OTHERS, DOUBLES, MIRRORS, SELVES: SCAVENGED IDENTITIES AND DOPPELGÄNGER SPACES IN NEIL GAIMAN'S *CORALINE*, *NEVERWHERE*, AND *THE GRAVEYARD BOOK*

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Abstract*: The paper aims to examine the journeys undertaken by the protagonists of* Coraline, Neverwhere *and* The Graveyard Book *in an attempt to highlight the extent to which Neil Gaiman's prose not only reshapes the uncanny and challenges the conventions of fantasy and horror alike, but also adds new dimensions to the doppelgänger paradigm. Far from being confined to the familiar premise of the ghostly other, Gaiman's doubles range from surrogate parents and monstrous necrophages to intertextual impostors and, more importantly, extend beyond the level of individual identity into the realm of architecture and landscape. By focusing on salient details of Coraline Jones's encounter with the Other Mother, Richard Mayhew's descent into London Below and Nobody Owens' unconventional upbringing, the analysis aims to draw attention to the numerous ways in which the three texts engage in doppelgänger scenarios, not only featuring stolen identities and mirror worlds but also employing a wide variety of intertextual strategies to cannibalize, recycle and recreate familiar plots and tropes whilst steadfastly reinforcing the value of authenticity.*

Keywords*: alterity; border(land)*; *doppelgänger*; *identity*; *intertextuality*; *uncanny*.

Introduction

Acknowledgement of the ability to use the "wonders and horrors" behind mysterious doors or "beyond the world of dreaming" (Cardin 379) as the premise of a brand of fantasy that is at once distinctly unique and strangely familiar constitutes a common thread of the numerous accolades drawn by Neil Gaiman's contributions to prose and graphic literature alike. His writing has been credited with weaving together "childhood fears of loss and neglect, of missing parents, corpse-like living figures, doppelgängers or uncanny doubles, dark mirror realms, unnatural and unhomely domestic spaces, and doors that open but appear to lead nowhere" (Conrich and Sedgwick 59) to conjure up a whole new dimension of the uncanny, as well as with challenging the tradition of the "psychic or supernatural" doppelgänger (Packer 149) through its disquietingly corporeal inhabitants. What is perhaps even more interesting to observe however is the fact that this challenge also entails an expansion of the doppelgänger paradigm beyond the level of individual identity into the realm of fantastic topography by means of "fantastical mirror worlds that operate alongside our own mundane, workaday reality." (Gatian 1) In Gaiman's works, the unsettling but rather narrowly circumscribed "collision between real bodies and an unfriendly informant [...] whose aim is to mask individuality and mute the voice of personal agency" (Walker King vii-viii) is amplified into a complex juxtaposition between familiar reality and a dark reflection in which protagonist and reader alike are "made to fit with rather divergent realities" (Tally 181).

'You people are spread all over the place.'

The relatively uncomplicated plot of the 2002 dark fantasy novella *Coraline* constitutes a fitting introduction to the wealth of alternative dimensions to be found in Gaiman's fictional universe, its straightforward approach to the familiar theme of "finding magic or the unworldly in unexpectedly everyday locales" (Cardin 379) entailing a short yet momentous journey through a locked and bricked-up door into an almost perfect replica of the young protagonist's home. Disillusioned with a real world apparently intent on ignoring if not denying her existence by second-guessing her questions, disregarding her preferences, summarily dismissing her initiatives, only engaging in brief and perfunctory dialogues and

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repeatedly mispronouncing her name, Coraline Jones finds herself crossing the threshold into a shadowy yet ominously recognizable space:

> Coraline walked down the corridor uneasily. There was something very familiar about it.
> The carpet beneath her feet was the same carpet they had in her flat. The wallpaper was the same wallpaper they had. The picture hanging in the hall was the same that they had hanging in their hallway at home.
> She knew where she was: she was in her own home. She hadn't left.
> She shook her head, confused. [...] no, it wasn't exactly the same. (*C* 27)

Made disturbing precisely by its closeness to the original – "It was so familiar – that was what made it feel so truly strange." (*C* 71) – this space appears to have absorbed and modified Coraline's family life, keeping its living centres trapped inside the snow globe on the mantelpiece much in the same way in which the German word for 'uncanny' – "'unheimlich', which literally means *un-home-ly*" (Tally 174) – retains within its structure the familiarity it aims to disrupt.

The Other Mother, the fictional double at the core of this mirrored world, seems to represent the very embodiment of the uncanny by combining the "temptations a child Coraline's age would want from a parent and the hauntingly dreadful and unexplainable" (Cardin 379). While her portrayal as a ghostly copy of Coraline's real mother – "Only her skin was white as paper. Only she was taller and thinner." (*C* 27-28) – and the obvious emphasis on alterity in her presentation of self would appear to render any further analysis superfluous, it might be interesting to observe that Gaiman's narrative is in fact replete with numerous additional details that confirm the Other Mother's status as a textbook example of literary doppelgänger. It is by no means difficult to provide textual evidence for all the elements featured on Andrew Webber's exhaustive list, starting from her status as a "figure of visual compulsion" (3) clearly emerging from her skilful creation of a universe meant to "appeal to Coraline's sensory experience of the world" (Lytle 90) in every way, from its lurid colour scheme to the marvellous toys, enchanted books with "pictures that writhed and crawled and shimmered" (*C* 30) and "the kind of clothes she would love to have hanging in her own wardrobe at home" (*C* 69).

The somewhat less enchanting doppelgänger proclivities highlighted by Webber, such as the way in which it "operates divisively on language [...] echoes, reiterates, distorts, parodies, dictates, impedes, and dumbfounds the subjective faculty of free speech" and acts as "an inveterate performer of identity" (Webber 3), are equally conspicuous in her ability to conjure up a fully furnished and populated universe "in a ghastly parody of the real people and real things" (*C* 117) and her determination to castigate its inhabitants as soon as they deviate from the predetermined script or otherwise fail to fulfil the roles assigned to them. In this respect it is quite interesting to note that Coraline's encounter with the "jellyish" (*C* 100) bat-like dogs, the "unformed and unfinished" plasticine people "warmed and rolled together, squashed and pressed" (*C* 101) like "two lumps of wax that had melted and melded together into one ghastly thing" (*C* 102) and the "pale and swollen" thing "that had once been her other father" (*C* 111) is not only indicative of the Other Mother's ruthlessness but also highly reminiscent of other contemporary representations of the doppelgänger figure meant to "emphasize the fluidity and malleability of identity in a cyber-world" (Duerre Humann 9) and indeed in any artificially constructed universe.

Notwithstanding the Other Mother's initially convincing enactment of the Happy Families game in an effort to complete her ménage with the missing offspring, it is quite clear that power represents the main coordinate of her interactions and that all her conjugal and

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parental endeavours entail some form of "tutelage, surrogacy and subalternation" (Webber 4) in which she is the only participant allowed to exert control. The inquisitive and censorious gaze filtered through the big black buttons with which she takes in (and over) the world as well as through the fifty little red eyes of her murine myrmidons, together with her skilful manipulation of language so as to keep Coraline uninformed and confused, add "voyeurism and innuendo" (Webber 4) to her ever-growing résumé, whereas the modus operandi revealed by the ghosts of children kidnapped from households centuries apart and her relentless pursuit of Coraline highlight her temporal out-of-placeness and the extent to which she "operates as a figure of displacement" and compulsive return, with each performance repeating "both its host subject and its own previous appearances" (Webber 4): "I walked through the scullery door [...] and I found myself back in the parlor. But she was waiting for me. She told me she was my other mamma, but I never saw my true mamma again." (*C* 85)

It would appear that gender is the only aspect included in Webber's analysis that fails to find a perfect match in the Other Mother's characterization, yet it is equally important to remember that the profile of a doppelgänger host and visitant axiomatically constructed as male (4) was exclusively based on a selection of nineteenth-century German texts and that the category of gender does not necessarily apply to monsters "made to channel the fear of the familiar turned distorted and terrible" (Cardin 379). Moreover, notwithstanding the extent to which her domestic accomplishments and alleged concern for Coraline's wellbeing single her out as a perfect embodiment of the "phallocentrically circumscribed mother-type" (Martin 22), her omnipotence and manipulative tendencies reveal her true identity as a version of the "dreaded phallic mother" (Fonseca 203) from fairy tales and popular culture, defined by a monopoly on power that belies her apparent conformity to gender roles.

Coraline's first tentative expedition into the uncanny seems to compensate for all the excitement and attention missing from her real existence by rewarding her "urge to discover and find wonders and horrors" (Cardin 379) with a world "that seemingly revolves around her" (Perdigao 102) and in which her previously suppressed identity is finally confirmed (Lytle 90). Lulled into a false sense of security (and indeed importance) by the absence of a doppelgänger of her own – "Was there an other Coraline? No, she realized, there wasn't. There was just her." (*C* 69) – the protagonist is initially unaware of the "possibility (or threat) of another Coraline" (Perdigao 102) amongst the conspicuous doubles populating the other world. Unlike the similarly disenchanted Helena Campbell in Gaiman's 2005 cinematic fantasy *MirrorMask*, Coraline never experiences the mortification of having her place in the real world usurped by an embarrassingly unrestrained double self, but is faced with the even more sinister prospect of being turned into her own shadow and taking in the world through the "unblinking, emotionless and uniform" (Conrich and Sedgwick 59) black buttons sported by all the Other Mother's soulless puppets before being completely discarded in favour of a new victim. The horror of having to surrender her individuality and having her pupils (and point of view) displaced by the opaque windows of the Other Mother's implausible and impersonal gaze is compounded by the encounter with "three shapes, each as faint and pale as the moon in the daytime sky" (*C* 84) and the realization that in this other world children are as easily replaceable (Russel 161) as human eyes and real parents.

Much like the Queen of Shadows in *MirrorMask*, the "idealized version of the parent that Coraline must learn to renounce if she is ever to grow up" (Fonseca 203) clearly belongs in the category of "smother mothers" who would happily arrest their offspring's development and freeze them in a state of "perpetual childhood" (Russell 161), yet whereas the former merely wants a surrogate daughter to stifle with the lavish attentions rejected by the runaway princess, the latter is a compulsive collector and voracious consumer of youthful prey. The "haunting bodies of blinded children, deprived of their souls and the life that their eyes provide" (Conrich and Sedgwick 60) and trapped forever in the dim space behind (or within)

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the mirror reveal that acquiescence is more likely to be followed by oblivion than adoration: "She stole our hearts, and she stole our souls, and she took our lives away, and she left us here, and she forgot about us in the dark." (*C* 84) The apparent incompatibility between the devoted provider of comforting nourishment and the "cannibalistic figure who eats to possess" (Jones 37) conjured up by the children's whispered reminiscences and the cat's non-committal assessment – "She wants something to love, I think [...] Something that isn't her. She might want something to eat as well. It's hard to tell with creatures like that." (*C* 65) – actually represents the most convincing confirmation of her status as a modern version of the darkest figure in fairy tale lore, the malevolent and manipulative "evil witch or substitute mother figure" (Jones 32) driven and defined by the simultaneous need to feed and feed off of her victims. As such, the ruthless destroyer, mimetic creator and gaolish (as well as ghoulish) preserver emerges as the perfect denizen of the intricate "pastiche of other stories" (Perdigao 102) making up the landscape of Coraline's world, her successive impersonation of several children's "other mamma" (*C* 85) mirroring the multiple layers of cannibalized texts to be glimpsed beneath the apparently straightforward rewriting of Carroll's fantasy classic.

Although Coraline lacks Alice's ability to turn solid glass into a "bright silvery mist" (Carroll 94) and has to access the other world through a somewhat more mundane portal, the mirror's centrality to the plot extends beyond the obvious fact that the two domestic environments parallel each other (Conrich and Sedgwick 59) with eerie differences (Russell 161). The Other Mother can push "through the mirror as if she were walking through nothing more solid than water" (*C* 89), relegate her hapless victims to the space beyond it and use its reflective surface as a canvas for her manipulative nightmares, yet far from exclusively functioning as her compliant weapon the mirror acts as a double agent by revealing the real parents trapped behind it, actuating the potential of the magical stone and exposing the Other Mother's monstrous nature: "'You weren't in the mirror,' said Coraline. The other mother smiled. 'Mirrors,' she said, 'are never to be trusted.'" (*C* 77) *Coraline*'s indebtedness to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and even more so to *Through the Looking-Glass* (Perdigao 102) clearly permeates its structure and is confirmed by a host of additional details ranging from the prominent position occupied by a megalomaniac female ruler to the cryptic words of wisdom delivered by a feline at least as elusive and "irritatingly self-centered" (*C* 37) as the Cheshire Cat. Its treatment of the themes of "neglect, abandonment, and oral obsession" is however somewhat more reminiscent of 'Hansel and Gretel' (Jones 32), while the words whispered by the three juvenile wraiths recall the "horrid warning" delivered by the "pale kings, and princes too" (354) in John Keats' 1819 ballad:

> That is why we could not leave here, when we died. She kept us, and she fed on us, until now we've nothing left of ourselves [...] She will take your life and all you are and all you care'st for, and she will leave you with nothing but mist and fog. She'll take your joy. And one day you'll awake and your heart and your soul will have gone. A husk you'll be, a wisp you'll be, and a thing no more than a dream on waking, or a memory of something forgotten. (*C* 85-86)

Indeed, far from being confined to the label assigned by one of her tiny captives – "Say nothing, for the beldam might be listening!" (*C* 81) – which could ultimately be read as a mere confirmation of her place in the vast category of "women known for luring their prey into their clutches" (Jones 37), the Other Mother's similarity to Keats' Belle Dame sans Merci entails some of the most resonant echoes in *Coraline*'s intertextual landscape, from her unearthly aspect and deceptive affection to the hedonistic lure she employs to seduce and entrap gullible victims. Unlike the "wretched wight" (Keats 354) and the similarly woebegone children now belonging to "the dark and to the empty places" (*C* 87), Coraline seems to

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instinctively sense treachery and resist temptation, giving in to the need to eat and rest "under the same roof as her other mother" (*C* 64) but steadfastly refusing to partake of the enticing (albeit mundane) equivalents of "roots of relish sweet, / And honey wild, and manna-dew" (Keats 355) repeatedly proffered to her: "even though she knew she would like it she could not bring herself to taste the hot chocolate." (*C* 93) Moreover, her sense of utter dislocation in the other world and her awareness of the fragile construction of identity – "It is astonishing just how much of what we are can be tied to the beds we wake up in in the morning" (*C* 67) – ensures that she is on her guard long before hearing the ghosts' cautionary tale:

> The names are the first things to go, after the breath has gone, and the beating of the heart. We keep our memories longer than our names. [...] Flee, while there's still air in your lungs and blood in your veins and warmth in your heart. Flee while you still have your mind and your soul. (*C* 83-85)

Coraline's commitment to her perhaps imperfect and infuriating but nevertheless "real, wonderful [...] glorious" (*C* 134) life emerges in equal measure from her endeavour to emulate her real parents' intelligence and courage and from the rejection of all extraneous identity markers: "*If I'm going to do this*, thought Coraline, *I'm not going to do it in her clothes*." (*C* 98) It is however quite interesting to observe that the final stage of her quest – the total annihilation of the phantom parent – also requires the use of "protective coloration" (*C* 153), her own euphemistic term for deceit and the Other Mother's chief feature. Her fierce defence of what she regards as her true identity notwithstanding, Coraline's acceptance of the ghostly boy's advice – "Be wise. Be brave. Be tricky." (*C* 145) – suggests that in order to enter adulthood the protagonist needs to internalize the disquieting lessons taught by the uncanny together with the idealized elements of the familiar.

'Sorry. Wrong London.'

The door that grants Coraline access into a space of adventure and arrested childhood has been described as "reminiscent of Alice's Rabbit Hole" (Martin 22), yet echoes of Wonderland and Neverland alike are even more pervasive in the title of Gaiman's 1996 *Neverwhere* and its protagonist's journey across a subterranean London whose vibrant colours and "promise of absolute freedom" seem to provide a clear contrast to the "grey, soul-draining" (Gatian 1) metropolis above. However, far from representing a voluntary incursion into an enchanted landscape, Richard Mayhew's tentative first steps down the manhole are a consequence of his banishment from a "world of safety and sanity" (*N* 122) that no longer acknowledges his existence into a "brutal, clandestine, and dirty" universe of "family infighting, petty fiefdoms, and hardscrabble survival" teeming with "killers for hire, runaways, vampires, thieves, and ruthless traders" as well as other "specially-adapted, scrappy forms of life" (Gatian 1) of its own.

It is not until the end of his quest that Richard comes to see the seductive appeal of what he initially considers a "dark reflection of London Above" (Gatian 1), much in the same way in which his original vision of the capital as "a grey city, even a black city" was pleasantly disproved by the surprising encounter with a place "filled with colour," an urbanscape of "red brick and white stone [...] bright red postboxes, and green grassy parks and cemeteries." (*N* 9) Likewise, his gradual realization that "the Tube map was a handy fiction that made life easier, but bore no resemblance to the reality of the shape of the city above" (*N* 10) acquires a new dimension following his descent into a deeper underworld "where metaphor is literal" (Gatian 1) and the accompanying revelation that this apparently "unreal mirror of the London he had known" (*N* 122) is populated by the tangible embodiments of station names – the spectral and murderous "Night's Bridge" (*N* 101), the Earl holding court

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in an underground carriage (*N* 151), the ominous "shepherds in Shepherd's Bush" (*N* 137), the implacable "Black Friars" (*N* 232), the duplicitous angel Islington (*N* 132) – and literary characters. Paradoxically, Richard's most trustworthy guide and protector would be very easy to dismiss as the ultimate fabrication, the intertextual doppelgänger, as the Marquis de Carabas is, by his own admission, an honest charlatan who "had named himself from a lie in a fairy tale, and created himself – his clothes, his manners, his carriage – as a grand joke" (*N* 239) in philosophical recognition of the fact that "the world, Above or Below, was a place that wished to be deceived" (*N* 238-239).

The challenge of distinguishing between real and unreal / original and copy is further complicated by the fact that these flesh-and-blood equivalents of cultural commonplaces are not the only doubles emerging from the shady haunts of London Below. The notion that "a person's 'self' is different in the London Below of *Neverwhere*" (Tally 181) is rendered painfully obvious by the confrontation between the "damp, muddy Richard" and the three successive incarnations of "his double" (*N* 246) conjured up during the "Ordeal of the Key" (*N* 233): the pragmatic co-worker, the immaculate fiancée, and his own professional persona, the "clean, well-dressed Richard" (*N* 245). The protagonist's steadfast refusal to accept the version of reality and sanity (*N* 247) proffered by "the-other-Richard-who-wasn't-him" (*N* 247) stems from a belated recognition of the "shallow pettiness and essential unreality of the world which is capable of allowing its most vulnerable and/or sensitive inhabitants to 'fall through the cracks' into Somewhere Else" (Blaszkiewicz 133) and confirms the extent to which homelessness can function like "a coming home or being 'at home' with our self" (Tally 181).

For all the under-worlders' insistence on the impossibility of a return journey – "You can't. It's one or the other. Nobody ever gets both." (*N* 88); "You can't go back to London Above. A few individuals manage a kind of half-life [...] it isn't a good life." (*N* 344) – Richard's successful completion of his quest earns him the gift of absolute choice: "The key is the key to all reality. If Richard wants to return to London Above, then the key will take him to London Above." (*N* 344) Unsurprisingly, within days of parting from Door with an apologetic reminder of his inability to fit in her outlandish universe – "I don't belong in this world. In my London..." (*N* 351) – Richard realizes that the now tangible prospects of a bigger flat, a higher salary, a wife, "another promotion [...] two children, a boy and a girl," a house in the suburbs (*N* 365) no longer hold the same appeal to the person he has become. The promise of "a nice normal life" (*N* 371) perfectly summed up the scope of Richard Mayhew's ambitions, but is no match for the expectations of the Warrior, the slayer of the Beast, "the greatest hunter in London Below" (*N* 318): "if this is all there is, then I don't want to be sane." (*N* 371) Unlike Coraline's shorter but equally challenging quest, the transformation Richard undergoes clearly amounts to more than an "initiation story" meant to help him become a better citizen of London Above and a "preparatory stage preceding his real life as a grown-up" (Blaszkiewicz 133). If one takes the line that "London Below is devised as a counter-world in which a society chasing after success and money may recognise its own limitations and triviality," Richard's eventual decision to "return underground in a deliberate act of rejection of 1990s capitalist values" (Korte and Zipp 50) reinforces the moral superiority of a site which is "clearly secondary to the Above, perhaps even dependent on it" but ultimately more humane and honest despite (or perhaps because of) its "obvious brutality, ruthlessness or even, at times, bestiality" (Blaszkiewicz 133).

In the end the very exclusion from "work, family and social environment" that condemns Richard to complete invisibility "by taking away his various social roles" (Beaudry 74) enables him to find "a part of him he had not known existed," (*N* 122) amply compensating for the lost social recognition that accounted for the best part of his previous identity. The nonchalance with which Richard's new peers comment on their

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inconspicuousness – "If you're part of London Below [...] they normally don't even notice you exist" (*N* 187) – and with which upper-worlders dismiss the validity of an alternative existence – "I've passed the people who fall through the cracks [...] They don't go to a special London. They freeze to death in the winter." (*N* 368) – highlights both the naivety of Richard's musings on first catching sight of Night's Bridge – "He wondered how something like this could exist, beneath the city of London, without everyone knowing." (*N* 99) – and his uniqueness as a protagonist "willing to abandon stereotypes and capable of appreciating the poor as many different and highly idiosyncratic individuals" (Korte and Zipp 50). His insightfulness is all the more remarkable in view of the limited (and limiting) Wellsian dichotomy upheld by the population of London Below, from the scholarly Lord Portico – "that two cities should be so near' [...] and yet in all things so far; the possessors above us, and the dispossessed, we who live below and between, who live in the cracks." (*N* 96) – to the condescending Marquis: "understand this: there are two Londons. There's London Above – that's where you live – and then there's London Below – the Underside – inhabited by people who fell through the cracks in the world." (*N* 126) While it is quite easy to understand why the folk "walking the streets above" (*N* 261) and sleeping in the "[q]uiet, warm, inhabited houses" in the so-called "real world" (*N* 88) are unlikely to ever appreciate "the beauty of these sewers" (*N* 261), it is quite interesting to note that the occupants of "the dirty, desperate underworld of the poor and homeless" seem equally oblivious of the fact that "their essentially subaltern and other realm is superimposed upon that of heroic myth, insisting on the recognition of value and significance in the traditionally valueless" (Tiffin 35).

The apparently straightforward premise of "two Londons separated in terms of space and temporality and yet strangely coexisting" (Korte and Zipp 49-50) is undermined by the complex synchronic and diachronic palimpsest of a "city in which the very old and the awkwardly new jostled each other, not uncomfortably, but without respect" (*N* 9) superimposed on "a lifeworld in which snatches from the past have survived in a state of ahistorical 'neverwhere'" (Korte and Zipp 50) like the architectonic relics granted a new lease on life in Lord Portico's palatial yet elusive residence:

> The swimming pool was an indoor Victorian structure, constructed of marble and of cast iron. Her father had found it [...] and he had woven it into the fabric of the House Without Doors. Perhaps in the world outside, in London Above, the room had long been destroyed and forgotten. Door had no idea where any of the rooms of her house were, physically. Her grandfather had constructed the house, taking a room from here, a room from there, all through London, discrete and doorless; her father had added to it. (*N* 80-81)

Richard's early intimations of the fact that "time in London Below had only a passing acquaintance with the kind of time he was used to" (*N* 108) are reinforced by details ranging from the bucolic landscape of "London as it had been perhaps three thousand years ago, or more, before ever the first stone of the first human habitation was laid upon a stone" (*N* 350) to the daunting immensity of the "vast Cyclopean gateway – built of enormous rough stone blocks" by the "long-dead kings of mythical London" (*N* 306) and the insidious ghosts and echoes of the infamous "London fog" (*N* 228) gone from the Upworld for forty years yet preserved in one of the numerous temporal pockets "where things and places stay the same, like bubbles in amber." (*N* 229) The ultimate confirmation of the existence of "a lot of time in London" that "doesn't all get used up at once" and consequently "has to go somewhere" (*N* 229) emerges from the convergence of the temporal and spatial in the labyrinth that constitutes the last stage of Richard's quest: "a place of pure madness [...] built of lost fragments of London Above: alleys and roads and corridors and sewers that had fallen

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through the cracks over the millennia, and entered the world of the lost and forgotten." (*N* 308) In light of Richard's propensity to recognize not only the inner worth of social outcasts but the deeply layered structure of both Londons, the apparently farcical ceremony in which the newly anointed "Sir Richard of Maybury" is given permission to "walk freely, without let or hindrance" (*N* 347) emerges as less of a generous allowance and more of a formal acknowledgement of his innate ability and willingness to transgress the limitations of linear time and class prejudice alike.

'Then Nobody it is.'

Without wishing to minimize the "enormous debt, conscious" as well as "unconscious" (*GB* 293) that Gaiman's take on the story of a "young boy raised by unconventional guardians" (Cardin 379) owes to Rudyard Kipling, the final section of this analysis aims to focus less on the extent to which *The Graveyard Book* represents a "fairy tale interpretation" (McStotts 72) of the *Jungle Books* and more on its treatment of the familiar topics of mirror worlds and infringed boundaries. While the protagonist's age, surrogate family and the spectral entities that occasionally try to lure him away are clearly reminiscent of *Coraline*, Bod's considerably lengthier journey along and across "the borderland between the living and the dead" (*GB* 253) entails equally resonant echoes of *Neverwhere* that go beyond the obvious parallel between "the Freedom of the Graveyard" (*GB* 17) and "the freedom of the Underside" (*N* 347). When Bod ignores the "limits and breaks the rules of the graveyard," (Seyford Hrezo 85) he brings into its space and into the "spectral in-between zone" (Tally 170) that he inhabits the same "potential for conflict and evil" (Seyford Hrezo 85) that Coraline unwittingly unleashes, yet the ultimate conclusion of their experiences seems to be that "limits and rules and boundaries can and must be *violated* rather than preserved or adopted" (Newhouse 124).

The idea that trespassing such borders contravenes "most human beings' understanding of what is real and what is not" and that "moving beyond that borderland puts them in danger of madness" (Seyford Hrezo 86) is a staple premise of the ghost story genre that permeates Richard's apparent breakdown; nevertheless, by the end of their respective quests, incidentally based on the same transposition of "classic locations, motifs, lessons, and structures" into a "current social setting" (Abbruscato 66), all three protagonists have come to experience "homely feelings in [...] uncanny places" (Tally 176) and are thus inoculated against "the frightful and terrorising" (Cardin 379). However, by "inverting the notion of the uncanny" and turning the "*unheimlich* site" of the cemetery into "a *heimlich* site in which the orphaned protagonist is nurtured" (Rudd 186), *The Graveyard Book* provides Bod with "a curious and powerful sense of self" (Tally 176) that ensures he is rarely haunted by the fear and self-doubt that occasionally cripple the other two characters. Moreover, the fact that his actual home lies in a "threshold space" not only "makes his existence all the more exemplary" (Tally 170) but grants him the unique opportunity to explore a multitude of dimensions before finally entering a real world that draws him in with the promise of "dangers [...] and mysteries, new friends to make, old friends to rediscover, mistakes to be made and many paths to be walked" (*GB* 289) rather than putting him off with the tedium and disappointment often pervading ordinary human experience.

The essential incompatibility between the graveyard and the 'real' world beyond its "spike-topped iron railing" and "high brick wall" (*GB* 8) that Bod eventually comes to accept is somewhat reminiscent of the problematic relationship between the two different communities constructed in *Coraline* and *Neverwhere*, especially given the inevitably anachronic atmosphere of a "a world that was [...] hundreds of years out of date" (*GB* 61). Notwithstanding the common denominator of a twentieth-century protagonist's encounter with the past – represented by the spectres of children from different centuries, the "little bubbles of old time in London" (*N* 229) or the "many ghosts, each of them representing a tiny

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slice of history" (Newhouse 122) – it must be noted that, unlike the house the other side of the Joneses' bricked-up drawing room door and London Below, the world of the dead does not represent a mirror image of the world of the living (Newhouse 124). Nevertheless, Bod's journey does entail a brief immersion into a space that seems to qualify as a world of simulacra, a universe inhabited neither by the living nor by their disembodied spirits, although the protagonist's first encounter with "the Duke of Westminster, the Honourable Archibald Fitzhugh and the Bishop of Bath and Wells, slipping and bounding from shadow to shadow," (*GB* 66-67) soon to be followed by "the Thirty-Third President of the United States and the Emperor of China" (*GB* 72) as well as by "the famous writer Victor Hugo" (*GB* 76) might prompt some readers to anticipate the addition of slightly more distinguished personages to the cast of ghostly characters. The rather less glamorous truth entails yet another reassessment of horror staples, perhaps less memorable but certainly more offbeat than the already familiar recasting of traditional antagonists such as werewolves and vampires into fantastic vigilantes like the "Hounds of God," blessed rather than cursed with the ability to transform and intent on pursuing evil-doers "to the very gates of Hell," (*GB* 88) and more ambivalent members of "the Honour Guard" whose former tendency to breach boundaries has been replaced by the determination to "protect the borders of things." (*GB* 284)

The moment Bod is gleefully told "how they had got their names and how he, in his turn, once he had become a nameless ghoul, would be named, as they had been, after the main course of his first dinner," (*GB* 76) the apparently illustrious intruders reveal themselves as creatures "whose identities and actions are merely scavenged or copied from others rather than created by and for oneself." (Tally 177) Unlike the classical double, born "as a result of an invasion by an Other" (Fonseca 202), these entities believe they can acquire some form of personal credentials by consuming the lifeless body of their alleged self. By endowing demons already defined by "the reprehensible habit of devouring the dead" (Bierce 116) with the even more ignoble (albeit less gruesome) tendency to "leech identities" (Tally 177), Gaiman thus engenders a breed of creatures completely devoid of authenticity and incapable of any creative endeavour whatsoever. The ghouls attempt to lure Bod with the promise of a "city of delights, of fun and magic" where he would be "appreciated, not ignored," (*GB* 69) highly reminiscent of the enticements proffered by the simulacra of real people inhabiting the Other Mother's universe, yet whereas the latter can construct the world anew every morning (*C* 120) in accordance with Coraline's wishes, the ghouls are "parasites and scavengers, eaters of carrion" who cannot build and whose very city turns out to be "something they found, long ago, but did not make." (*GB* 74) The Other Mother is revealed to have an identity of her own as the *belle dame*, albeit one that she struggles to conceal, and even though her creations are ultimately condemned by Coraline as unconvincing imitations, the results of her efforts to "twist and copy and distort things that already existed" (*C* 118) are considerably more compelling than the inflated yet generic promises made by the ghouls – "the best city [...] best life [...] best food" (*GB* 73) – because they are customised to match each new victim's innermost desires. Likewise, although the "associative house" (*N* 82) built by Lord Portico and his father entails clear elements of architectural cannibalism, with the various rooms salvaged from all over London, the resulting "House Without Doors" (*N* 80) constitutes the very opposite of the nightmarish city of Ghûlheim, being not only harmonious and unique in its postmodern eclecticism, but also indicative of its owners' ability to tastefully select and recombine rather than merely appropriate.

The ghouls' failure to convince Bod to surrender his distinctive name and self in favour of a derivative label and questionable lifestyle is hardly surprising given his fundamental status as the very opposite of the "identity-thieving ghouls" and the "almost nameless 'Jacks'" (Tally 178) and the singularity that distinguishes him from ethereal ghosts and living boys alike: "He looks like nobody but himself." (*GB* 19) Notwithstanding the

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efforts made by his ghostly protectors to find him a suitable eponym, by his one living friend to trace his lineage, by Miss Lupescu to replace his "foolish name" (*GB* 59) with a generic form of address and by the Sleer to grant him the authority and immortality of his long-lost Master (*GB* 234) and thus anchor him in a universe that is familiar to them, Bod is never tempted to question or renounce the identity that renders him unique: "I know my name [...] I'm Nobody Owens. That's who I am." (*NG* 264) It would be interesting to know whether his guardian's choice of a "good name" that he believes "will help to keep him safe" (*GB* 19) owes anything to the Homeric precedent, yet his parting gift of a "a passport [...] made out in the name of Nobody Owens" (*GB* 285) seems to stem less from the continued need to shelter his ward and more from renewed recognition of Bod's individuality. By the end of the personal journey covered by their respective narratives, Coraline Jones, Richard Mayhew and Nobody Owens are ready to cross yet another threshold, having displayed not only courage and selflessness but also a fierce determination to stay true to themselves, yet whereas the trajectories of the first two seem to have been somehow already mapped out, the promise to "[l]eave no path untaken" (*GB* 288) Bod makes before walking into Life "with his eyes and his heart wide open" (*GB* 289) singles him out once again as the least circumscribed and predictable of Gaiman's protagonists.

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