

Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and the Connectedness between Identity and Space in Contemporary Fantasy Literature

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In The Dialogic Imagination (1981), Mikhail Bakhtin defines the chronotope as the “fusion of temporal and spatial indicators in the narrative. The fantasy genre uses unique chronotopes such as those of multidimensionality, time travel, and heterotopia – discordance of universes – as defined by Michel Foucault in his lecture “Of Other Spaces”. These enable transitions between the “primary” and “secondary” worlds, or reality and alternate realms, and could be utilised by authors to comment on today’s societal problems effectively. Based on Joseph Campbell’s The Hero of a Thousand Faces and Tzvetan Todorov’s The Fantastic, fantasy stories often feature a hero embarking on a transformative journey to an otherworldly realm, returning profoundly changed. In Neil Gaiman’s Neverwhere, Richard Mayhew, struggling to adapt to London, becomes trapped in “London Below”, a surreal, alternate version of the city. His journey through this fantastical realm, filled with peculiar beings and altered landmarks, mirrors Richard’s journey of self-discovery. This paper explores how imagined spaces in Gaiman’s Neverwhere (1996) reflect a protagonist’s personal transformation, using genre-specific chronotopes to represent transitions and adaptation to new life situations.

Keywords

Chronotope; postmodernism; fantasy literature; *Neverwhere*; Neil Gaiman

Introduction

*“He had gone beyond the world of metaphor & simile into the place of things that are, and it was changing him.”
– Neil Gaiman, Neverwhere*

From childhood, into young adulthood, and arguably throughout much of life, millions of people around the world use fantasy literature to escape the “real” world. Not only do some works of fantasy provide readers with a refuge from more superficial matters and a metaphysical escape into remote and magical worlds, they also offer necessary juxtapositions that, upon the reader’s return to reality, bring clarity and new perspectives on problems that once seemed impossible, difficult, or dreadfully stressful. It could even be said that through the works of fantasy, people are enabled to make sense of life, its ups and downs, its injustices and incomprehensible nonsensical arbitrariness, and find beauty, wonder and whimsy in the most mundane of human activities. Other works, through their implicitly political agenda, could make readers ponder the meaning and purpose of society, question philosophical questions, societal conventions, and much more.

One such work which has undoubtedly left a lasting impact on the development of many readers’ perceptions of the world is Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* (1996), where a young man finds himself disappointed with the state of the society he lives in, and gets to juxtapose his reality with an alternate one – just like so many do throughout their lives, through escapist literature, i.e., literature allowing readers a temporary escape from everyday reality (Tolkien 59–67). It could be said that Neil Gaiman’s body of work has left a lasting impact on readers precisely because of his unique ability to disrupt the boundaries between the mundane and the mythical. In his urban fantasy stories, combining fantastical elements with a modern urban setting (Mendlesohn & James 25–26), time and space are often manipulated to create what Mikhail Bakhtin terms the *chronotope*. Gaiman utilises these temporal and spatial topoi not merely to build magical worlds, but to provide readers with necessary juxtapositions, creating a metaphysical landscape that allows readers to make sense of life’s inequalities and contradictions. It could be asserted, according to various works published on his novels, that this is largely due to his overarching penchant for utilising rather dark, whimsical world-building to destabilise, continually, our realistic stereotypes and contest fixed notions of human identity (Chang; Koudelková). In his urban fantasy stories, conventional spatial and temporal boundaries are frequently destabilised, contributing to the creation of some truly interesting and meaning-charged chronotopes. It is this very use of Bakhtinian dialogism that scholars have come to recognise as a defining hallmark of Gaiman’s entire approach to gothic myth-making (Burdge et al. 49–64). In his novel *Neverwhere*, this

spatial-temporal distortion manifests itself through the stark division between “London Above” and the subterranean, alternate realm of “London Below”.

This paper explores the fantasy fiction-specific and postmodern chronotopes in *Neverwhere* to see how imagined spaces mirror the protagonist's mental processes, or state of mind, on his journey of self-discovery. By applying the theoretical frameworks of Mikhail Bakhtin, Maria Nikolajeva, and Rosemary Jackson, the paper will explore how Richard Mayhew's journey through this altered reality functions as a subversive commentary on class, visibility, and the fragmented, somewhat elitist nature of the post-modern metropolis.

Bakhtin's dimension of time in *Neverwhere*

Having established the novel in terms of genre and in terms of its relation to the fantastic mode-specific *chronotopes*, this part of the text is going to focus on other, rather temporal features of the narrative which enable the author to comment on the contemporary state of London Above, which is meant to represent the *chronotope* of our reality.

Firstly, it needs to be established what exactly *chronotopes* are and how they are going to be used in this work. In his *Dialogic Imagination*, a collection of essays on the nature and development of novelistic prose, Bakhtin, inter alia, analyses the forms of time and of the *chronotope* in the novel. A *chronotope* could be defined literally as the “time-space” against which the story unfolds. Bakhtin described it as “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature; the inseparability of time and space constitutive of literature” (Bakhtin 84). He went on to specify that as we get familiar with the settings of a novel, time “thickens” and becomes artistically visible, as space becomes charged with meaning and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history (Bakhtin 84–85).

The *chronotope* of *Neverwhere* is divided into London Above, which is meant to represent our reality, and London Below, which represents a magical realm. London Below is presented in the novel as a realm which parallels, especially in terms of spatial layout, London Above, however, it contains elements of alienation and estrangement which render the protagonist's as well as the reader's experience, stressful and somewhat unsettling.

According to Rosemary Jackson, Bakhtin saw *fantasy* as a continuation of “mennipea” – a genre which broke the demands of historical realism or

probability, moved easily in space between this world and an under and upper world. For Bakhtin, it's a carnival in which everyone participates – life the wrong way around, a temporary condition, a ritualised suspension of everyday law and order – and by those means it dissolves differences, permits free contact between various ranks, and breaks taboos (Jackson 14-16).

To address this definition in light of Bakhtin's chronotope theory, the realm of London Below does indeed offer, much to Richard's surprise, a utopian counterpart to London Above. Here, social differences are dissolved and social norms differ greatly from those of London Above. As the protagonist gradually realises throughout his journey, these norms are considerably more democratic, fair, and just. It is also due to the use of public meeting places, as we shall see in the upcoming parts of this paper.

Of the generic *chronotope* types which Bakhtin defines in his essay, two of them are particularly relevant for the purposes of this paper and shall now be discussed in greater depth. It needs to be asserted now that the dimension of time splits in *Neverwhere* into two "timelines", which at the beginning exist completely separately, in the middle we briefly observe their entanglement (the scene at the British Museum, 185-204), and at the end they co-exist, as the protagonist gains the awareness of them co-existing, and returns to the realm of London Above and his original timeline. One of said timelines takes place in the world above, which is much more indicative of Bakhtin's *chronotope* of the "path of life", and the other takes place in the world below, which is greatly evocative of the "adventure novel of ordeal" *chronotope*. The two, however, overlap and mix together, contributing to the distorted image of the timeflow in the novel.

In the timeline which takes place in the world above, Richard Mayhew is a young man who lives and works in London. The *chronotope* is "normal", we see him go to work, have a relationship with his fiancée and go through his day-to-day life in a chronological progression. It is when he meets the girl "Door" that he starts slipping into the other timeline – one which is distorted, confusing, and seemingly lacking any real indicators of daytime or nighttime, day of the month, even day of the week. The story is narrated in such a manner that the reader is, like the protagonist, forced to feel the pressure of the timeline which is unfolding in London Above, as he believes that he must have spent years, decades even, in the realm of London Below and dreads the effects of his absence in London Above.

Everything in the timeline in London Below happens randomly, much like in Bakhtin's typical adventure novel of ordeal. In the adventure novel

of ordeal, also referred to as the “Greek Romance” *chronotope*, the heroes neither age nor undergo significant development, and their goals remain unchanged throughout the narrative. The entire adventure novel time is filled out with simultaneity and ruptures (meetings and non-meetings) and random disjunctions in time, which make up the complete plot of the novel. The only two points which stand firm are the initiating action and the hero’s desired goal (Bakhtin 86-90).

The initiating action was Richard’s slipping into London Below, the ending action is meant to be his redemption and his return from this world to London Above and the life he has had there. However, his journey is disrupted by random occurrences, simultaneities and ruptures, adventures and disjunctions, before he finally gets where he’d been heading the whole time – back to London Above. As has already been hinted, in the timeline associated with the *chronotope* of London Below, time seems to have stopped moving altogether. At the same time, it apparently passes much faster than in London Above. This distorted perception of time contributes to a disturbing and ominous atmosphere, affecting both the protagonist and the reader, who cannot help but sympathise with Richard and share his sense of fear and uncertainty. While we cannot tell the time by any indicators other than the chronology of the events that unfold and the dubious approximations of the ages of the other characters, it is apparent that it simply flows differently in the realm of London Below. What seems to Richard as months or years could not have been more than a couple of weeks in London Above. However, as he makes his way through London Below, we are reminded of yet another of Bakhtin’s *chronotope* types – *the path of life chronotope*. This type of *chronotope* is deeply infused with folklore motifs, events have more chronotopic significance, space becomes concrete and saturated with a time which is more substantial, and thus space is filled with real, living meaning. Quite often, the motif of a road is utilised – time fuses together with space and flows in it, forming the road (Bakhtin 120-122).

The hero always passes through some familiar territory, never through some exotic alien world – because in the end, Richard walks through London, just not his London. He leaves his life above behind as he breaks up with his fiancée Jessica. When he eventually returns, his job is still waiting for him, his landlord has kept his apartment ready, and Jessica and his friend from work continue to interact with him as if nothing had happened. For Richard, however, everything has changed. He has been through a transformative journey, both physically and figuratively.

Approximately mid-novel, Richard and his friend Door are to have a mission which has them travel to London Above, where they meet with Jessica. She, surprisingly, goes on with her life and due to the distortion of London Below, to which Richard now officially belongs, he cannot be fully seen by her (Gaiman 198-200). The *chronotopes* of London Below and London Above overlap – the people who formally belong to London Below are almost invisible and non-existent to the people who live in reality.

At this point in the narrative, Richard thinks that he must have been in London Below for ages, but seemingly the timeline of London Above has moved by only a couple of days. At this point in the narrative, the existence of two separate timelines within these realms and the arbitrary flow of time in London Below become apparent. By the end of the story, both these “timelines” merge. While it is much clearer that we are once again in the world above and the flow of time is in sync with reality, Richard strives for the chaos of the flow of time in London Below, because that’s where he found himself and changed into an adventurous warrior. He cannot live in this certainty, cyclical routine and chronology anymore. It is in London Below, which he dreaded initially because it was unfamiliar and not normal and not “real”, that he realises that the normalcy and mundanity of London Above had been suffocating him. He had secretly been dreading the fact that he is predestined to have his life laid out for him, like his girlfriend Jessica. Jessica has everything lined up for herself and him, she wants a career, she wants marriage and children and he’d just sort of accepted that life was always going to be just that and going in that one direction. But in London Below time flows weirdly and one never knows when another adventure, the Floating Market or some other event, will arise.

Fantasy specific chronotopes in *Neverwhere*

According to a number of works by various scholars (see, for instance, Smethurst or Nikolajeva), the *postmodern chronotope* is undoubtedly an interesting medium to consider in the analysis of contemporary society, social ills and social problems. As has, hopefully, become evident from this paper, *fantasy* fiction has the ability to, through the means of representation of unreal places and, by extension, by means of *defamiliarisation*, make this analysis even more thorough and has the capacity to convey these messages in a fitting, hard-hitting, and witty manner.

Maria Nikolajeva, a specialist in the postmodern treatment of *chronotopes*, especially in *fantastic* and science fiction literature, based her analysis of *fantasy*-specific *chronotopes* on the contrast between fairy-tale and *fantasy*. She argues that *fantasy* is undoubtedly a medium of the 20th century, because it seems to reflect the post-modern human's split and ambivalent picture of the universe. She goes on to specify that while *fantasy* could not be rightfully utilised as a genre, it could be seen as a generic heading for a variety of different types of narrative, which take place in a fairy-tale realm, depict travel between different worlds and bring magic into the everyday (Nikolajeva 2). Postmodern *fantasy* fiction, through means of representation of unreal places and by means of *defamiliarisation*, makes the analysis of today's society even more thorough and has the capacity to convey these messages in a fitting, hard-hitting, and witty manner. As well as that, the characters are temporarily displaced from modern, linear time, into a mythical, cyclical, archaic time, and return to linearity at the end of the story, which only aids to highlight the contrasts between reality and its mirror image depicted in the *fantastic* realm. This, according to various scholars' works, is a very common feature of Gaiman's general narrative style – rather than constructing a unitary, coherent world for mere escapism, his literature frequently borrows traditional mythological structures only to subject them to a profound postmodern destabilisation (Gorman 165-166). By bringing the magical into the mundane every day, his broader body of work consistently challenges our societal norms and exposes the subjective nature of reality.

The aforementioned is very indicative of Richard Mayhew's story – Richard gets "sucked" from the realm of London Above, which in the story serves as the *chronotope* of our contemporary reality, into London Below, which serves as the *fantastic* realm, and which by its differentiation reflects our reality. The flow of time in the *chronotope* of reality is perceived to be much more linear than in the alternate realm; the exact shape, scope and speed of time, however, is never made clear in the story, contributing to its mysterious atmosphere. The initial setting of *fantasy* literature usually tends to be reality, from which the characters are transported into some magical realm and then brought back. Another common trope in *fantasy* literature is one which sees the magical realm intervening into reality in the form of magical beings, transformations or objects. In the case of *Neverwhere*, both happens.

The passage between two worlds often connects with patterns such as the door, the magic object, the magic helper – the messenger. In our case, this messenger is Door (referring to both her name and her function, because

she travels through dimensions and places which are remote), who herself embodies the very ephemeral and ever-changing principles of London Below. Richard initially perceives her as an ambiguous and difficult figure to categorise:

She was certainly unlike anyone he had ever known. When she noticed him looking at her, she shrugged and shimmied down further into her layers of clothes, deeper into her leather jacket. Her face looked out at the world from inside the jacket. The expression on her face made Richard think of a beautiful homeless child he had seen, the previous winter, behind Covent Garden: he had not been certain whether it was a girl or a boy (Gaiman 94).

As the story progresses, however, Door increasingly assumes the role of a confident leader and Richard's guide. "Door folded her arms and stood taller, putting her head back, raising her pointed chin. She looked less like a ragged street pixie; more like someone used to getting her own way. The opal eyes flashed. 'Your Grace, the marquis is with me as my companion, on my quest. Our families have been friends for a long time now'" (Gaiman 99). This transformation mirrors the fluidity of London Below itself, a realm in which identities, social positions and spatial boundaries remain unstable and subject to change.

The realm of London Below is a discordant universe to London Above, because these two places coexist, but aspects of London Above are exaggerated by the existence of London Below. It is due to defamiliarisation that the contrasts are made so stark – thanks to the contrast between London Above and London Below and the incomprehensibilities and misunderstandings between the two, facts, and uncomfortable truths about our reality, represented by the *chronotope* of London Above, come to light, e.g., homelessness, class struggle, elitism, rejection by the society, etc. Thus juxtaposing our own world to its *fantastic* counterpart, the author is enabled to discuss existential questions, such as "what is reality?", "why shouldn't people of all classes and backgrounds be equal?", "why can't everyone have a place to live" "why can't we treat the people on the margins of society as equals, too?", which are inherently questions pertinent to postmodern thinking. Additionally, the multitude of worlds is a reflection of the young protagonist's distorted perception of reality in which he is living. The protagonist focalises the narrative, forces the reader to adopt his subjectivity, and therefore the reader

is forced to question reality with Richard and to be uncomfortable with him. The *fantasy* realm thus externalises the protagonist's inner world, representing the thoughts of the group the character is supposed to represent.

Postmodern chronotope and spatial turn exemplified on *Neverwhere*

Postmodernism has brought on a shift in the perception of the indicators of space-time, in many areas of life and study. Postmodern *chronotope* in literature became a way of seeing the post-modern world with a heightened consciousness of space and time in contemporary society. While postmodernism could be considered a continuation of modernism, the time-spaces in postmodernism are driven by and respond to a lack of development, loss of direction, focus on the marginal and the "unseen" and "unknown" of societies, and finally by rather ambivalent approaches towards the past and the future. It is therefore no wonder that *chronotope* in postmodernist literature expresses time-space in which the conscious mind frames and organises the real, but it can also be the time-space where it dis-organises and re-presents the real, offering a post-modern perspective on the world (Smethurst 5).

One of the predominant features of postmodernity is globalisation and the need to represent communities, places and spaces which have historically not been at the centre of attention, yet the urge to break down spatial barriers has not led to a general homogenisation of space. The absence of spatial boundaries shifts emphasis to other boundaries – cities fragment into pockets, divided into classes, races, ethnicities, genders, etc. Power structures are challenged to a limit where they are so unseen and absent that they appear metaphysical, chaotic, random.

Another concept which needs to be highlighted in connection to postmodernism and the present topic is heterotopia – places produced by society as part of its continuous coming into being. They stand for representation, dialogical mirroring of the real world. Foucault's concept of the heterotopia refers to those institutional and cultural settings that are fundamentally "different". These "worlds within worlds" are marked by their intensity and incompatibility with standard spaces. While they reference the outside world, they ultimately function to transform or disturb our understanding of it (Smethurst 33–36, 40–43). The concept is of course restricted to particular kinds of sites, which sort of serve as containers within social space, where

the spatial dynamics are detached from history. Those include cemeteries, fairgrounds, libraries, museums, cinemas, theatres, gardens, etc.

As Henri Lefebvre elaborated: “The history of space must account for both representational spaces and representations of space, but above all for their interrelationships and their links with social practice. The history of space thus has its place between anthropology and political economy” (Lefebvre, qtd. in Bauhaus-Universität Weimar). This figurative site of exchange for both Lefebvre and the already mentioned Bakhtin, is expressed metaphorically as “the traditional marketplace”; the social hub of communication and a place of business, performance, entertainment, and gossip.

Adjacent to this concept is also the concept of social space. Social space is more than “doing things” in space – institutions, religious authorities, ethnic groups, and individuals themselves tend to reserve space, and peg out an exclusive patch secluded from the process of social production. Social space is also shaped by external, economic forces – global capitalism has its own spatial dynamic, and operates through social space, and shapes it. In postmodernism, conflicts arise in heterogeneous multicultural societies and the open space of the market place is often removed and different social groups are more confined in delineated areas with limited freedom to wander elsewhere. Social space thus becomes fragmented, which leads to segregation and exclusion of the marginal parts of society. Additionally, capitalism reaches across all social spaces, compressing both time and space to meet capitalism’s own demands to increase production and supply continuously (Smethurst 31–64).

With all that in mind, one may look at the spatial practice of society – deciphering that society’s material organisation and its representational spaces – as symbolic and metaphorical mental maps by which we experience physical space. In literature, similar ways of thinking could be encountered by reading signs and symbols as our reality, through which authors attempt to appropriate, to seek changes in this organisation of society. In literature, as in social life, complex symbolisms are often linked to the underground side of social life, where contemporary space is resisted or re-imagined. Space, like writing, can also embody complex dialogic symbolisms.

Both the *chronotopes* of reality and of the alternate world which are utilised in the novel in question represent all these aforementioned concepts very well. Arguably, the author has selected one of the best cities in the world to represent the postmodern sensibility – London. *Nowhere* is a novel which sheds light on what we do not normally see. It is not so much London upside down, but London’s most invisible made visible. The whole society is fragmented into

pieces which make sense only to the Underground people – there is nobility (Lady Door and her family), there are mercenaries (Marquis de Carabas, Hunter), and there are lower castes as well (The Rat Girl, Richard), but all of them meet at the Floating Market where they have a chance to mingle and trade.

To set out the theoretical framework clearly for the following analysis, the novel will be viewed through a three-part lens to analyse Gaiman's novel in light of the theoretical basis established in the earlier sections. Firstly, Bakhtin's concepts of the "chronotope" and "carnival" will serve as the primary tool to analyse how time and societal rules are temporarily suspended to create egalitarian, utopian spaces within the narrative. Secondly, Lefebvre's theory of "social space" will be practically applied to examine how capitalist economic forces fragment the geography of London Above, thereby necessitating the alternative, currency-free networks of London Below. Finally, Foucault's concept of the "heterotopia" will be used as a framework to evaluate specific, intense locations in the novel that bridge both realms but actively disrupt snobbish, capitalist understandings of reality.

1) *The Floating Market*

What is important to note about the Floating Market is the fact that no matter where it appears next, all of the inhabitants of London Below know exactly where it is bound to appear next, without anyone telling them. This represents a crucial feature of London Below – its heart is always moving from place to place, always social, always changing. It is not a stable, static place; it literally moves and happens elsewhere every single time. It could be interpreted as a commentary on how London Above, the *chronotope* of our reality, actually works, by means of defamiliarisation.

London Above is segregated into social classes which do not usually intermingle and everyone belongs to a well segregated, designated proper place. The intermingling of classes is discouraged, as seen in the scenes which take place in London Above – homeless, dishevelled individuals are not welcome at a high-society party at the British Museum. Whereas in London Below, the Floating Market is an unstable, everchanging entity which travels to different locations, representing different quarters of the city, and everyone, no matter their social standing, is welcome there. People think of themselves in terms of "us" vs "Others" – they only think in terms of themselves and their own, real-life problems. They may never admit it and own up to it, but they do in fact segregate themselves from people who are not like them. For

instance, Richard's girlfriend would never even notice a homeless person, let alone help a bleeding, dirty-looking young girl, but Richard would. Deep inside, he does not agree with this division of society, with the way society is run in London Above, and with the unfair and unjustified divisions of power, and he does find it inhumane in a way.

Physical places in London Above, where people of designated societies meet, are also meant exclusively for those people and the "other" people are strictly excluded – for instance, there are a couple of instances in the book where the protagonist witnesses discrimination towards unkempt individuals. While in London Below, people and other beings have their own social standing, and they have their own weird function within the realm. To Richard, who is from London Above, this initially appears to be insane or simply odd. Yet, no matter what, all the people of London Below, no matter their social standing, position, sexuality and race, meet and mingle happily at the next Floating Market. As its name suggests, it floats from one place to another and never stays the same, as to represent the ever-changing and ever-transforming heart of the society. It floats and changes as to always appear somewhere else, contributing to its unique quality to represent all of the possible places of London Below and unite the people by their travelling all over to get there.

Another facet of the Floating Market is the fact that there is no currency, but merely exchanges of goods. That is yet another example of what London Below as a place, and the Floating Market in particular, is meant to represent – it lies outside of the restraints of our capitalist society and quite literally everyone could trade something there for exactly what they need. This feature of the narrative exemplifies Henri Lefebvre's concept of an alternative representational space. Unlike the fragmented social spaces of London Above, which are strictly shaped by external, capitalist economic forces that segregate the marginalised, the Floating Market resists this dynamic.

Furthermore, we can see that no matter where and when it appears next, the inhabitants always know exactly where and when to go, much to Richard's surprise. The Floating Market serves as the ultimate realisation of Bakhtin's aforementioned "carnival". By acting as a temporary, ritualised suspension of everyday law and order, it inherently makes its visitors engage in conversation, trade of goods and information, and leads inevitably to the intermingling of all the layers and groups of society. It feels like the people of London Below are intrinsically, naturally united together by this semi-sentient, space-travelling

event and made to respect each other in this almost utopian setting, dissolving the differences and taboos that govern London Above.

The Floating Market, essentially, is a reaction to the class-based, capitalist divisions of the society of London Above, as the market is where the society of London Below shares common space and develops a common identity.

2) *The British Museum*

The British Museum also appears in the novel as a place accessible to both the inhabitants of London Above and those of London Below, where the reality of London Below briefly intersects with the chronotope of London Above.

Mid-way through the story, the protagonist, along with his companion Lady Door, go on a mission to meet with an Angel, who happens to reside somewhere in the British Museum, in the *chronotope* which is meant to represent our reality. At the same time, Richard's ex-girlfriend Jessica had booked the museum out for a private event. While Richard and Door make their way through the museum filled to the brim with snobby London Above people, they do get noticed as slightly avant-garde visitors to this private event, but they almost do not get noticed at all – they become almost invisible to the London Above people, much like the homeless on the street. London Above people do see them, their minds and perceptions simply choose to ignore them. Here, the museum functions precisely as one of Foucault's heterotopias – a “world within a world” marked by its intensity. While it references the outside world of London Above, it ultimately disturbs their rigid, capitalist understanding of social space. The perception of the London Above people, however, is so limited that they will simply choose not to see the people who do not belong to their reality, while the London Below people can see everyone.

As Richard's entrance to London Above is strictly restricted, as he now belongs to London Below and it is virtually impossible for him to enter this realm, it could be asserted that Door and Richard were allowed in because the British Museum is a place where people from all walks of life, no matter their social standing, meet, even in London Above. It is a place of knowledge where social standing plays no role, as the entrance to it is free. However, the visitors to the Museum that evening (Jessica and her pretentious guests) booked it out for a private event, included a buffet with expensive food and drink, and imposed a dress code to be able to attend, making it almost cartoonishly obvious and somewhat ridiculous that a place in London Above,

which is generally speaking democratised and available to the wider public, is now made into a segregated place for a snobbish event.

Entrance to the British Museum should be free, because access to knowledge and art should always belong to everyone and be democratic, yet the London Above people made of it something which is exclusive to them. People from London Below, such as Richard and Door, could access the museum because it reflects the principles of their world – it is intended as a place where people from all walks of life can meet freely and democratically. On the particular night in question, however, when the private event was taking place, a rather absurd situation was created. This contrast serves as an effective juxtaposition of the values of London Above and London Below, while also offering a fitting commentary on contemporary social elitism.

3) *The Lady Door*

Last but not least, the function of Lady Door is also worth discussing, especially due to her liminal qualities. While technically, she is not a place, she and her abilities serve as a rather fascinating asset to the spatial layout of the story. Firstly, she is the being/device which initially brings Richard to London Below, but she is also his guide on this journey. Through his friendship with her, he discovers that he does indeed belong down there.

Indeed even her initial characterisation addresses the issues of the postmodern *chronotope* quite well – time apparently passes differently for her, as Richard has a significant difficulty pinpointing her age (she looks around 15-16, but acts as if much older and has apparently been alive for centuries). Her name on its own addresses her ability to travel through different places and highlights the instability and unpredictability of her character – she herself changes from a frail fragile girl into a powerful, wealthy Lady who is in charge of the whole group. She is also said to have the ability to open doors of any kind, which seems in the novel like she could literally travel through dimensions. In this sense, it could be said that Lady Door serves as the physical embodiment and prime example of the postmodern breakdown of spatial boundaries discussed earlier. By effortlessly travelling through different dimensions, she actively dismantles the fragmented, segregated pockets of the city that usually confine different social groups.

She explains to Richard that her abilities are because of her lineage and are an innate part of who she is, coming to her as naturally as breathing. This explanation prompts Richard to reconsider his assumptions and alter his perceptions of London Below and its inhabitants. Maybe Richard does not

need to have such a closed-off relationship to space, after all, maybe there need not be rules for who belongs where and which places are designated for whom. It is simply all up to you, or Richard, how you decide to perceive the world and which doors you dare to open. She literally embodies the fragmentariness, ambiguity and arbitrariness of London Below. She quite sharply mirrors the leading female character of London Above, Jessica. Where Jessica knows exactly her own place and that of others, Door rejects such rigid distinctions. Jessica clearly differentiates between social groups and the spaces she believes are designated to them, acting as a privileged, wealthy woman accustomed to the social hierarchies of London Above. Door, by contrast, embodies a more democratic style of leadership. She cares little for such divisions and instead strives to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and justly, regardless of who they are.

Conclusion

As is shown throughout this paper, the *chronotopes* which are utilised in the narrative of *Neverwhere* serve as an effective, mirror-image metaphor to today's society and its problems. People in London Below, who are invisible to the people in London Above, are actually there, and are real, it is just that the people of London Above choose not to see them and acknowledge them; the people from London Below are social outcasts, homeless, lost and forgotten, and no longer fit in with the society in London Above. Richard goes from an average, normal London Above person, to an enlightened London Below citizen, not only because of his journey, but also because of the innovative use of time-space which shows him a mirror image of his world up there and what could be and what is.

In conclusion, the interplay of chronotopes in *Neverwhere* serves as more than a mere backdrop for adventure. It functions as the primary catalyst for the protagonist's inner philosophical shift. By transitioning from the linear, rigid time-space of "London Above" to the fragmented, heterotopic "London Below", Richard Mayhew is forced to confront the unseen elements of the postmodern landscape. His journey demonstrates that personal transformation is, to a large extent, linked to spatial perception. The "London Below" chronotope, characterised by its Floating Market and rather old-fashioned, mutual respect-based values, dissolves the class-based and capitalist boundaries that previously defined Richard's existence.

Ultimately, Gaiman's *Neverwhere* suggests that the *fantastic* is not a retreat or escape from reality, but rather, as Bakhtin suggested, a testing of the truth. When Richard, at the end of the story, chooses to return to London Below, he is not escaping life, but rejecting a reality that demands the invisibility of the marginalised. His transformation proves that once a protagonist has gained the consciousness of heterotopia, the primary world's rigid structures can no longer contain their changed, liberated identity. This reflects a core tenet of Gaiman's broader literary agenda, in which the macabre and the bizarre are routinely utilised to navigate, and ultimately resolve, crises of identity in our contemporary world (Chang). By choosing to return to London Below, Richard is not escaping from life, but rejecting a social order that systematically excludes those on its margins.

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