the fantastic centers the narrated world. In the portal-quest we are invited through into the fantastic; in the intrusion fantasy, the fantastic enters the fictional world; in the liminal fantasy, the magic hovers in the corner of our eye; while in the immersive fantasy we are allowed no escape. (xiv)

This thesis focuses on the merging of portal and liminal fantasies, as each novel discussed features liminal elements and fantastic gateways connecting two or more realities. The locus

of these worlds colliding, the gateway or portal has a complex function. According to Lori Campbell, "drawing our gaze to the exact places where consciousness and un-consciousness meet, the portal spotlights the intricate human processes by which we navigate the world, ourselves, and the relationship between the two" (2). One example for this is *Neverwhere*, in which the protagonist Richard questions his own sanity when he is about to cross the threshold from unconsciousness to consciousness. Another example can be found in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, where the narrator is shown the transformative power that his memories hold as soon as he is conscious of them. Campbell argues further that in portal fantasies the portal will also "initiate a process of transformation on numerous levels — social, psychological, political, and spiritual" (6). This thesis will mainly focus on changes in character development.

There are various objects, places and people in portal fantasies that can function as portals, or porters. Campbell points out that "in marking these 'in-between' spaces, the portal connotes a myriad of power associations and imbalances, centralizing and making transparent the ways in which literary fantasy attacks real-world problems" (6). These aspects of portal and liminal fantasies will be elaborated on in the three chapters that follow. It will be shown that not only the protagonist crosses a borderline with an initially unconscious mind changes, but the worlds from which and into which he steps, will interact and change through the person connecting them. The thesis will determine what aspects of the protagonist and the worlds change, how this change occurs and to what effect these changes occur. The factors of liminality used in anthropology and psychology will be applied to the narratives analysed in this thesis.

Portals, Liminality and Transformation in Gaiman's Work

The protagonists in the novels discussed in this thesis move into liminal spaces, which is a concept that has gained symbolic importance in much fantasy literature. Liminality is a significant concept in other fields of study as well. According to Paul Larson, "[l]iminality is a term used to describe the psychological process of transitioning across boundaries and borders. The term 'limen' comes from the Latin world for threshold; it is literally the threshold separating one space from another" (n.p.). Another important investigation into liminality was made by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957). He described the stages of changing functions of the individual within a group or community. According to Van Gennep, these changes have three stages, which he describes in his study *Rites of Passage* (1909). According to Larson, "[h]is student Victor Turner (1920–1983) continued and expanded his analytic framework and integrated it into role theory and the relationship of social action to drama" (n.p.). In *The Forest of Symbols* (1970), Turner explains what the three stages of rites of passage are: the initial stage refers to separation from the rest of the group, the middle stage he calls the "liminal stage" in which the person goes through the "transformation" and "becoming," where "emphasis tends to be laid on the transition itself, rather than on the particular states between which it is taking place" (96). Key here is Turner's focus on transformation or becoming, of a process of development, which can be found as central aspects of the plot in many portal fantasies as well.

Klapcsik compares Mendleshon's two types of fantasy story, the portal-quest and liminal type, concluding that in the former it is clear that the protagonist is in "direct contact with the fantastic" (57), whereas the latter "hides the threshold, suggesting that the boundaries between fantasy and reality are elusive or insignificant, evoking humorous and surreal overtones" (57). These traits are evident in Gaiman's writings. A unique and an essential part of Gaiman's fiction is his use of humour. Humour helps blur the line between serious and less

serious events, as it does not only allow comic relief, but it can also create a relaxed mood that makes discussing difficult topics easier. Light-heartedness combined with the multiple focalizers is the element that lends a liminal quality to Gaiman's stories. The technique that Gaiman uses to create humorous scenes is "the pretense of the narrator that nothing unique is happening" (58), all the while the reader is surprised by the fantastic elements that surface in the story. This, according to Klapcsik, "doubles the narrative perspective, as the restrained, naïve voice of narration becomes echoed by the reader's growing wonder and estrangement" (58). Campbell's argument can be added here; she claims that Gaiman's stories "acknowledge fantasy tradition while infusing magic into contemporary environments, thus linking past and present" (187). Therefore, not only humour, but the juxtaposition of the real and fantastic creates another liminal quality in Gaiman's fiction, a safe zone where difficult themes can be addressed in a light-hearted way. Finally, Klapcsik and Lee agree that Gaiman's style is unique, as his "fantasy realm is not an escape from reality, but in constant interaction with it" (Klapcsik 79). The reason for this is that "Gaiman continues the fantasy tradition with a twist: he understands that the joy of fantasy has real material effects" (Lee 562).

Chapter 2: Liminality and Transformation in *Neverwhere*

London is the setting of Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and many of the city's landmarks and well-known sights are introduced in a different light, as the novel features a parallel setting, an alternative London that the protagonist can enter into through a portal. This "supernatural domain as the Underworld" (Klapcsik 75), called London Below, is the liminal space where the protagonist, Richard Mayhew unwittingly arrives and is confronted with the fact that he cannot return to his old life. The experience changes his understanding of himself, how others perceive him, and his place in the world. This chapter shows that the protagonist in *Neverwhere* evolves from an indecisive and clumsy London clerk into a self-confident and perceptive achiever. This change is initiated by his first encounter with someone from, and finalised by his acceptance into, London Below. Reading the novel through the critical lens of Klapcsik's approach of liminal spaces and Turner's theory of liminal stages will sustain the analysis of this transformation.

The Other World: Portals, Crossing Boundaries Between Fantasy and Reality in *Neverwhere*

The protagonist of *Neverwhere*, Richard Mayhew, moves from an unnamed place in the north of Britain to London at the outset of the story, to seek another environment. The story moves three years forward and it seems that he has found success: he works in an office, where he has at least one good friend, and he is engaged to the stunning Jessica. It becomes obvious from the ironic narration that his life is far from ideal: Richard is dimly forgetful, constantly having to catch up with mistakes he makes, and his fiancé is in control of his private life. Her scolding remarks belittle him and it can be assumed that she does not love or accept him for his clumsy real self, but because he surrenders to her dominating control. The dramatic irony of this situation creates tension and expectation in the reader: the person who should

understand the unending depth of Richard's disillusion is himself. Richard is now stuck in an out-of-balance position, where false assumptions of love from Jessica and promises of well-being provided by his job keep him from realizing that he is not happy. Something must happen to make him see that he is trapped in a life where he merely follows orders, and never questions the decisions that are made for him by others. This section discusses the nature of the different realities that Richard has access to and moves between in the novel, to establish the effect that the liminal spaces have on his transformation.

The anticipated initial incident is Richard's meeting the Lady Door, who is a representative of the underworld London Below. The two parallel cities in *Neverwhere*, London Above and London Below exist as mirror cities sharing a borderline, still isolated from one another, as their citizens cannot mingle. The inhabitants of London Above are not aware of the twin city underneath and do not enter it, unless contacted by a character from London Below. The encounter occurs when Richard and Jessica are on their way to a dinner appointment with her boss, Jessica firing instructions at Richard about what to do and not to do. Suddenly a wounded and bleeding young woman, the Lady Door, appears from a doorway in the wall and collapses into a heap in front of them on the pavement. She obviously needs help. Jessica wants to rush on, but Richard defies his astonished girlfriend to help Door. By showing altruism and choosing kindness against blind obedience, the protagonist unwittingly disturbs the construction of his life pattern and creates a temporary imbalance in his lopsided existence. He renders himself an outsider by interacting with Door and her pursuers, as it will turn him invisible to all the people in London Above, and only visible to those in London Below. He is forced to continue a liminal existence on the periphery between these two worlds, as he does not belong to the former anymore, but not yet to the latter either. The theory of the rites of passage, the three stages, as described by Turner, can be applied here: first Richard leaves the first group, London Above, and will eventually arrive in the second

group, London Below. According to Turner's theory, a third, in-between state can be found between these two: the liminal stage, that Richard is in throughout most of the book, as the liminal persona.

Turner's research shows that "[t]he symbolism attached to and surrounding the liminal *persona* is complex and bizarre. Much of it is modelled on human biological processes" as these signs "give an outward and visible form to an inward and conceptual process" (96). For example, the person in the liminal stage is seen as invisible:

> [t]he structural 'invisibility' of liminal *personae* has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. In so far as they are not yet classified, the symbols that represent them are, in many societies, drawn from the ideology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge. (96)

In this sense, as Richard has already been removed from his community, he is in isolation of the liminal stage. This is shown when Richard goes to the office where he is employed: he arrives to witness his belongings and desk being removed. Moreover, when he tries to find out why, nobody recognises him. "Sylvia stared at him, gently puzzled. 'And you are . . . ?' … 'Richard,' he said, sarcastically. 'Richard Mayhew.' 'Ah,' said Sylvia. Then her attention slid off Richard, like water off an oiled duck …" (61). This incident shows that after interacting with the inhabitants of London Below, Richard slowly fades away from his own reality: Sylvia can see him but cannot keep her focus on him.

Richard then visits Gary, his friend at the office, right after meeting Sylvia, but Gary is not able to see him either, unless Richard breaks the thickening invisibility-fog around him by shouting at Gary:

> "Gary. What's going on? Is this a joke or something?"

> Gary looked around, as if he had heard something. He flicked the keyboard, activating a screen-saver of dancing hippopotami, then he shook his head as if to clear it, picked up the telephone, and began to dial. Richard slammed his hand down on the phone, cutting Gary off.
>
> "Look, this isn't funny. I don't know what everyone's playing at." Finally, to his enormous relief, Gary looked up at him. Richard continued, "If I've been fired then just tell me I've been fired, but all this pretending I'm not here . . . "
>
> And then Gary smiled and said, "Hi. Yeah. I'm Gary Perunu. Can I help you?"
>
> (61)

This unsuccessful attempt to be recognised makes Richard leave the office quietly, in defeat. The situation is difficult to accept, as Richard does not consciously choose to leave his primary world, London Above. It takes several painful incidents and lessons to understand his new position and that the possibility to enter London Above again is non-existent.

One of these incidents is when Richard staggers to his apartment and takes a bath, but is astounded to notice strange people walking around in his flat, viewing it, together with an estate agent. None of these people can see or hear him, he is entirely invisible to them. Still feeling shocked and incredulous and half waiting to wake up from this nightmare, Richard decides to just pack and leave. As he tries to withdraw money from the ATM, his bank card is not recognized: Richard realises he is being deleted from society.

He desperately needs help and receives it from another, similarly liminal character. This person can, surprisingly, see him. It is another outcast, a homeless man called Iliaster, who helps Richard find his way to London Below. Iliaster leads Richard to an underground door, through which they enter a dark borderline territory, a large cave-like room with fires and smoke. The shadowy creatures that occupy this space look, act and talk like hybrid beings between human and animal: “People scurried from fire to fire” (69). Their leader, who is

covered in fur and is called the "Lord Rat-speaker" asks: "Who've you brought to us, Iliaster? Talk-talk-talk" (69). Richard soon learns that rats are considered superior beings in the underworld of London Below. If he wants to find the Lady Door, he needs to follow their instructions. Portraying rats as intelligent, rather than loathsome creatures foreshadows the upside down hierarchy of the underworld of London Below, where humans are reduced to lesser beings. Gaiman's construction of his liminal, fantastic, space dovetails with Campbell's claim of the portal being a "nexus point" (6) where interaction between the two worlds occurs: the folds between London Above and Below provide transitory figures: interpreters and guides, who help a lost wanderer, such as Richard to navigate.

Along with the protagonist, the reader is plunged into the world of London Below, whose unusual setting and characters invite an offbeat interpretation of what London could also be like, set in various time frames. For example, references are made to Victorian style clothing, and old-fashioned customs, such as having a blacksmith sharpen knives or fighting with a spear. Furthermore, unusually formal names such as the Marquis de Carabas, the Lady Door are customary, which also suggest a setting reminiscent of bygone times. Additionally, the fact that baronies, fiefdoms, friars, earls, servants exist and thrive in London Below, also suggests a historical time frame. Klapcsik argues that these "microworlds … provide privileges and restrictions for their members" (Klapcsik 75), which builds a hierarchy not unlike that of London Above. As both of the parallel cities have their own system of microworlds, Richard needs to find the group he belongs to. The time-frame in London Below is not simply historical but also fantastic, as futuristic, cultic beings such as the beautiful and charming, but demonic, warmth-sucking Velvet Children, and the similarly ambiguous angel Islington fit seamlessly into the fabric of the tale.

The London Underground, its stations, trains and dwellers play a pivotal role in reflecting how the multi-faceted metropolis extends in time and space, into "various spatial

and time zones" (Klapcsik 75) and even into the realm of the fantastic. The spatial liminality is expressed through the different locations in London Below, such as Night's Bridge. Richard assumes he is in Knightsbridge, but in the alternative world Knightsbridge is a bridge that connects up and down, light and dark. Its darkness, as a rule, snatches some of the creatures that pass it, among whom the protagonist's guide, the rat-girl Anaesthesia, proving the power of the dark side of London Below. Other liminal spaces in London Below are the Earl's Court Tube station, where an actual Earl travels around in his own underground train, representing his court; and the Floating Market, held in a different location each time. Klapcsik points out a crucial function of the mysterious market gatherings by defining them as "[a] rare possibility to eschew social and magical blindness," which "is obtained when the characters participate in ritualistic, carnivalesque events" (77). These "'Floating Markets' are such special events in *Neverwhere*, which bring together the various baronies, temporarily suspending the hierarchical distinctions and oppositions between them" (77). These obvious differences between the groups in London Below help Richard feel more at ease at the market, as his outsider status is not apparent and he can easily mingle among thousands of peculiar looking and smelling people. Another distinction in London Below is the monetary system, as "the biggest treasure that can be paid is a favour and the biggest favour is to keep one's soul in a box so that their body can die and be brought back to life" (Klapcsik 75). Therefore, *Neverwhere* showcases familiar elements of the well-known city, which merge historic and fantastic details to create London Below. The portals connecting London Above and London Below link two worlds that contrast one another in spatial, temporal and social aspects that reflect and magnify the imbalance that the protagonist is feeling in his life.

The plot of the novel can be categorized as a portal-quest; because of the oscillating points of view, the narration of *Neverwhere* is liminal: switching, pulsating between the two worlds of London Above and London Below. An omniscient narrator is present, but the

focalizers from the latter grow in number until there is no one left from London Above. According to Klapcsik, "the focalization reveals various ideological and cognitive systems" (75) through which the reader is moved back and forth unknowingly. Richard is stuck between these worlds, however, and needs to accept the fact that he has become an outcast. Klapcsik brings to mind the liminality of "a rhizomatic movement, which has no beginning or end" and explains that

> … rhizomatic structure is associated with various forms of mobile existence, *traveling* life: that of the itinerant blacksmith, the transhumant, the merchant, the immigrant, the wandering schizo, and most of all, that of the *nomad.* The wanderings of the nomads, the movements of tribes are liminal in a postmodern sense. (18)

A major difference between nomads and the protagonist of *Neverwhere* is that wanderers often consciously leave society for they do not feel they belong, sharpening the contrast between themselves and others. Klapcsik claims that "[t]he magical invisibility evokes social criticism" as it points to how "most people intend to neglect homeless citizens" (76). Homeless people live in spaces that everyday people try to avoid. Gaiman uses these "marginal and vulgar" (Klapcsik 76) areas as the setting of *Neverwhere*. The intention of showing these spaces, such as the sewer system, and the creatures that occupy them, will give these "deliberately overlooked social spheres" (Klapcsik 76) some agency. Richard does not choose to become an outcast, but he adopts and embraces this lifestyle in the end. This acceptance of his outcast status will be further discussed in the final section of this chapter, where his becoming a liminal nomad between two worlds will be shown as the first step in his transformation from his uncertain old self, unconscious of his own needs, into a renewed, self-assured character, who is able to assert his own will.

The nightmarish events in the initial sequence of the novel pull Richard away from reality, into a swaying and instable wormhole of *un*reality. He finds himself in the titular non-

existent space, in never-where and never-when. The porter, who draws him into this liminal place and time, is a person with the symbolic name Door. Door opens a gate to London Above, in a desperate attempt to escape two assassins hired to execute her. Richard later gathers that Door comes from a noble family in London Below, whose members each have the same superpower: *they can open things*, making Door a crucial porter figure in the novel.

> "Richard," she said. "My family. We're openers. It's, our Talent. Look . . . " She reached out a grubby hand, touched the door. For a long moment nothing happened, then there was a loud crash from the other side of the door, and a chunk from their side. Door pushed against the door and, with a fierce squeal from the rusted hinges, it opened. (170-171)

This power is Door's gift, but also a curse, as the compelling ability to open anything is what launches the operation to murder her family. Her father, Portico, leaves a desperate last message to Door with instructions on how to stay alive, and what to do to avenge their death. Door's father's dream was to modernise London Below, and bring it closer to London Above, suggesting a conflict in London Below between different powerful factions. His assassination can be interpreted as a sign that the position of the two worlds will remain strictly separated, and everything in-between exterminated.

Door does not have the intention to involve Richard in the business of London Below, but she has no other choice, as, oddly enough, he is the only one who can see and help her. Door and Richard are confused about their first meeting and why they could see each other so clearly, even though the two worlds do not collide in general:

> "If you're part of London Below," said Door to Richard, … "they normally don't even notice you exist unless you stop and talk to them. And even then, they forget you pretty quickly."
>
> "But I saw you," said Richard. It had been bothering him for a while.

"I know," said Door. "Isn't that odd?"

"Everything's odd," said Richard, with feeling. (187)

The power of the mysterious collision between the two worlds, London Above and London Below, played out by their representatives, Richard and Door, lies in the stark opposite qualities of these two characters. Door is a noblewoman, a heroine with a superpower, on an epic quest. Richard, by contrast, is an everyday Londoner. He is disoriented and disorganised, clumsy, but kind. In London Above, these qualities grant him scarce happiness, but his naivety and innocent good nature is genuinely needed and fits the idiosyncratic time and place of London Below. Door's ability to open things allows her to find solutions to problems, and her opening up of London Above leads her to Richard, his genuine kindness. They become friends. In this way, the Lord Portico's wish to bring the two worlds closer to each other is fulfilled, as Richard the outsider is the one who helps Door survive, creating a bridge between the two worlds.

Otherworldly Beings and Concepts in *Neverwhere*

Neverwhere portrays several otherworldly concepts, beings and monster-like creatures that are significant for the transformation of the protagonist. The fact that London Below is built on the underground and sewer system generates a dark and gloomy setting. Most of the people who occupy this realm give the impression that personal hygiene is not a top priority for them. This does not make them monstrous, but it certainly gives the occupants of London Below a dubious, shady appearance that will not allow favourable first impressions and suggests that the majority of the occupants of London Below are poor. This section will examine how Richard, a relatively well-off individual, explores the socio-economic inequities of London life through the fantasy world of London Below. The alien concepts of this underworld transform his view on value and trust. The defamiliarization of the value system of London

Above lend Richard a new understanding of life in his city, which, eventually, will lead to his decision to leave it forever.

Money and wealth can be considered monstrous in *Neverwhere*, but the two worlds, London Above and Below must be examined separately. In the world of corporate London Above the blunt and obsolete Mr Stockton represents wealth and power. He is introduced as Jessica's boss, who is treated with the utmost respect and admiration, even when he does not deserve it. From the description of his character the conclusion can be drawn that Mr Stockton in his turn treats people rather indecently: "He was over sixty; his hair was gray and silver, and it was cut too long in the back, because it made people uncomfortable that his hair was too long, and Mr. Stockton liked making people uncomfortable" (192). When he arrives at the opening of the exhibition, where he has made all the guests wait for him, and gives a speech, it becomes painfully obvious that this man is not a role model in any ethical way: "'I'll make the speech now,' said Mr. Stockton, to Jessica, by way of introduction. 'Then I'll bugger off. Come back some other time, when there aren't all these stuffed shirts about'" (193). Therefore, having become financially successful has only made him a vulgar and flat character. An established connection between this negative power-hungry figure in the world Above and his counterpart in the world Below, the angel Islington, is made evident in this speech:

> Mr. Stockton cleared his throat. "Okay," he said. "This won't take long. When I was a small boy, I used to come to the British Museum on Saturdays, because it was free, and we didn't have much money. But I'd come up the big steps to the museum, and I'd come down to this room round the back and look up at this angel. It was like it knew what I was thinking. (193)

This passage suggests that even though children from non-wealthy backgrounds have a chance connect with and learn from the cultural treasures in the museums, which can

potentially provide them with a morally fulfilling future, this is not the case with Mr Stockton. The parallels between Mr Stockton and the angel behind the door, who tricks and manipulates all around him to achieve his personal goal, are apparent. Mr Stockton is the man whom Richard was supposed to have dinner with on the evening of Door's appearance in London Above, but this meeting never took place. Mr Stockton belongs to the corporate world of London Above that Richard could never adjust to; therefore, the only person that this man influenced in Richard's life is Jessica. Richard is now confronted with the empty qualities of the man whom Jessica, whom he was engaged to, so admires.

Money is entirely omitted from London Below, as trade is made by "swapping stuff" (99). Richard's firs visit to the Floating Market reveals the variety of the merchandise that can be swapped: "fresh dreams … weapons … rubbish … lost property" (110). When he wants to buy food, he pays with "a ballpoint pen, and a book of matches he had forgotten he had" (112). He then swaps his handkerchief for information about how to find Door (114). Additionally, a much more crucial currency than money is used to grant wishes and achieve goals: *favours*. Favours are promised, owned, expected to be returned and eventually performed. These favours are driven not out of goodwill, generosity or mercy, but by some magical, sheer power of the *promise*, of giving your *word*. Therefore, language, in a form of a promise, an uttered contract, will bind a person to another, until that favour has been paid back and thus the equilibrium of not owing anyone a favour is regained. As such freedom can never be achieved in a society where an extended network of favours is a sustaining force, this can be seen as a liminal existence: characters are in a constant state of in-between favours, either owing or expecting one. These favours interlinking the lives of the people of London Below create a new kind of equilibrium, a hovering state of hope, and in the case of the Marquis de Carabas, even a fulfilled promise of resurrection from the dead.

The lack of money in *Neverwhere* creates the opposite of a monster: a fabric of interconnected debt-offerings. As the legacy of a favour can be inherited and thus passed from one generation to the next, favours are indeed comparable to payment. Door remembers in a flashback how she received her first promise of a favour. Her father, Portico, explained to her on her fifth birthday, on her first ever visit to the Floating Market, pointing out a peculiar looking man in a long coat: "'He calls himself the Marquis de Carabas,' he said. 'He's a fraud and a cheat and possibly even something of a monster. If you're ever in trouble, go to him. He will protect you, girl. He has to'" (237). The Marquis is generally not to be trusted; however, in debt of a favour, he is the most reliable and safe person Door can reach out to. Richard assists the Lady Door throughout the novel, playing a crucial role in her quest and in achieving her goal. He can never be paid for his services, however, either in goods or in favours, as his liminal character is not yet part of London Below.

Monsters appear in human form in the novel. The two grotesque assassins, Mr Coup, the fox-like murderous crook, and his companion, the verbally challenged but physically rather overwhelming, bloodthirsty murderer Vandemar, look like men, but are not really considered as such. Door is rather surprised, when Richard refers to them as "men":

> "Men?" A flash of the opal-colored eyes.
>
> "Croup and, um, Vanderbilt."
>
> "Vandemar." She mused for a moment, then nodded. "I suppose you could call them men, yes. Two legs, two arms, a head each" (42).

What makes Croup and Vandemar real monsters is not only their appearance and savage intentions, but that *they do not keep their word* and break promises, which they do deliberately, also to the Marquis, whom they promise "an hour's head start" (209) to escape, but instead, follow and kill him almost instantly after he leaves. Although Richard meets them

in the beginning of the story and finds them peculiar, they remain distant figures of the pursuer and have no direct effect on him.

An actual monster, the Beast, a remnant of old London fog, roams under the sewers in a labyrinth; Door's bodyguard, Hunter, wants to kill it. The Beast and Hunter have a similarly legendary status in London Below, only Hunter happens to be the most beautiful woman Richard has ever seen. Appearances are deceptive, therefore, and Richard learns valuable lessons from the otherworldly beings of London Below: impressively beautiful creatures, such as Hunter, Lamia and the angel Islington turn out to be traitors, disloyal, mean, cold-blooded murderers. In contrast, some bizarre figures, such as the cheating, lying and thieving Marquis will play a crucial role in saving the lives of Richard and Door. The monetary value system used in London Above has no meaning in London Below, where good deeds and help, in the form of favours, is the most valuable currency.

Transformation of the Protagonist in *Neverwhere*

By both the people of London Above and Below, Richard is seen as a kind, but somewhat hopeless or dim-witted person, who does not fight, is afraid of heights, and asks too many questions. "I'm sorry, he's an idiot" (42) is how Door tries to sooth the offended rat that Richard wants to chase away furiously. Richard needs to adjust to the unknown new environment. Richard himself accepts his own incompatibility to keep up with the fast changing situation around him. He clearly expresses this to his companions, for example when he is lead to London Below by the rat-speaker Anaesthesia and they meet Hunter: "My name is Richard Mayhew. This is Anaesthesia. She's the one of us who knows what she's doing" (101). Going through several ritual-like adventures, however, shows him that he is far from hopeless, that he can find his balance and grow to become useful part of London Below. Having crossed through the portal to London Below and interacting with the otherworldly

beings there changes him. Campbell's claim about porter figures can be applied to Richard's transformation: "these entities enable and influence the protagonist's *internal* quest, which results in some form of internal *and* external change" (7). This section analyses Richard's external and internal transformation. The physical change is apparent from the way he carries himself after these adventures, finding balance in a readjusted, stable body. His internal transformation is complete when he finally discovers his own free will and decides that he wants to belong to London Below.

Throughout the novel, each major character has a goal, reminiscent of the portal-quest fantasies. Richard's only goal is, as Klapcsik explains, to return to London Above: "[i]nstead of being integrated in a new order, he intends to return to his old life, to normality, the dullness of an ordinary life. Because his adventures take place in London Below, however, he becomes more and more integrated in the fantasy realm" (78). That Richard could not fulfil his internal quest to become contended in London Above and needed to descend to London Below to face this fact is foreshadowed by his regular dreams of him having to fight the Beast.

In London Below, the stages of Richard's quest are marked by pivotal occasions of trial and error, passing which will lead him further towards his own true identity, his reality. As in classic fantasy quests, he has to approach and tackle obstacles to reach the next challenge. His initial successes at passing these stages could be seen as beginner's luck, as Hunter, Door, and Richard himself, along with the reader, perceives them that way. Richard does not comprehend what lies ahead most of the time, and apart from a vague feeling of foreboding, goes rather innocently into these tests, remaining friendly and open to all the creatures around him, which usually induces the opinion in all that he is a pathetic but kind fool.

The first example of such a test in London Below is crossing the Night's Bridge, whose impending horrors become clear to Richard as soon as he steps on it: "… Richard began to understand darkness: darkness as something solid and real, so much more than a simple absence of light. He felt it touch his skin, questing, moving, exploring: gliding through his mind" (101-102). This passage shows the magic of London Below examining Richard. The darkness decides that Richard may continue, but his little helper Anaesthesia is taken, the only reminder of her is a bead from her necklace that Richard finds on the ground. Richard's reaction to this event exemplifies, in stark comparison to the indifference of the London Belowers, his utter feeling of despair, guilt, frustration at having lost her:

> The woman raised her flashlight, shone it across the bridge. Richard could see all the way across the bridge. It was deserted. "Where is she?" he asked.
>
> "Gone," said the woman, flatly. "The darkness took her."
>
> "We've got to do something," said Richard urgently.
>
> "Such as?"
>
> Once again, he opened his mouth. This time, he found no words. He closed it again. He fingered the lump of quartz, looked at the others on the ground.
>
> "She's gone," said the woman. "The bridge takes its toll. Be grateful it didn't take you too. (104)

Again, Richard must accept his inability to change the situation that arises: he has now lost his guide. Richard succeeds in finding the market and Door, and forms a group with her and her bodyguard, Hunter, to complete the quest that Door is on. The next level of testing Richard's capability is played out in London Above, the realm Hunter, the bodyguard, cannot enter. This is crucial, as without Hunter, Door and Richard have no physical protection. They solve this puzzle too, and manage, after an adventurous escape from security guards, to locate, entering through a cathedral door displayed at the British Museum, the caverns of the angel

Islington. Islington is the major antagonist figure in the narrative and names the next level of the quest: they must bring him a key.

Obtaining this key is another test that Richard passes with excellent results. The test is threefold and once completed, the key, kept safe by the Black Friars, which the angel Islington needs, will be won. After Hunter and Door pass their part of the test by winning a fight and solving a riddle, respectively, it is Richard's turn to seize the key. The test is called the Ordeal, and with good reason: Richard is guided to a small room where portraits of numerous people, who attempted and failed the Ordeal, going back hundreds of years, are hung. He has no other choice but to face what awaits him, but again, as he is unaware of the depth of the challenge, like so many difficulties in London Below, he is not at all deterred and enters, showing hardly any apprehension. He exits the room and finds himself back in London Above, at an underground station. Here he experiences a series of hallucinations that reveal to him that he has become a deranged homeless person, and that killing himself would be the only way to end his miserable suffering. Richard takes the image presented to him for granted and is at the point of jumping in front of the train when he is saved by a piece of London Below, a speckle of the fantasy tale that suddenly turns palpably real: he feels his fingers clasp around a bead from the rat girl Anaesthesia's necklace in his pocket.

The proof of London Below's existence saves Richard's sanity, and cements his new reality. Instead of crashing into him, to add him to its ghastly travelling corpses of suicide victims, the train opens its doors to Richard, who enters it and is safely transferred back to his companions in London Below. He walks with the obtained key triumphantly back to Door and Hunter. As the narration turns to focalizing Hunter, the impression that Richard gives to the ones around him appears to have shifted:

> The friars drew back. Richard Mayhew, the Upworlder, came toward them through the fog, walking beside the abbot. Richard looked different, somehow . . . Hunter

> scrutinized him, trying to work out what had changed. His center of balance had moved lower, become more centered. No . . . it was more than that. He looked less boyish. He looked as if he had begun to grow up. (254)

What is described in this passage is the external, visible change in Richard: his body, his physical shape shows the balance that he feels inside. Not only has he successfully obtained the key, the reward that his friends need so desperately, but he has also convinced himself that his life is worth living. He is not consciously aware of it yet, but Hunter, whose instincts are sharper, perceives the physical transformation that these achievements have brought in his posture and in the way he carries himself.

The next event that further enhances Richard's physical powers is his encounter with the Beast. Going towards the labyrinth Richard needs to process the fact that Hunter has betrayed them all for an opportunity to kill the Beast. When they arrive at the bottom of London Below, at the end of Down Street, an ancient portal awaits them, through which they enter the labyrinth, where the Beast is guarding Islington. Hunter dies in the attempt but surprisingly it is Richard who finishes off what she started and he kills the Beast. Hunter, with her dying wish makes Richard touch the Beast's blood to his eyes and lips, through which he receives elevated senses and simply knows the way out of the Labyrinth. In this instant the blood of the Beast represents a portal of knowledge. He puts some blood on his tongue and realises that "it tasted utterly natural, like tasting an ocean" (319). Richard, completely transformed now, runs through the labyrinth:

> Whatever the reason, he ran straight and true through the labyrinth, which no longer held any mysteries for him. He felt that he knew every twist, every path, every alley and lane and runnel of it. He ran, stumbling and falling, and still running, exhausted, through the labyrinth, his blood pounding in his temples. A rhyme coursed through his

head, as he ran, pounding and echoing to the rhythm of his feet. It was something he had heard as a child.

This aye night, this aye night

Every night and all

Fire and fleet and candlelight

And Christ receive thy soul. (320)

Richard shows hidden qualities here, not only reflected in killing the Beast and finding his way back to Door, but in the fact that he has always known this would happen, from his dreams. Similarly, the children's verse, resurfacing from his subconscious, shows a changed consciousness and new reality, and reflect his becoming a complex well-rounded character, who, moving from a state of unknowing and being invisible, now has become the one who can see his own past, present and future.

At the end of the labyrinth waits Islington, the false angel, who captures Door, and tortures them but is prevented by Door from going to Heaven and is instead transferred, through another portal that Door opens, to a menacing place. The world of London Below has been saved by Richard and Door, they are now the heroes. During these adventures of a lifetime Richard receives the titles "The Warrior" (343), "Sir Richard Maybury" (344), and is given "the freedom of the Underside" (347). Even though these titles render him a proper member of London Below, his wish is to return to his old life in London Above, and he learns from the abbot that it is possible: "'Richard passed the Ordeal of the Key. He is its master, until he returns it to our keeping. The key has power.' … 'The key is the key to all reality. If Richard wants to return to London Above, then the key will take him back to London Above'" (344). Richard has gone through the ultimate transformation from being controlled by others to controlling not only his own decisions, but being master of all, including his own, reality.

Even though Door asks him to stay, and Richard is hesitant, soon he says goodbye to Door, ready to never see her again. Back in London Above, Richard's transformation becomes evident: he is assertive and self-confident, securing a luxurious flat for himself and a promotion at work. He refuses Jessica's offer to get back together and there is already another girl at work who wants to go out with him. However, he is melancholy. When he finally tells Gary what happened to him while he was away, Gary is sceptical and assures Richard that "this is reality. Get used to it. It's all there is" (370). Richard then realises that to be happy, he must abandon London Above, and declares to a homeless lady, before carving a makeshift doorway into a random wall with Hunter's knife: "I thought I wanted a nice normal life. I mean, maybe I am crazy. I mean, maybe. But if this is all there is, then I don't want to be sane" (371). A parallel can be drawn between this scene and the Ordeal, when Richard must make a choice between sanity or death, and in the second case between sanity and the symbolic death of a boring, predictable life. Richard realises that the confrontation with "the alternate realm of London Below, a place born of magic and the uncanny" (Van der Colff 18) has resulted in an epiphany; he understands that he needs to go back, as through his "experiences in London Below, his primary reality is transformed into emptiness, a blank slate to be filled with fantasy" (Van der Colff 20). He is given consolation when his wish is granted; the Marquis de Carabas appears and takes him back to London Below.

Thus, Richard disappears, but he leaves behind a glimmer of the portal to London Below in the form of his honest narrative told to a good friend. The tale is passed on and therefore the portal left open, just a little crack, between the two worlds, waiting for the next wanderer to enter through it into the other world.

Chapter 3: Liminality and Transformation in *The Graveyard Book*

Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (2008), just like Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), which inspired it, is composed of short stories that are interconnected by the setting. Both locations, a jungle and a graveyard, can be seen as an unlikely setting for raising a child, without human parents. In *The Graveyard Book*, the graveyard takes the role of a nursery, a playground, and a school. Even though the location is an epitome of another world, another Underworld, similarly to *Neverwhere*, the margins between realities in this narrative are more difficult to detect. This chapter shows how in *The Graveyard Book*, the multiple portals lead to liminal spaces that overlap and connect realities in a crisscross layover manner. The protagonist's encounter with humans, ghosts and otherworldly beings will smudge the edges of reality for not only the protagonist, but all people and creatures around him. The protagonist goes through a transformation from being invisible to finding his name, his identity and his future goals. This transformation results in his understanding of the consolation he has received from the graveyard that he grew up in, and the confrontation he seeks in the human world, finding which is the only way for him to move forward in his life.

The Other World: Portals, Crossing Boundaries Between Fantasy and Reality in *The Graveyard Book*

The setting is not consciously chosen by the protagonist: Nobody Owens wanders into the world of the graveyard by chance, as a toddler, in the middle of the night, after his parents and sister are murdered in one of the homes near the cemetery. The city is asleep; but as the creatures of the graveyard are active at night, the toddler's arrival promptly stirs up a hectic commotion. The inhabitants of the graveyard witness, in rapid succession, the appearance of the child, followed by his blood-thirsty pursuer, whose attempts to locate the little one are

nearly successful, and the flickering and fearful apparition of his dead mother's ghost pleading for her son's safety. The setting that the boy arrives at here, and nature of the portals he moves through during the story will be examined in the first section of this chapter. The protagonist will also be established as a porter figure between past and present, the living and the dead, and humans and otherworldly beings, and the significant effect that his arrival has on the inhabitants of the cemetery will be shown.

After his arrival, quite an upheaval follows, as many of the ghosts at the graveyard are sceptical about the idea of taking in a living boy. There is no time for a debate, however, as the pursuer has almost succeeded in finding the child. A decision whether or not to aid him must immediately be made. However much Mistress Owens is eager to help, clutching the child, promising his mother's ghost to take care of him, she also knows that she needs some serious support; she cannot raise the child without the help of the whole graveyard. At this point, the Lady on the Grey appears.

This eerily liminal character, simultaneously disturbing and soothing, is the representation of the Afterlife. She arrives on her grey horse, which is the vessel that carries the souls from the world of the living to that of the dead. Her name underlines the symbolic nature of the colour grey in the narrative. Gaiman navigates the reader between the blacks and whites of what is dark and scary, and what is light and familiar. The Lady on the Grey's reassuringly firm but kind character erases the borders between apprehension and anticipation of the final truth awaiting all humans. This final question, *what comes after death*, is turned into a comfortable, non-threatening, "grey," acceptance of the unknown by this noble apparition.

The Lady on the Grey decides that the people of the cemetery are to protect, shelter and raise the child. The cemetery dwellers comply and start making arrangements at once: the Owenses are to become the boy's parents, and Silas, the liminal vampire character, his

guardian. The boy's reality is instantly altered: he is named Nobody Owens and is given the Freedom of the Graveyard, which means that he becomes unnoticeable for living creatures. The assassin cannot see him anymore, the boy is hidden from one world and has made a safe transition to become part of the other world of the non-living.

The unique alliance of a vampire guardian, two dead foster parents, and their community of the deceased produces an astonishing result at raising Bod: the boy actually survives and grows to become an adolescent, even though the assassin Jack is seeking to kill him. Bod knows that he is not allowed to leave the cemetery for reasons concerning his own safety, but the details of his obscure history are kept deliberately unclear to him by his guardian, Silas. Contrarily, the history of all the dead people in the cemetery are an open book: not only does Bod learn about their personal stories, but his nightly adventures with, and lessons from the inhabitants of the graveyard prove to be quite the alternative course of the history of Britain. Insider, first-hand knowledge about past events and beliefs that he could not possibly have witnessed are described to him by the his dead friends who lived through them. These encounters allow Bod to perceive historical events from a point of view that no living creature has access to, forming a peculiar, distinct reality around him that is unlike any other child's.

Apart from learning ghostly skills such as Fading from sight, Bod's lessons include the learning of medieval medicine, for example the four humours. When he needs to recite them to Mr Pennyworth as his homework, he does it well enough: "Um. Sanguine, Choleric. Phlegmatic. And the other one. Um, Melancholic, I think" (97). The turbulent bygone times that Bod discusses with people who lived during these different ages in Britain vary greatly. Another lesson he learns is from the time of the Great Plague. Liza Hempstock, the witch girl, tells Bod how she was accused of attracting one of the village lads by witchcraft until he was "bespelled" (101). Liza was then held under water in the duck pond, as a test of her magic

powers, as a result of which she drowned. Then her body was burned "until I was nothing but blackened charcoal, and they popped me in a hole in the potter's field without so much as a headstone to mark my name"(102). She claims to be a witch, however, and believes that it was her curse that caused the carpet that arrived from London to her hometown, to be contaminated with the plague, and kill all the people in the village who took part in her cruel execution. Liza is a representative of a time in history where everyday life and magic had common ground, when people accepted the existence of supernatural and fantastic realities. These circumstances allow Bod to see his fantastic reality as the norm.

There is a ghost from Roman times at the cemetery, and even a mysterious entity from *before* the Romans, from Celtic times, hidden in the deepest grave, which Bod visits several times. He learns that the old symbolic relics in this Celtic grave, of which he tries to sell one to buy a headstone for Liza, are extremely valuable. Bod connects to and befriends the ghosts of the cemetery and shows understanding; he listens eagerly to their stories and, therefore, becomes the link between past events and their present interpretations. The fact that Bod is unaware of his unique position becomes clear during history classes at the school that he later attends outside of the graveyard. His teacher, Mr Kirby claims that Bod "is a smart lad" but "in History he'll throw in little made-up details, stuff not in the books" (168) and Bod sometimes feels, during history class "the urge to say that it hadn't happened like that, not according to people who had been there anyway" (177). Bod is thus given access to both the academic understanding of history, received from his teachers and books, and also the raw, first-hand experiences of the inhabitants of those times, who now are in the graveyard. This results in past and present overlapping in him causes the truth of what actually happened to become smudged and unclear.

Bod's reality has been altered by growing up in an unusual community, but it is *his* reality, just like his name, Nobody, does not sound extraordinary to him. He is unaware,

however, of the magnitude of the change his arrival and years spent at the cemetery bring to its inhabitants. The decade that Bod spends at the cemetery is incomparable to the endless time stretching ahead of the dead people inhabiting it. Nevertheless, Bod transforms some of the ghosts' view on existence, and therefore, their reality. Firstly, he fulfils a long lost dream of a childless couple who were denied children in their lives and were forced to give up that dream of having a child when they were still alive and reached old age, and definitely when they died. Now, beyond the end, when they would not have expected it, they are given the opportunity to become loving parents to someone who needs them even more than they need him. The Owenses give all the attention, care and wisdom to Bod that any child needs to receive from their parents to become a well-rounded individual.

Apart from the Owenses, Bod also changes the reality of his friend from the cemetery, the witch-girl Lisa Hempstock. Lisa lost hope and trust in humanity when she was tortured, killed and burned by the people of her village. Lisa does not expect to be pleasantly surprised by human beings ever again but must check her centuries-long resentment when she realises the dangers Bod chooses to go through, only to make her happy by giving her a headstone. Lisa helps Bod escape from two life-threatening situations in return.

Another otherworldly being whose existence is changed by Bod is Silas. Silas is essential in the upbringing of the child as he is the only one who can physically leave the cemetery and thus provide the necessary items that a living, growing body will need. Silas is known to be an erratic character at the cemetery, who has the Freedom of the Graveyard, comes and goes as he pleases and none of the inhabitants expect him to behave any differently. However, when he pledges himself to become Bod's guardian, his responsibilities and commitment to the child's feeding, clothing, education and safety transform him into an, albeit enigmatic, but nonetheless reliable parent-figure for Bod.

The rest of the graveyard's inhabitants support Bod, they teach him, raise him, and together eliminate the assassins who come to the cemetery to kill him. Saving Bod creates a common goal amongst the inhabitants of the graveyard. His ability to see the cemetery's inhabitants fades as he grows up, but the effect of his time spent there will never fade: his interaction with them has made a lasting impression on this community of dead people. As such, Bod initiates the constitution of a liminal grey area between the unchangeable reality of being dead and forgotten and of being alive and full of future possibilities.

Most of the ghosts in the graveyard with whom Bod interacts are normal, everyday dead humans, behaving and talking according to *when* they are from. The master of the ancient druid-grave leaves an unfathomable, alien impression on Bod, whose origins are impossible to trace. He soon learns that the druid Sleer is not the only obscure, non-human creature around. Bod learns that many wonderful and terrifying beings inhabit the world, the array of whom is described by Miss Lupescu as "there are the living and the dead, there are day-folk and night-folk, there are ghouls and mist-walkers, there are the high hunters and the Hounds of God. Also, there are solitary types" (63). It is unclear for Bod to which category he himself belongs. The dead people are on one side and cannot mingle with the living ones, and the living are on the other side and can never notice the dead. But Bod can see them all, he converses with both sides and belongs to both, but also to neither.

The liminal "microworlds" (Klapcsik 76) are acutely present in *The Graveyard Book*, represented by its inhabitants. Bod, Nobody, lives among them but does not belong to any of the classes (Abbruscato 68), as he occupies the grey area between human and other, living and dead, real and imaginary. Therefore, Bod is the porter at the intersection of these worlds, and the link between them, as if he were positioned at the overlapping margins, or between the folds of the seams, at the edge, where these worlds blindly feel for one another. His position as porter is different from that of the similarly liminal figure of Silas, because Bod can make a

choice between these worlds, to leave one for the other, whereas Silas' only existence is on the margin between them, as he cannot fully exist in either.

The significance of the colour grey is evident in *The Graveyard Book*. If the living were represented by the colour white and the dead by black then Bod would be located on the periphery between them, merging the two, allowing them to overlap into grey. And that is what he becomes, a faded, grey, invisible person, until he meets Scarlett, a human girl always dressed in colourful garments, who comes to visit the cemetery to play, while her mother or father sits on a bench. The little girl "would wander off the path, a splash of fluorescent green or orange or pink" (36). Additionally to her appearance, her name, Scarlett, the colour of the life-blood, is in stark contrast with the invisible boy called Nobody, who had "a small, grave face and grey eyes" (36) and "a mop of mouse-coloured hair" (37). The liminality of Bod's existence between the shady cemetery folk and the bright new friend is made poignant, as his position allows Scarlett's reality to transform. Scarlett does not only accept the possibility of Bod being merely a creature of her imagination, but she allows this new idea to develop further by acknowledging that her imaginary friend has his own imaginary friends whom she cannot see, but is ready to converse with: "Bod would introduce Scarlett to some of his other friends. That she could not see them did not seem to matter … He would pass on their comments to her" (37). In this manner, Bod plays the role of the interpreter, transferring information between the living and the dead and therefore causing friction and interaction between them.

Lori Campbell introduces the "porter" figure, a powerful organic representation connecting two sides, allowing them to interact: "[t]hrough the portal or porter, the concrete or metaphorical manifestation of magical agency, the Primary and Secondary spaces meaningfully collide" (4). Bod serves as a porter figure between his "primary" world that he shares with the ghosts of the cemetery, and the "secondary" world, which is the human world.

Even though Scarlett cannot see Bod's friends, she sees them through his eyes and therefore creates for herself, from an illusion, a real image.

Van der Colff argues that the distinction between the marvellous and the uncanny might be more difficult to establish than imagined by Todorov and Jackson, as these two aspects of fantastic literature have a binding connection between them:

> Todorov and Jackson both attempt to establish clear boundaries between sub-genres of the fantastic, although they allow some room for overlap. I think that these genres are much more intricately related. What is "real" or "true" for one person may be "illusory" for another. What appears to be a "dreamscape" or "hallucinatory" state may for another person be his/her fundamental "reality". Or, some narrative event or character may initially be perceived as "illusory", but may eventually become part of another character's primary "reality." (17)

Even though Scarlett is a living friend, who believes Bod to be imaginary, their friendship is real (Van der Colff 20). Scarlett represents all other living outsiders who might have the opportunity, the privilege, to be able to see Bod. The reassuring physical confidence of his existence that is revealed to Scarlett cements Bod's role in this relationship as the conductor through whom the uncanny becomes marvellous and the illusion becomes real. Their friendship is put on pause for a few years, as Scarlett moves away, but it is Scarlett at the end who helps Bod solve the mystery of his family's murder, therefore, she plays a crucial role in the resolution of the novel.

An event that brings the two worlds of the dead and the living together is the Danse Macabre, a feature that Gaiman borrows from European folklore. It is a celebration during a unique, sombre and at the same time uplifting night, presenting Bod with an eye-opening revelation about the group he really belongs to. Bod wants to join in with the preparations in the hectic graveyard, but is curiously left out. It seems to him that the graveyard is bursting

with anticipation, humming with the fussy, cleaning, singing inhabitants, all sharing some secret conspiracy, a plan that he cannot be told of. Bod wanders around, ending up downtown with all the other living people, waiting together. He has to figure out for himself what the Danse Macabre actually is. When he sees his friends approaching the town, as a group of sombre ghost in the distance is when Bod realises that he can never really be part of the cemetery community, until he dies himself. What he can do, however, is dance and take part in the fun, which "unites the poor and the rich, the dead and the living, the primary and secondary world" (Klapcsik 77). The heart-breaking truth for Bod is that he is part of a group, but it is not the group that he thought he belonged to. It is not as heart-breaking as the reality of "the liminal character Silas, who is in-between the two states" and thus "cannot participate" (Klapcsik 77). Silas is the one and only true liminal character here, as he is not allowed to dance, only to observe from the sidelines.

Two other worlds Bod brings together are the two extremes of the fantastic in the novel: the Jacks of All Trades and the Honor Guards. The former group is comprised of evil, monstrous humans who, on the outside, look and act like gentlemen. The latter group, fighting evil, is made up of heroes, who on their turn look like monsters. Bod is unaware of the existence of either of these two societies, yet his identity bears a pivotal significance in their operations, as large battles and intricate plots are being executed on both sides behind his back to either slaughter or spare him. The reader gradually comprehends that Bod's family and other innocent creatures in the narrative fall victim to the greed and hunger for power that the Jacks of All Trades represent. The impression that these two groups have been in a timeless struggle with each other is strong, but details are left to the imagination of the reader and in fact are not shared with Bod until the very end. Therefore, Bod's oblivion of his own importance brings a different kind of liminality with it, a true invisibility, a perfect fading or decolorizing of his identity from himself. Bod must move away from this grey area of being

nobody and develop his own true colour and name and therefore, his identity. His encounters with otherworldly beings and concepts, discussed in the next section, will assist him in achieving this goal.

Otherworldly Beings and Concepts in *The Graveyard Book*

The allegation that children's books have become too protective of their young readers, resulting in "the forced sanitization of fairy tales" (Abbruscato 4), makes modern children's literature controversial. According to Abbruscato, this is a mistake in modern children's stories, as it "creates the illusion for children that life is completely sunny" (4), which does not prepare children well enough for the adversities they will undoubtedly face growing up. Abbruscato declares furthermore, quoting Bettelheim, that "[b]asic elements needed for balanced growth of one's psyche" are "the emotions, the imagination and the intellect" (4). He goes on to claim that "with the recent devolution in fairy tales, this equilateral growth is no longer possible" (4). The accusation of being too protective cannot be made about *The Graveyard Book*, which portrays a wide array of otherworldly beings, monsters and themes that might be considered less suitable, even too grotesque for young readers. One of these themes is the narrative's central notion of a child growing up in a cemetery, among ghosts.

The Gothic monster elements in the novel can be considered idiosyncratic, for simply being present and, therefore, assisting the development of the above mentioned three aspects of human identity in its readers. But Gaiman goes one step further in *The Graveyard Book* by creating monsters that have important characteristics, other than being merely scary; Gaiman creates monstrous creatures that are more real and relatable. This section argues that the tension created by the alternation of opposing character traits renders the otherworldly beings liminal, on the edge of likeable. This section highlights how Bod, while he decodes his past and future, accepts confrontation with monstrous beings and concepts. The lessons learnt

from these encounters assist his transformative quest of moving into adulthood, teaching him skills and knowledge needed for the development of his identity, so he can, in his case, exit the magical world through the portal, to join the living humans outside of the cemetery.

Gaiman's monsters are simultaneously frightening as well as ridiculous. The ghouls are scary but insecure, like Lisa Hempstock; they are also ruthless but understanding, such as Silas and Miss Lupescu; and they can be sympathetic but evil, like the Jacks. The first group of beings discussed are the ghouls, who teach Bod indirectly to verify the value of prized possessions or promises to avoid rash decisions. A decision Bod makes without thinking is going through the ghoul-gate, which is another portal into a perilous new world. Bod meets the ghouls in the cemetery by accident. They stumble upon him sitting at the ghoul-gate, the entrance to their city under the ground. The ghoul-gate is a peculiar place:

> One grave in every graveyard belongs to the ghouls. Wander any graveyard long enough and you will find it—waterstained and bulging, with cracked or broken stone, scraggly grass or rank weeds about it, and a feeling, when you reach it, of abandonment. It may be colder than the other gravestones, too, and the name on the stone is all too often impossible to read. If there is a statue on the grave it will be headless or so scabbed with fungus and lichens as to look like a fungus itself. If one grave in a graveyard looks like a target for petty vandals, that is the ghoul-gate. If the grave makes you want to be somewhere else, that is the ghoul-gate. (57)

Bod is feeling lost and abandoned himself, and it is the Ghoul gate his legs take him to, where he sits down to brood about how miserable he is. The reason for him feeling this way is that his guardian, Silas, has left him in the care of a strict new guardian, who is forcing him to eat strange food and memorize seemingly useless lists of words. The ghoul-gate he happens to be sitting on leads to yet another world, one that it is dangerous and almost impossible to return from, similarly to London Below in *Neverwhere*, discussed in Chapter 2. Bod, who is ignorant

of the danger, allows the wacky little creatures that suddenly appear and show sympathy, promising him cheer, festivity and nice food at their destination, to take him through it. The secret entrance is burst open: “the Duke of Westminster grabbed a handful of mangy-looking grass, shouted what sounded like “Skagh! Thegh! Khavagah!” and pulled. The stone slab that covered the grave swung open like a trapdoor, revealing a darkness beneath” (70). Then they all jump in, throwing Bod in as well, closing the gate by shouting “Wegh Khârados!” (70). They fall through a seemingly unending black hole to drop into a hellish underground scene, where Bod sees other ghouls dropping from ghoul gates all around. The darkness he falls through represents his utter ignorance of what lies ahead.

One of the most frightful episodes of the book follows, in which Bod discovers the nature of ghouls. The cheerful creatures Bod has teamed up with are in fact living corpses, feeding on other corpses. The description of this method of nutrition is bizarrely shocking but still funny, as the ghouls are unmistakeably convinced that they are living their best life: “can you imagine … how fine a drink the black ichor that collects in a leaden coffin can be? Or how it feels to be more important than kings and queens, than presidents, prime ministers or heroes, to be sure of it, in the same way that people are more important than Brussels sprouts?” (73). Bod realises that the very same dumb and revolting future awaits him. He will receive a new name (the one of the dead individual that he is feeding on first), and will lose all of his memories, and with them, his integrity. Bod is doomed; his initial amusement about the ghouls is turning into horror, as their funny appearance and clothing, speech and names now reveal a grotesque truth about them. These monsters bring to mind Roberts’ claim, according to which

> Gothic (as fantasy) *is* ludicrous”. Most modes of literature have been mocked and pastiched, but crime, or love-romance, or the cowboy novel (for example) have not provided writers with whole careers simply writing parodies of the form. Fantasy has.

> This is, indeed, a rich tradition, tolerated within the genre perhaps as a demonstration that its fans 'can take a joke' but actually speaking to a much deeper cultural logic. (28)

The Graveyard Book belongs to this tradition of serious horror-parody, exemplified by texts like Gaiman's collaboration with Terry Pratchett, *Good Omens* (1990) and George A. Romero's film *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). Describing the ghouls with humour exposes how innocence and inexperience can lead to making almost pathetic mistakes. The comic relief that is initially caused by the appearance of the ghouls turns into a reality-check; Bod grasps the immense gap between the reality of the ghouls and his own: what is delicious food for the ghouls seems far more abominable to him than any food of Miss Lupescu's that he previously refused to eat. The peculiar creatures are loathsome, nasty varmints, who are dragging him towards their city of magical wonders, *Ghûlheim,* glowing with a hellish red light in the distance. The awakening places Bod on the borderline between childhood and adulthood, at the liminal stage of adolescence. This coming of age experience, therefore, highlights the Todorovian liminal stage, which Bod has arrived at, of being ignorant of the next, adult stage, and having to earn and learn his way into it by going through dangerous trials.

Bod considers himself unlucky with the strict and altogether strange teacher, Miss Lupescu, who replaces Silas when he is called away from the cemetery for a longer period of time. However, it turns out later that the seemingly random pieces of information that Bod forcibly acquired from Miss Lupescu, such as knowing how to ask for help in different languages, among which that of the night-gaunt, are lifesaving pieces of information. Bod is put in a sack to be carried off by one of the ghouls, but remembers to call for help and is later saved and carried back to the graveyard on Miss Lupescu's back, with only mild injuries. The unasked-for ability to open the ghoul-gate turns out to be a gift too later, when the assassin

group who killed Bod's family are chasing him in the cemetery. He can open the ghoul-gate to dispose of his enemy, which puts the lessons learnt from Miss Lupescu in an different light.

Each chapter of *The Graveyard Book* introduces a new challenge for Bod. These lessons alternate between bringing either confrontation or consolation to Bod. In the chapter where he faces the ghouls he is saved by Miss Lupescu, who appears as an enormous wolf-dog, chasing after the ghouls who are running away with Bod in a sack. Peeping through a hole in the sack, catching a glimpse Miss Lupescu, Bod thinks "I'm between the ghouls and the monster" (83). Only when the dog speaks "in Miss Lupescu's voice" (84) does Bod realise that he is saved. He is taken back home to the Owenses on the hound's back. The next day Bod looks for the folded up paper with the lists of creatures that he was supposed to learn, on which the first entry is *The Hounds of God*, creatures who "claim their transformation is a gift from their creator, and they repay the gift with their tenacity, for they will pursue an evil-doer to the very gates of Hell" (88). What Bod learns in this chapter puts the stereotypical views on monsters in a new light, as both the ghouls and the werewolf embrace the transformation they have gone through.

The witch Liza Hempstock is another otherworldly character. She is understandably dismayed at having been executed for witchcraft; the conclusion could be drawn that she was falsely accused. She reveals to Bod, however, that she *is* in fact a witch; she cursed her torturers, who all died of the plague. The text implies that Liza was persecuted not because she caused harm to people but because she was different: her goblin-like, unattractive looks drew negative attention, but also the curiosity of her fellow villagers. The cruel revenge she took in response to her own killing qualifies her as a liminal character between maiden and monster. As Bod goes on a mission to find a headstone for this bullied teenage girl, she declares that "[i]t's the first nice thing anyone's done for me in five hundred years" (120). Liza is taught a lesson about herself, and her bitter antagonism towards all fellow humans: she

surprises herself at her own willingness to hide Bod from his pursuers, when it becomes obvious that Bod is truly rubbish at Fading:

> "It's because you're alive," said Liza, with a sniff. "There's stuff as works for us, the dead, who have to fight to be noticed at the best of times, that won't never work for you people."
>
> She hugged herself tightly, moving her body back and forth, as if she was debating something. Then she said, "It's because of me you got into this…. Come here, Nobody Owens."
>
> He took a step towards her, in that tiny room, and she put her cold hand on his forehead. It felt like a wet silk scarf against his skin.
>
> "Now," she said. "Perhaps I can do a good turn for you."
>
> And with that, she began to mutter to herself, mumbling words that Bod could not make out. Then she said, clear and loud,
>
> "Be hole, be dust, be dream, be wind
>
> Be night, be dark, be wish, be mind,
>
> Now slip, now slide, now move unseen,
>
> Above, beneath, betwixt, between."
>
> Something huge touched him, brushed him from head to feet, and he shivered. His hair prickled, and his skin was all gooseflesh. Something had changed. "What did you do?" he asked.
>
> "Just gived you a helping hand," she said. "I may be dead, but I'm a dead witch, remember. And we don't forget." (120-121)

By using this spell on Bod, Liza creates a liminal zone around him, reminiscent of a veil, to make him invisible, so when the two men come back for him to the storage room that Bod was locked into, they see no trace of him, even though he is right there. Miss Lupescu saves

Bod because she promised Silas that she would take care of him, but the magic that Liza performs here is an honest response to Bod's kindness, teaching Bod, Liza, and the reader a valuable lesson on altruism, benevolence, courtesy and decency.

Finally, the creatures that are less monstrous or otherworldly are to be discussed here: the humans. Many of the living human beings that Bod interacts with end up disappointing him. Some examples are the two men trying to trick each other for the Sleer's brooch that Bod takes to the antique shop to sell, and the school bullies who threaten Bod when he tries to help the victims. Both cases end with Bod's narrow escape, and an escape only possible with the help of his graveyard friends and ghostly capabilities.

The best example of an evil human being is Jack Frost, the assassin, who is several steps ahead of Bod, when they encounter each other at the end of the novel. Jack is a master of disguise and acts to be of a man of letters, a local historian who comes to the graveyard regularly on the pretext of copying the letters from the gravestones. His impeccably charming manners and good-natured behaviour make a positive impression on Scarlett, her mother, and Bod, taking him for a harmless and helpful ally. This is where the liminality of Jack's character lies: he is a brilliant con artist, portraying the perfect adult Bod can rely on and trust. Yet, the power to put up such a convincing disguise comes from a galvanized drive in the assassin to reach his goal of killing Bod. Jack Frost, a powerful living human being, is portrayed as a selfish, flat character at the onset of the novel and his convincing nutty professor-act almost completely fools Bod and the reader. Flat characters do not exist in real life, as nobody is ever only mean or kind. Jack Frost's ability to hide his monstrous and shrewd intentions behind a completely convincing mask of benevolence renders him almost non-human. His liminal quality between cruel and kind is shattered when his true nature is revealed, leaving only the monster to be seen.

Jack Frost's driving force, as he calls it is "[p]ride in my work … Pride in finishing what I began" (260-261). According to Margaret Seyford Hrezo, the motivation behind Jack Frost's and Bod's acts differ in how they observe reality. She explains that the Jacks, just like the ghouls, represent believers of the Modern Project, who "understand reason as pure calculation of the means required to reach a desired end and assume that reality is only what they can see or touch … Rationalism is instrumental. The measure of rationality is success in achieving goals" (84). For Bod, cold calculation is not unknown, as Silas, his guardian, uses manipulation and cruelty to achieve his goals, but these goals serve the community. However, the Jacks' path of "greed, villainy, murder, the unbridled desire for power, and the certainty that only the individual who desires these things matters" (Hrezo 85) is alien to Bod. Hrezo claims that Bod develops opsis during the time he spends at the cemetery, an ethical clear-sightedness, which is "[t]he classic understanding of reason" (85); this "underlies the life of the graveyard with its openness to all parts of reality" (Hrezo 85). Jack, by contrast, lacks opsis and that eventually becomes his demise. Unlike Bod, Jack does not grasp the Sleer's intentions, and blinded by his greed for power falls into its trap: becoming its master means remaining underground forever.

At the final confrontation, Bod and Scarlett manage to escape to the cemetery, where Scarlett hides and Bod, with the help of the graveyard community tricks each Jack into a trap. Mr Dandy, an apparent leader of the order, is the one who reveals to Bod who the Jacks are and what the prophecy about him is, the reason for his family to die: "We killed you for protection. Long time ago, one of our people—this was back in Egypt, in pyramid days—he foresaw that one day, there would be a child born who would walk the borderland between the living and the dead. That if this child grew to adulthood it would mean the end of our order and all we stand for" (252). Bod fulfils the prophecy and sends Mr Dandy through the ghoul-gate into Hell. The last Jack to take care of is Jack Frost, but Bod eventually manages,

through understanding of Jack and himself discussed in the previous paragraph, to defeat him. The power of Jack Frost and his gripping effect on all people around him lies in his adaptability. In this sense, Jack Frost is comparable to a classic gothic liminal character such as Stevenson's Dr Jekyll. Roberts's explanation of nineteenth-century Gothic liminality applies to Gaiman's form of portal fantasy fiction:

> What all these monsters have in common is their protean ability to transform, to move from unexceptional 'human' behaviour to barbaric, violent, transgressive and unfettered. In this respect they are emblematizations of the protean force of the Gothic novel itself; a form capable of being associated with supernatural excess. (31)

In this way Jack Frost, as the other monsters in the narrative, is liminal, as their function is flipped, the stereotypical gothic horror elements are used to create loving personages and the humans that make a good first impression turn out to be cheats, murderers. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that Bod finds consolation among monsters and confrontation among his own kind, the living humans. As soon as he realises his need for human contact, he reaches the decision to leave the cemetery, which process is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Transformation of the Protagonist in *The Graveyard Book*

The epigraph to the novel recalls a nursery rhyme that ends "it's only a pauper that nobody owns." The inhabitants of the graveyard agree, when they need a name for Bod that "[h]e looks like nobody but himself" (19) and, therefore, give him the name Nobody Owens. Nobody Owens' name implies that his personal history and future depends only on his own actions, he is free to choose what to do with his life. He learns to fit into the graveyard by following instructions: "invisibility is an essential skill that he has to learn via tiresome drills" (Klapcsik 79). While Bod becomes good at Fading and Dreamwalking and the other skills he

learns from the dead, Klapcsik argues that it is not the goal of the narrative to isolate him from the living, as this "fantasy realm is not an escape from reality, but in constant interaction with it" (79). Together with Silas, Bod is a "guide … capable of controlling, and mediating between, the two realms" (Klapcsik 79). At the moment of his near-death, with Jack Frost about to kill him, Bod knows and accepts his name to be Nobody Owens, giving up Jack to be "owned" as Master of the Sleer, and himself to walk away free. The years of interacting with both the dead and the living created a unique understanding in him of both. This section analyses the character transformation Bod undergoes from a grey and invisible, liminal being into a living human, ready to exit the cemetery and join the outside world.

The event that fades the boundary between the dead and the living, the Danse Macabre "unites the poor and the rich, the dead and the living, the primary and secondary world" (Klapcsik 78). Bod takes it for granted that he would walk with the dead, but is refused and must join the living. This is an eye-opener for the young boy and a step towards his understanding of his uncommon position in the graveyard, spurring his wish to join a school of living people, and finally, leave the graveyard and join the world of the living. After this event the graveyard folk retreat back to the cemetery, into their hidden existence. "*The Graveyard Book* is a wainscot fantasy. Wainscoting, a type of wall panelling, describes in this context fictional societies that are hidden, literally or metaphorically. A wainscot fantasy therefore focuses on this difficult –to-detect society living in the interstitial spaces of primary reality" (McStotts 69). The theme of invisibility is thoroughly explored in *The Graveyard Book*, rendering Bod, who is not visible to living people, a liminal character; after the Danse Macabre, his understanding of his own possibilities in joining the living are expanded.

In *Neverwhere*, Richard Mayhew is an ordinary, unremarkable individual, "chosen" by fate to be the one to help Door. Similarly, Bod is singled out; his fate is predetermined, based on an ancient prophecy. No further evidence or sign is given that Bod has any extraordinary

powers or qualities other than those that the freedom of the graveyard lends him. The only sign, (and a convincing one at that) is that he does, quite expertly dispose of the last members of the assassin group exactly as prophesized. Bod does this with the help of the graveyard folk. He stays calm in all situations, almost as cool as an assassin himself. Scarlett is shocked at this and does not understand how Bod could trap Jack so calculatingly, but Bod is unmoved, and in his turn does not understand why Scarlett is so disappointed in him. Silas wipes her memory of the night, pointing out, when Bod is outraged that Scarlett will not remember him, that "[p]eople want to forget the impossible" (270). Bod has truly entered the realm of the fantastic, therefore, playing by the rules of a much more far-reaching system of realms between life and death, and beyond. His reality is contrasted with the dual reality of life OR death, which is Scarlett's reality.

Bod has become part of the impossible that lies beyond life. To become a real, living individual, he needs to leave the graveyard, the safety of his home and face the unknown. Therefore, the graveyard was the safe haven, atypically for any usual depiction of horror graveyards and atypically of portal fantasies, where the secondary world is the unfamiliar one. Again, the liminal characteristic is inevitable, flipping the illusion of what is real and what is safe upside down, turning it around, making the world of the living, that Bod is facing in the beginning of adulthood, the dangerous location where adventure awaits. He leaves, even if Liza Hempstock's last words to him try to convince him to stay:

> "That's the difference between the living and the dead, ennit?" said the voice. It was Liza Hempstock talking, Bod knew, although the witch-girl was nowhere to be seen. "The dead dun't disappoint you. They've had their life, done what they've done. We dun't change. The living, they always disappoint you, dun't they? You meet a boy who's all brave and noble, and he grows up to run away." … "We wants you to

> surprise us and disappoint us and impress us and amaze us. Come home, Bod." (183-184)

What Bod finds in the graveyard is consolation, but he does not know this until he is confronted with the truth of his true identity. In *The Graveyard Book*, Nobody Owens finds consolation in being grey and invisible in the graveyard, observing and learning from the otherworldly beings around him. Once he is ready to face the fact that he has an important role in the fantastic community based on a prophecy, he accepts his fate and fulfils the prophecy. The most important lesson he learns, however, is that before he can be a true member of the graveyard community and join the ghosts, first he needs to live. He learns that leaving the safe haven of the graveyard is the only way to face the reality of living. The advice that Mother Slaughter gives him when he leaves the graveyard illustrates the ambiguity of his status perfectly: "[y]ou are always you and that don't change, and you are always changing and there's nothing you can do about it" (280). That is, while he is still alive.

Chapter 4: Liminality and Transformation in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

In *Neverwhere* and *The Graveyard Book* a portal connects a primary to a secondary world. The two secondary worlds are a parallel city, fully populated under the ground and a neighbourhood society of friendly dead people abiding their unchanging "lives" in an urban cemetery. The third novel to be discussed in relation to portals and seeking other worlds is the *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (*Ocean* afterwards). The novel is set at an alien, complex, mythically abstract site. In this novel, Gaiman fuses seemingly miscellaneous elements of cosmology, the bildungsroman, fairy-tale aesthetic, monsters from another realm, and a human-guarding goddess. The nameless protagonist's journey balances the story on the edge of the real and dream world. This novel is set apart as the protagonist crosses portals, and he becomes a portal himself, but he is not aware of this fact. This chapter highlights the nature of the portal, the titular ocean. The function of this liminal space is to lend knowledge to the protagonist when he enters it. The otherworldly figures and concepts assist in the protagonist's fluctuating alteration between moving towards and away from this memory-portal and his evolution is revealed to be cyclic, ever-returning to the starting point. Therefore, in this novel, the protagonist is presented in a limbo-like existence between the stagnation of his adult reality and the rediscovery of the expansively eccentric reality of his childhood. The conclusion will be drawn that in *Ocean* portals must be kept shut and guarded.

The Other World: Portals, Crossing Boundaries Between Fantasy and Reality in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

The portals leading into other worlds in *Ocean* are numerous and leave the reader questioning the nature and existence of the fantastic elements in the story. The concept that the fantastic stands between marvellous, overtly supernatural, and the mundane, non-supernatural elements

is reflected in the novel. Klapcsik refers to this as a "*thematic* hesitations between reality and the fantastic" and claims that it "is mirrored on the *formal level* of the text: the narrative voice and focalization is often doubled" (26). Klapcsik argues about Gaiman's stories in general tend to be liminal "because of the dubious nature of the fantastic realm" (26). The marvellous in *Ocean* is not questioned by the unnamed narrator, who is in the process of remembering the fantastic elements of his childhood, but by the reader. As his childhood memories resurface, triggered by the protagonist's return to the end of the lane, it is questionable whether the incredible events that he remembers really happened or were merely the products invented by the mind of a lonely, bookish child trying to make sense of the messy adult world around him. This section will show the significant nature of the titular body of water, the ocean: it is the portal between the fantastic and real, adulthood and childhood, remembering and forgetting.

The unnamed narrator is introduced as a socially awkward individual with an hour to spend between two emotionally taxing events: a funeral in the town he grew up in, where he has just given a speech, and the reception after the funeral, where he is expected to interact with all the guests, which he is feeling reluctant to do. Having to address the mourners at a funeral in his home town suggests that the deceased is one of his parents, marking therefore a new era in his life, the last stage after one's parents die, the true end of childhood. The protagonist aimlessly drives around in the town where he lived until he was a teenager and winds up at the site of his now demolished childhood home. This is where a flood of flashbacks from a forgotten childhood await and overpower him. He cannot resist the urge to exit his car and walk to his old neighbours' red brick farmhouse, as if mesmerised by a magnetic force. He is drawn to the centre of this force, which is the pond behind the house, the portal, whose sight allows long forgotten memories to whirl up from the deepest levels of his consciousness. These memories are a separate realm where the protagonist's life is lived parallel to the material and mental existence of the here-and-now. His mind enters the realm

of childhood, but his body remains in the liminal, physically inactive stage of reminiscence, in the present, throughout the novel. Therefore, Hempstock Farm is the physical representation of a temporal leap into a bygone time in his life.

He recollects his awful birthday party at 7 that no guests attended, then the suicide of the tenant that lived in his room, and finally the terrible tale of the otherworldly nanny, who came to look after him and his little sister. The nanny seduced his father, breaking up the family unit and feelings of safety in his home. His parents saw his hatred and rejection of the nanny as bad behaviour and the only people at his aid were the three women living on the neighbouring Hempstock Farm: Old Mrs. Hempstock, the grandma, Ginny Hempstock, the mother, and Lettie Hempstock, the 11-year-old girl, who became his friend. The rush of resurfacing memories that the narrator experiences reveal that Hempstock Farm and the pond serve as a mystical and multi-layered ancient site that form the gateway to another reality.

It is implied that the farm can be moved around and is part of the protohistory of all existing worlds, some of which are inhabited by nameless, unclassified creatures. The man remembers Lettie telling him about the farm: “Hempstock Farm stretches a very long way. We brought a lot of this with us from the old country, when we came here. The farm came with us, and brought things with it when it came. Gran calls them fleas” (40). The ambiguous “came with us” in Lettie’s description hints at the farm possibly having its own will. The farm, undeniably attached to the triple goddess figure of the women who manage it, moves itself mechanically according to the rules provided by the world-order of the megacosm, which unites the old and the new worlds and is therefore not only spatially, but temporally liminal. Rebecca Long describes the farm as “a kind of sacred zone within a changing, unstable landscape: it functions as the ‘zone of absolute reality’ in that it allows the narrator to access the truths that he has forgotten” (126). In this way, the farm is the gate between the present and past of the narrator. Furthermore, apart from being the gate between the everyday

reality and the fantastic, the farm serves as a shelter, the only place where the boy, and later, the boy as a man, feels safe. The farm serves as a shelter for his memories too. His own adult reality is merely the frame of the narrative that switches to a very different story within it, that of the artist as a boy and his lost encounters with the impossible.

The farm is located at the end of the lane, at the terminus of the town; for a child, as the protagonist remembers himself at the age of 7, perhaps even the end of the world. Anything is possible beyond this borderline between the small and safe familiar world and the vast and wild territories that lie away from it. The narrator of the book remembers being taken to this borderland beyond the lane, as a child, by the neighbour girl Lettie Hempstock, who was living at the farm at the time. Slowly as his memories return, he remembers the extraordinary features that he observed then, the scene of the farmland's alternate reality:

> I did not know where we were, but I could not believe we were still on the Hempstocks' land, no more than I believed we were in the world I had grown up in. The sky of this place was the dull orange of a warning light; the plants, which were spiky, like huge, ragged aloes, were a dark silvery green, and looked as if they had been beaten from gunmetal. (40)

The appearance of the alien surroundings is thus menacing, but the boy is not afraid, as he is with Lettie, and Lettie is not afraid. However, Lettie is only a child herself, even if she is a goddess, she is an 11-year-old goddess, and it has been a critical error in judgement on her part to allow the boy to accompany her to the borderlands. Consequently, in her efforts to keep the human world safe she in facts endangers it further. She realises that she underestimated the gravity of the situation as soon as they approach the site of the monster, but then it is too late and all she can do is hold the boy's hand really tight and instruct him not to let go. The unexpected complexity of the task of binding the monster that has entered the new country through the farm has disastrous consequences. The boy, albeit unwittingly and

unwillingly, does let go of her hand to catch the ball the flea throws at him and, therefore, allows the monster to enter, through him, the world of the humans. The monster makes a hole into the boy, into his foot, from which it slowly creeps all the way up, in the form of a wormhole, into his heart. Because of the mistake made by the guardians at Hempstock farm, an unwanted monster has crossed the boundaries of the two worlds and the site where these two worlds meet is inside the boy; he therefore has become the portal himself.

The boy understands that an uncanny event has taken place, but he hopefully assumes that the worm can be removed from his foot and attempts to do this alone, in the bathroom that evening. He pulls a piece of the worm out, but some of it is stuck and it eventually breaks off. He throws the piece of worm that came out away. This is how the monster, the Skarthach of the Keep, or Ursula Monkton by her chosen human name, enters the human world. She takes human form and arrives the next day as the new nanny. Ursula is friendly and understanding, but the boy knows her to be the manifestation of the monster he encountered at the borderlands of Hempstock farm. Their relationship is bitter and antagonistic, with the boy refusing to talk to her or eat her food. The piece of worm still left inside of him moves up from the foot into the boy's heart to form a portal for the otherworldly being. Ursula Monkton keeps the boy locked inside the house and eventually in his room, because the gate she created inside his body is transforming him into a potential entryway, a portal. Similarly to Hempstock Farm, this gate inside the boy must be guarded and kept shut.

This way of shaping the portal and keeping it ready is a phenomenon entirely new to the all-knowing Hempstocks. This shows how the workings of this old universe can be random and unexpected, even to its oldest inhabitants. They find out about the doorway inside of him when the boy is given the opportunity to, and choses to, forget, to burn, a memory of a dreadful event. This event was when his father, under the spell of the monster, almost drowns him in the bathtub. When he throws the piece of memory into the fire, he is startled by the

shock of burning pain in his foot and ends up screaming on the floor. This is how the Hempstocks find the hole in his foot and he is forced to make a confession: “That was how it came with us from the place with the orangey sky. In my foot … I brought it back. It was my fault. I’m sorry” (101). Old Mrs. Hempstock observes the hole in the foot and declares it “very clever,” explaining further that the monster “could have hidden inside you, if she needed to, used you as a door to go home” (101). The portal cannot stay in the boy, so Old Mrs. Hempstock slowly starts pulling out the wormhole: “I watched as something that glistened—it seemed black at first, then translucent, then reflective like mercury—was pulled out from the sole of my foot.” However, the end of it is stuck inside the boy, and he feels “a coldness in my heart as if a chip of ice were lodged there” (102). The portal has been fastened thoroughly, it has now become part of him; he is forever to remain the opening between fantasy and reality.

The child narrator’s position evolves and he becomes a central figure in the unfolding sequence of events. He is first invited to interact with the divine Hempstock figures, and then the unique feature of carrying a portal inside of him is established by another supernatural being. Not only does he witness it, but he also plays a part in the Hempstock women’s defensive operation against this intruder who tries to damage the human world. The young boy is therefore elevated above the rest of humanity. Old Mrs. Hempstock acknowledges that “it’s a dangerous thing to be a door” (110). According to Long, the boy is now a “powerful figure” as he has developed into a “symbol of existence of another world” and he himself is the portal:

> He is keeping the world open: he is the site of a breakthrough of the sacred into the world. He functions, physically and existentially, as a hierophany within the narrative. The narration of his childhood is also the narration of a hierophany, of a manifestation

> of the sacred or supernatural into the world. In this context, the narration of his childhood becomes a myth. (127)

The genesis story of Ursula Monkton, the earthly manifestation-myth of Skarthach of the Keep, is rapidly terminated by the gate-keeper Lettie, and the wormhole is cleaned up by the hunger birds. The end piece of the portal, connecting this world and a mysterious other is still in the narrator's heart. The possibility of escaping from the hunger birds is zero, and before Ursula Monkton could reach her door home inside the boy, the birds devour her. Lettie realises that the hunger birds need to clean the last piece too, the one in the boy's heart. She immediately places him into the fairy circle that is in the garden of the house. The boy does not believe that the circle has any powers but stays inside it nevertheless, until Lettie comes back for him with the ocean in a bucket. The circle protects him impeccably but he needs to move to the only safe place from the hunger birds: to Hempstock farm and to do that he needs to travel through the ultimate portal: the ocean.

The boy crosses the portal of the fairy ring, and within it, he crosses into the ocean, which Lettie simply brings to him in a bucket. Having gone through this double gate, he experiences an unparalleled sense of safety. As he takes the first gulp of the water, his first thought of "[t]his is the kind of water you can breathe" (143) is replaced by the immense sensation of *knowing everything*. A rush of boundless understanding takes over his mind as random concepts, complex ideas zigzag through his consciousness, revealing to him their secrets, as he is himself is now part of the ocean that connects everything, "an ocean that stretches from forever to forever" (144). He sees the intricate patterns of interlacing realities: "I saw the world from above and below. I saw that there were patterns and gates and paths beyond the real. I saw all these things and I understood them and they filled me" (143). This ocean is thus far more than a portal: it is the interlacing glue between portals, realities, a membrane defined by recognition.

The narrator remembers that the ocean shows the true form of anything that enters it: from below, under the water he child narrator looks up at Lettie, still holding his hand, and sees that "Lettie Hempstock was made of silken sheets the color of ice, filled with tiny flickering candle flames" (144). The smooth, tranquil and effortlessly fluid representation of the young goddess Lettie immersed in her element, the ocean, can be contrasted with the stormy monster Ursula who looks like filthy, ragged strips flapping in the hot wind. The symbolic contrast between these creatures narrows them down to their true natures as far as their effect on the protagonist's life: one cool, soothing and reassuring force against its stormy and destructive counterpart. However, soon it is revealed that the ocean of knowledge can be destructive too, as Lettie's voice replies to a question that has not even fully formed in the narrator's head yet, but the answer is already pronounced: "I'm really sorry" (143). The ultimate request that the boy realises he wants to make is if he could stay forever, "for the rest of time in the ocean which was the universe which was the soul which was all that mattered" (145). This request is denied by Lettie for the reason that it is impossible to stay in the ocean, because "[i]t would … [d]issolve you. You wouldn't die in here, nothing ever dies in here, but if you stayed here for too long, after a while just a little of you would exist everywhere, all spread out … Never enough of you all together in one place, so there wouldn't be anything left that would think of itself as an 'I'" (145). The ocean, the portal, is not only the glue between worlds and realities to hold them together, but also an entity that clearly keeps them separate; the ocean creates order by filtering out the pieces that belong together.

Andrew Eichel describes the ocean as a "memory palace" (145) and this sensation as the protagonist's moment "to achieve an apotheosis whereby he transcends the normal boundaries of human knowledge and experience and becomes mentally and physically united with all of reality for a brief, glorious moment" (145). The hope to stay in the ocean can be seen as a long wished-for moment for this young child, who is struggling to understand the

adult world around him. This request of a mystical manifestation of the sudden outburst to run away from home and never come back, a possible response from children unable to deal with changes in their lives. As for the adult narrator, however, this memory is more than just the memory of a great escape from hardships, it is a "symbol of shared knowledge, the ocean … connects all forms of narrative on a fundamentally symbolic and imaginative level" (Long 127). He remembers now, that even in the all-knowing ocean, looking at himself would not result in seeing his own true form, as "if I looked inward I would see only infinite mirrors, staring into myself for eternity" (144). The guarding and keeping shut of the ocean-portal is crucial, therefore, as its powers lie not in spreading constant knowledge, but in the sheer existence of this knowledge. The recollection of having had a glimpse at this vast amount of knowledge, resurfacing from the narrator's consciousness is sufficient to calm down the troubled mind of the adult protagonist. Lettie formulates the importance of keeping this ocean-portal untouched and therefore shut, as it would "be boring, knowing everything … It's nothing special, knowing how things work. And you really do have to give it all up if you want to play" (146). Eichel stresses the boy's disappointment "[t]his loss of transcendence leaves him devastated but to 'play' is to live" (146). Eichel's theory for living without the ocean in the goddess' case is "[e]ven the Hempstocks choose to coalesce their consciousness and memories around a singular point of identity, a place to call one's own" (146). Therefore, it can be concluded that for a goddess among humans there can be no liminal state between omnipotent and human, the all-powerful force must be given up to be able to "play."

Otherworldly Beings and Concepts in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

The non-human beings in *Ocean* represent dissatisfaction and the assertive force needed to achieve a change in one's situation. Even though the creatures that this section will analyse advance towards their goal, the change that they desire is not always possible or necessary,

and the transformation that this act of change brings can turn out to be unwanted in hindsight. The protagonist will learn from these otherworldly beings that taking risks without knowledge might be undesired, or even fatal, but necessary, if one wants to feel alive.

Initially, the novel offers an abstract idea of the child as a monster: small packages of willpower, not able to negotiate or reconcile, driving towards one goal only, which is to advance their, from an adult viewpoint, petty aspirations. Most children want to grow up so that they do not have to depend on adults to fulfil their ambitions. Long claims "the narrator remembers a time when he was a monster: a small child … getting his own way. Here, the narrator connects monsterhood with a kind of solipsistic selfishness, a focusing inwards of thought and emotion, to the exclusion of all others" (124). The potential in the narrator's case is dubious, he is not the assertive type as a child, but the kind of child who longs to be alone in his room with his new Narnia books. He is not feeling lonely, he is feeling very comfortable, alone with his books. According to Long, "[t]he narrator himself never truly acknowledges that he has grown up. For example, at the funeral … he is only pretending to be an adult" (124). This would mean that he still shies away from responsibilities and that he is altogether not a very successful adult. This is not entirely the case. Certainly, the narrator is feeling uncomfortable at the funeral, wearing tight clothes and having to speak publicly, but that is not surprising at all. He is an artist, and as such, uncertain and confident at the same time. These two character traits can be used to describe children too. To be an artist is a liminal profession: having a drive, an urge to create and constantly doubting whether one's work is good enough. It is therefore not necessary for an artist to grow up. To exhibit the innermost essence within an individual, as artists do, it is beneficial to allow the egocentric drive of the monster-child inside to take over; to lose all inhibitions that typify adult understanding.

The non-human being that negatively affects the protagonist's life is Ursula Monkton, who is new to the human world. She has waited a very long time and wants to be recognised. To achieve this, she is offering people what they want: money and power. This way Ursula Monkton creates monsters wherever she goes; money becomes a monster: the opal miner kills himself because he lost at a gambling session. Another uncanny embodiment of the evil that money represents is a coin that mysteriously materializes in the narrator's throat during a dream. He is choking on it, and wakes up just in time to realise that the nightmare he is having is real: he really is suffocating. He plucks the coin out of his throat with great difficulty, but dares not acknowledge its existence: "I did not look at the thing. It was tight in my hand, slimy with my saliva and my phlegm. I did not want to look at it. I did not want it to exist, the bridge between my dream and the waking world" (28). Ursula Monkton's attempt to gift money to the boy goes terribly amiss, and cements the almost unacceptably frightening realisation in the boy that the monster can cross from the fantasy-world into the real world.

Apart from the money that Ursula Monkton gives her followers, the power that she grants them is also near-fatal. An indisputable example is the abnormal adjustments she causes in the value system of the narrator's father. He truly becomes a monster: instead of protecting the home and its inhabitants, he lashes out ruthlessly at the boy for not accepting Ursula. In a nightmarish scene at the climax of the novel, the father turns against his son and throws him, fully clothed, into the bath filled with cold water; he then proceeds nearly to drown him. This modification stands in contrast to the natural protective role of fathers, and generates the uncanny bathtub scene. It is not only the father, who transforms from "familiar and reassuring— heimlich—into something unfamiliar and threatening—unheimlich" (Yaeri 146). There is a spatial shift as well when "the bathroom, a space previously associated with comfortable memories and considered one of the narrator's 'safe places,' is transformed" (Yaeri 152). As the bathroom becomes a space of terror, the scene renders Ursula's intentions

of trying to make humans happy, unsuccessful. For her this is the only way to feel alive, however, as she has waited an immense amount of time for the opportunity to enter this world, even though she knew the risks involved and she is here to play.

Significantly, none of the four characters in the protagonist's family are referred to by their names. This makes them general archetypes of the father, the mother, the son and the daughter. The monster Ursula Monkton, by contrast, has many names: first Old Mrs. Hempstock refers to it by a collective nickname made up by herself, calling it a flea, which she uses for all creatures that enter the human realm uninvited. When Lettie goes to bind this flea down, at the outskirts of the farm, she needs to know its name, which later turns out to be the Skarthach of the Keep. Eventually, the monster also uses a human name, Ursula Monkton. Therefore, the family members' lack of a name has symbolic significance: they could be any family, and the one who enters and breaks the family unit, in any family unit is a constant phenomenon of monstrous proportions. The monster, from outside the family unit, is seen as a creature from an alien other world, even if they mean to offer gifts and mean to bring contentment.

After the bathroom incident nothing seems right, as total destruction of all order looms above a hazy future for the child, and "the narrator experiences the disintegration of the familiar and known world and discovers its frighteningly unexpected aspects" (Yaeri 153). One disastrous event brings another, and the narrator's "beliefs and assumptions about the home, the family, and the general ways of things are shattered; and the world becomes an uncertain place where no rules are absolute" (Yaeri 153). The boy's reality has been transformed by the monster, and the fact that he seems to be the only one aware of the true nature of Ursula Monkton singles the narrator out as a forsaken outcast, between the monster and its followers, isolating him from his familiar surroundings.

Another otherworldly being that plays a significant role in the narrator's transformation is the triple goddess figure of the Hemptstock women. The three women represent the supernatural power that keeps the boundaries between worlds intact and the human world safe from intruders. The female trio operate together, and they all play a role in protecting the young boy, therefore, counterbalancing the damage Ursula Monkton creates. All three Hempstock women, but especially Old Mrs. Hempstock display an uncomplicated and almost leisurely attitude when faced with calamity. These women soothe the boy's nerves by satisfying his physical needs to the uttermost: they offer him delicious food, a warm bath, clean clothes, and a safe place to spend the night. Some of these basic elements of need are absent or inadequately present in the boy's home: he is fed burnt toast every day, and his room, where he could previously read undisturbed, is rented out. His parents work a lot and seem to be drifting apart, and even his little sister is against him, siding with Ursula Monkton instead. In contrast, the Hempstock women's effortless teamwork creates a sense of unity, and their authentic, unselfishly welcoming attitude towards him provides a sense of security that, before meeting these women, he only felt when reading books: a place he can escape to.

It is not surprising that the narrator develops a special relationship with Lettie. She is also a child, and like children growing up in the same neighbourhood often do, they go on adventures together. Yet the boy realises that Lettie is unlike any of the other children around, but he cannot grasp "who or what she is: he is aware of two categories, people and monsters, and it would appear that this little girl is neither" (Long 130). Therefore, he confronts Lettie, when they are sitting together by the pond:

"You Hempstocks aren't people," I said.

"Are too."

I shook my head. "I bet you don't actually even look like that," I said. "Not really."

> Lettie shrugged. “Nobody actually looks like what they really are on the inside. You don’t. I don’t. People are much more complicated than that. It’s true of everybody.”
>
> I said, “Are you a monster? Like Ursula Monkton?”
>
> Lettie threw a pebble into the pond. “I don’t think so,” she said. “Monsters come in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are things people are scared of. Some of them are things that look like things people used to be scared of a long time ago. Sometimes monsters are things people should be scared of, but they aren’t.”
>
> I said, “People should be scared of Ursula Monkton.”
>
> “P’raps. What do you think Ursula Monkton is scared of?”
>
> “Dunno. Why do you think she’s scared of anything? She’s a grown-up, isn’t she? Grown-ups and monsters aren’t scared of things.”
>
> “Oh, monsters are scared,” said Lettie. “That’s why they’re monsters. And as for grown-ups . . .” She stopped talking, rubbed her freckled nose with a finger. Then, “I’m going to tell you something important. Grown-ups don’t look like grown-ups on the inside either. Outside, they’re big and thoughtless and they always know what they’re doing. Inside, they look just like they always have. Like they did when they were your age. The truth is, there aren’t any grown-ups. Not one, in the whole wide world.” She thought for a moment. Then she smiled. “Except for Granny, of course.” (112)

What this passage demonstrates is that, for an 11-year-old child, Lettie exhibits an extraordinary amount of wisdom that clearly sets her apart from other human children; this places her character on the borderline between human and divine. Her insightful comments offer knowledge to the boy; being with her is similar to being in the ocean. Yet, her eye-opener claim about monsters being afraid does not justify cruel behaviour. Similarly, the revelation about adults being more like children inside, proving that “[t]he child self is the

essential self" (Long 129), does not make it any less likely that adults still always win. Her claim that all people, all grown-ups are only *acting* like they know what they are doing does however have an effect on the already grown-up narrator remembering it: it renders suffering and misfortune more acceptable, as they are the unwanted but inevitable outcome of "not really knowing what he is doing," and just life happening to him. Therefore, being an adult is very much like *not* being in the ocean, forgetting how things work and simply going on the adventure of life. The confrontation with this childhood memory shows that the power of the Hempstock women lies in their wisdom, which stretches through time and reaches into the future of the forgotten, unnamed boy, bringing him consolation.

Transformation of the Protagonist in *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*

According to Eichel, the protagonist of *Ocean* utilizes his "retreat into [his] memory palace … to relive the original experiences stored there" and additionally "to retrieve a lost part of his identity" (140). Old Mrs. Hempstock reveals to him that it is not his first visit to the Hempstock farm, but apparently each difficult decision or troublesome time in his life triggered a visit to the pond. He remembers none of it, but hearing it from her does make sense. This final section will investigate the role that the protagonist's childhood memories play in his adult identity, and conclude that his transformation is not linear, but cyclical, never-ending, as he oscillates between remembering and forgetting, between his present spent away from, and the traumatic past events concluded by Lettie Hempstock's ocean.

The narrator used to be a bookish, shy child, not particularly popular with schoolmates. He grows up to be an artist, apparently making a living from the art he makes. Even though he is divorced, he does have an ex-partner and more than one child. Therefore, he is not at all as an unsuccessful adult as Derek Lee claims. Lee depicts the narrator as someone "whose chief attributes in life are apathy and isolation. His adolescence was

unremarkable (‘no good times, no bad times’) and his adult life even more banal” (558). Lee goes on to claim that the reason the narrator ends up driving around is not the funeral reception, but that “the true problem is actually the narrator himself, whose worldview is defined by alienation, emptiness, boredom, anxiety, and loss” (558). This train of thought cumulates in a scathing conclusion about the narrator: “[h]is adult life performs a kind of living death, and the primary mode of his existence is clearly disenchantment. This sad figure gains power because his anonymity makes him a stand-in for the modern man—more specifically, the modern adult man: defeated, unimaginative, castrated” (558). Lee’s claims paint a very dark picture of the modern man and the narrator of *Ocean*. This view is not entirely accurate. After Lettie’s death, and following Lettie’s advice, the narrator as a child leaves the ocean and lives his life, forgetting the knowledge of how things work. The fact that he has become an artist is significant: to be able to create, and therefore, to live, he has given up remembering, knowing everything from the past. To be able to move on, to survive, he needs to make the only sensible decision: forget the past. From the vantage point of preservation he did the right thing. Even if he is, in Lee’s view, defeated, he wins —because the most horrifying events in his childhood are successfully snipped out of his memory.

In contrast to Lee, Long asserts that the reason for forgetting is to wipe out the traces left by the childhood trauma of the protagonist: “[t]he little boy does not willingly leave the home to embark on an adventure; he flees to escape from a monster who has exposed his home to the fundamentally real and adult concepts of abuse, sex, and manipulation. Returning to the compromised home is equated with being lost” (129). Therefore, when he is back at the ocean, the memories of the trauma will resurface, which means that each time he returns, “[i]n both narrative and figurative terms he falls into the ocean of memory that Lettie’s pond represents and enters a new cycle of remembrance and forgetting” (128), but as he re-lives the memories, “the narrator re-acknowledges the loss of something that is already gone” (128).

To be reassured that the trauma is over can have a cleansing function, restoring confidence in the narrator that he must continue, providing the boost for him to move away from a particularly difficult time or problem in his life.

As the history of his removed, or eaten, or damaged, heart only comes back to him when he is near Lettie's ocean, it can be argued that the narrator is the door not only between fantasy and reality, but also between forgetting and remembering. This door, or hole, in his heart is kept shut in his adulthood, and his childhood behind it is only revealed to him when he enters the magical territory of the Hempstock farm. Once he leaves the farmhouse, all the events that he has been revealed to him from his childhood, fade away again, and "[t]he boy is then freed from the universe and given to himself again. This loss of transcendence leaves him devastated but to 'play' is to live. Even the Hempstocks choose to coalesce their consciousness and memories around a singular point of identity, a place to call one's own" (Eichel 146). Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that the protagonist is stuck in the liminal stage, the unending cyclical transformation between child and adult, much like how the Hempstock are stuck, by their own choice, on the farm. Making art is the narrator's way, as an adult, to search for himself, as "creation is necessary for survival" (Miller 116). He needs to confront his past from time to time, but there is no consolation for him there, other than the ephemeral and unexplainable conclusion that Lettie Hempstock, the goddess, sacrificed herself to save his life.

Conclusion

This thesis has shown that in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* , *The Graveyard Book* and *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* the portals to other worlds gain agency and play a role in the transformation of the protagonist from an unknowing individual, whose understanding of his reality, the world around him, is incomplete, into a knowledgeable individual, who can make critical judgements about his world and decisions based on these judgements that move him forward. Only in the case of the narrator of *Ocean* is this result slightly different, as his understanding of reality depends on his physical location. All three novels portray fantastic settings that are accessible through portals. This creates isolated secondary worlds, connected to the real world. The other worlds are isolated spaces, not approachable for anybody. All three protagonists are average individuals, but the fact that they have been chosen, or given the chance to leave their reality and shift from unconsciousness to consciousness singles them out from the rest of their environment. The thesis applied the concept of liminality to define the nature of the fantasy worlds depicted in the novels beyond the portal.

The thesis has shown that the three books contain liminal fantasy settings that lie beyond mundane reality. These liminal spaces are accessible only via mysteriously operating portals. Yet, there are significant differences when it comes to the nature of these portals and the effect they have on the protagonist. In *Neverwhere*, the portal leading to the other world of London Below is accidentally opened to Richard. He questions his sanity when he compares the two Londons, but eventually decides that what is real in London Above is not his own reality anymore. He finds his balance in the parallel city below and loses it again when he returns back home. Therefore, he has adopted the strange and dark reality of London Below as his own and his character cannot find consolation in the predictable future that awaits him in his old life.

In *The Graveyard Book*, Bod similarly finds his home in the parallel reality of the ghost community, but for him the uncanny world *is* the primal reality. It takes him several years to realise that he is an outsider in his community and that he is an outsider in the community of the living as well. This confrontation results in him leaving the cemetery. In contrast to Richard, Bod is happy in the fantasy world and finds consolation among the ghosts. However, as he grows into an adolescent, he seeks confrontation, and not the consolation of the familiar and safe. He has learnt everything that the ghost village could teach him and must now move on. His coming-of-age is his transformation: he is ready to forget the uncanny reality to find adventure among the living.

Unlike Richard and Bod, the narrator in *Ocean* is the ultimate liminal character: he is stuck between childhood and adulthood, fantasy and reality, knowing and forgetting, death and life. His transformation fluctuates between these stages, as the only possibility to engage with his fantastic reality is in his memory, going back in time and going back in place. He crosses the portal again and again, but each time involuntarily, driven by his subconscious. Therefore, the protagonist has an idiosyncratic relationship with the portal and changes only in the vicinity of Hempstock farm, where the portal is located.

Overall, a compelling conclusion that can be drawn from the nature of the portals and their relationship to the characters and their character transformation is that, within the reality of material riches, it is the value of friendship, altruism and kindness that opens the portals to magical worlds, and keeps these new world accessible to those that seek "to escape … not necessarily from their history or culture but from the circumstances that history and culture have forced them into" (Sharzer 121), and which have proven unacceptable. The liminal spaces explored after "a flight away from turmoil" (Sharzer 131) through a portal can function as fantastic realms that "articulate the unspoken, unmet desires of those who need to get there" (Sharzer 132) in search of transformation of themselves and society.

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