Lynnette Lounsbury, "Entry on: Neverwhere by Neil Gaiman ", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/102. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Neil Gaiman

Neverwhere

United Kingdom (1996)

TAGS: Cerberus Labyrinth Lamia Minotaur Mithras Odyssey Underworld





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General information	
Title of the work	Neverwhere
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1996
First Edition Details	Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere*. London: BBC Books, 1996, 370 pp.
ISBN	0380973634
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Mythological fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Young adults
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Creators



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Neil Gaiman , b. 1960
(Author)

Neil Gaiman was born in Hampshire, England, the son of leading members of the Church of Scientology and now lives near Minneapolis in the United States. His parents were of Polish-Jewish and East-European Jewish origin. He was raised in Sussex, and educated in Church of England schools. He loved books from an early age, enjoying in particular the works of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Edgar Allan Poe, Ursula K. Le Guin and G. K. Chesterton. He has described himself as a "feral child who was raised in libraries," (see here, accessed: July 3, 2018) and credits this experience for his life-long love of reading. Raised in both the Jewish tradition and the Church of Scientology, Gaiman's religious upbringing attuned him to intersections in culture and belief and while he was heavily influenced by these belief systems, he ascribes to none as an adult. He began a career as a journalist and interviewer, and wrote for the British Fantasy Society.

His writing career began in journalism and his first published book was a biography of the musical group *Duran Duran* (1984). He wrote *Don't Panic: The Official Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Companion* (1988), and collaborated with Terry Pratchett on *Good Omens* (1990). Notable in his career is his friendship with other major writers of fantasy such as Pratchett, and Alan Moore. He began writing comic books, and developed *The Sandman*, a series of highly popular graphic novels (1989–1996) about Morpheus, the personification of sleep/dream, in collaboration with artist Mike Dringenberg. Gaiman's literary output is voluminous, including works for adult readers, young adults, and children, including *Neverwhere* (1996), *American Gods* (2001), *Coraline* (2002), *The Wolves in the Walls* (2003), *Anansi Boys* (2005), *The Graveyard Book* (2008), *The Ocean at the End of the Lane* (2013). A hallmark of his approach is a cross-cultural interest in mythology, fairytale and folk tale, which he interweaves in his storytelling. In 2017, he published *Norse Mythology*, a retelling of the Norse myths.

Gaiman is credited with reviving and re-creating comics as well as

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succeeding in the cross-genre writing for multiple audiences and ages with his works of prose, comics, song lyrics, drama, screenwriting and journalism. Gaiman was one of the first writers to establish a blog and a Twitter account and has over one million followers on each. Gaiman's work has received numerous awards internationally, including the Carnegie Medal and the Newbery Medal and his work has been on the bestseller lists across the world numerous times. *The Graveyard Book* is his most awarded book with sixteen awards. To date he has published forty books, thirty-nine graphic works, and had six television episodes, five screenplays and two theatre works produced.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 3, 2018).

Profile at the literature.britishcouncil.org (accessed: July 3, 2018).

Profile at the www.fantasybookreview.co.uk (accessed: July 3, 2018).

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Additional information

Adaptations	TV series: Humphreys, Dewi, dir., Gaiman, N., and Henry, L., *Neverwhere*, BBC, 1996.
Translation	Multiple languages
Summary	Richard Mayhew is a young businessman recently moved to London where his job is almost as dull as his fiancé, a demanding and over-bearing social climber. One night he stumbles over a girl lying injured on the sidewalk. When he stops to help her, he inadvertently opens himself up to a second fantastical world – London Below, an underworld city that shadows the real London. *Neverwhere* involves a character descending into the Underworld, Odysseus-like, to see what lies beyond the everyday and to face his mortality. As the Marquis de Carabas explains to Richard, London Below is the Underside, the place full of people who *fell through the cracks in the world*. The more involved Richard becomes with the Below, the more he vanishes from the Above, suggesting the notion that one can only be dead OR alive, never both. The Below is filled with murderers, monsters, warriors and angels navigating lives that take them through the sewer canals and abandoned subways of underground London, known as the Neverwhere. The girl, Door, rescued by Richard is a person of great power, but also a fugitive with powerful enemies. While Richard would prefer to return to his mundane life, when this proves impossible, he reluctantly joins her quest to find those who killed her family and to destroy the evil force intent on destroying the whole of the Below. The two face a series of episodic trials, also in the tradition of the Iliad and the Odyssey, overcoming evil, but also their own natures to triumph. In effect, this makes Richard a classical hero with a modern twist. The forces of evil are incarnate in the Angel of Islington, though they also appear as the "shadow-self," which tempts Richard to remove himself from the quest. When Richard and Door finally triumph, he is able to return to his life Above, which now seems both inadequately adventurous and disturbingly shallow. Richard's final choice is to make his way to the place where he felt the most himself, in the Below.

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Analysis

Neverwhere is Gaiman's first novel (a novelisation of the television series he co-created for the BBC) and begins a series of novels with deep mythological underpinnings. Gaiman is interested in the growth and journey of the individual, particularly children and young adults through their interactions with the fantastical, mythological and paranormal. *Neverwhere*, set in and below London, uses ideas of the Underworld, the Odyssey, the shadow self and guardians such as the Minotaur and Cerberus, to create a separate mirror world that teaches Richard more about himself than London above was able to do. London Below allows Richard to see himself in a role he never would have been able to take on in the Above – hero, protector and pro-active protagonist. He is a modern Odysseus, facing a journey he did not want but learning more than he could have imagined. Gaiman mixes myth with his use of other traditions, such as fairytales and religious traditions. The Marquis de Carabas is a modern "puss in boots," a mercenary for hire who ends up becoming the revolutionary, a dandy who becomes a figure Christ-like in his sacrifice, martyrdom and resurrection. He also journeys to self-knowledge, changing from a man who required payment for services to the man who returns Richard to the Below for no fee. The Angel Islington is another religious reference, in this case, the fallen angel (or Satan/Lucifer) who is beguiling but nefarious. Lamia of The Velvets is a vampiric Succubus, a modern reflection of Lamia, Zeus's mistress and child eater. Door is both Oracle to Richard, and traveller herself, taking part in a quest for both knowledge and revenge that introduces her to many archetypal characters and eventually reveals to her, her own role in the story – that of unifying, of the Below, and of Richard's two versions of himself. The most obvious classical allusion in the text is that of the Labyrinth and the Minotaur (the Beast of London), which must be fought and defeated by Richard and Hunter. Only Richard survives this encounter.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Cerberus Labyrinth Lamia Minotaur Mithras Odyssey Underworld

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Depression Emotions Identity Learning Love Memory Self Suicide Youth

Further Reading

Elber-Aviram, Hadas, "'The Past Is Below Us': Urban Fantasy, Urban Archaeology, and the Recovery of Suppressed History." *The Institute of Archaeology* 23 (2013).

Kidder, Orion, "Fantastic philosophy", *Extrapolation* 54 (2013): 326.

Onega, Susana "The Mythical Impulse in British Historiographic Metafiction", *European Journal of English Studies* 1. 2 (1997): 184 –204.

Romero-Jódar, Andrés, "Subversions of the Mythical Canon in Neil Gaiman's Neverwhere", *Cuadernos de Investigación Filológica* 31–32 (2006): 163–195.

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