Wonder in London Below

A comparison of G. K. Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*

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Contents

Introduction

Social criticism has been expressed through literature for centuries, taking various forms depending on how acceptable it was to criticise the state of the world at various times. Naturally, works of literature that contain social criticism are strongly linked to the time in which they were written. In some cases, it is even necessary to study the time in which the texts were written in order to understand their arguments at all. However, there are some cases where it might be relevant to study how the manifestation of social criticism in earlier works of literature has affected subsequent works. G. K. Chesterton's *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, published in 1904, and Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, published in 1996, present one such case.

Neverwhere opens with a quote taken from *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, which is the first sign to the reader that the novels will bear similarities to one another. Gaiman has also stated, for example in the article "Neil Gaiman Introduces *Neverwhere*" in *The Telegraph*, that his novel was influenced by *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (par. 1). In particular, Gaiman has been influenced by Chesterton's interpretation of London as a city shaped by its place names, which is what the quote in *Neverwhere* hints at. An intertextual study of these two novels might therefore focus on the two authors' portrayal of London. However, social criticism is also an important factor in both novels, and although the novels focus on different areas of society, it may prove fruitful to examine in what ways Gaiman has been influenced by the attitudes present in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Consequently, the purpose of this essay is to study the social criticism in the two novels closer, in order to find out how Chesterton's views on society and human nature can be said to have influenced Gaiman.

The first two parts of this essay will consist of separate analyses of the two novels in order to distinguish what criticism is directly related to the time in which each novel was written. The analyses will both begin with a short historical background and then apply the facts of this background to the novel in question. The third part will be dedicated to comparing the two novels in order to find out how and why Gaiman has been influenced by Chesterton, or how he subverts the ideas developed by Chesterton.

Mad Philosophies Meet Common Sense: *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*

G. K. Chesterton's 1904 novel *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* takes place in London in 1984, and envisions a society in which little has changed over the past eighty years. The major change that has taken place is the shift in government to all-powerful kings, randomly chosen among the people. When the novel was published, the United Kingdom had only recently left the Victorian era behind. King Edward VII succeeded his mother on the throne in 1901, and provided a stark contrast to the stern Victorian ideals of the past. As Lucy Moore puts it: "While Victoria's bleak piety coloured her age, the Prince of Wales's passions for girls, gambling and gluttony reflected the debauched mood of the society in which he moved" (par. 7). The Edwardian era itself was a time of contrast; for some people it was a time of leisure sports and opulent wealth, but for others it was a period of great suffering; it was also a time of great political movement, most notably because of women campaigning for the right to vote.

As Queen Victoria had been a dominating figure of her period, so King Edward came to dominate his. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, he was "immensely popular", even though he lived a controversial life. Stanley Weintraub writes in *Edward the Caresser : The Playboy Prince who became Edward VII* that Edward was kept out of politics for most of his life, because his mother, Queen Victoria, did not trust him enough to let him take part in official affairs (xi). Unable to engage himself in important matters, he found amusement elsewhere: In gambling, shooting, wine and women. This did little to increase his mother's feelings of trust for him. Weintraub goes as far as to claim that the prince was "a walking argument for the defects of primogeniture" (xiv).

The Prince of Wales' pursuits were imitated by the upper classes, most notably in the country house party: a form of entertainment which reached its peak during the Victorian period and continued up until the beginning of the First World War. According to Evangeline Holland, the country house party was a vital part of the social season in Victorian and Edwardian England. It was fashionable as well as expensive, and many of these parties were held to entertain "the easily-bored Prince of Wales" (par. 2).

In 1859, Charles Darwin published the scientific treatise *On the Origin of Species*, which sent ripples across the world, and came to affect not only Darwin's field of biology, but also religion and the social sciences. Ernst Mayr explains in "Darwin's

Impact on Modern Thought" that Darwin's theses "required a complete rethinking of man's concept of the world and of his own position in it" (319). This rethinking led to the development of a number of philosophical theories during the latter half of the 19th century, some of which developed into political ideologies.

Karl Marx was very impressed with Darwin's theories, writing in a letter to Ferdinand Lassalle that "Darwin's work is most important and suits my purpose in that it provides a basis in natural science for the historical class struggle" (par. 10). Marx was not the only one to try to apply Darwin's theories on politics; the theory of social Darwinism, popular around the turn of the 20th century, attempted to transpose the concept of the "survival of the fittest"[1] onto human society. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, social Darwinism "was used to support laissez-faire capitalism and political conservatism". The theory defended the class system as being the result of natural inequalities between people of different classes. As an example, poor people were not to receive support from those better off, because their poverty was simply a sign of their being "unfit".

The Edwardian era was a peaceful chapter in British history. However, the alliance systems that were developing in Europe were disrupting the balance of power. The complex system of alliances between European countries that would eventually lead up to the First World War had started in the 19th century, and continued through the Edwardian era. Britain formed an alliance with France in 1904, the same year that *The Napoleon of Notting Hill Was* published (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). France had already developed an alliance with Russia in the 1890's, and Britain would do the same in 1907. With Germany and Austria-Hungary as opposing forces, Europe had become split between two alliance systems.

Europe was not the only part of the world that was undergoing changes. Of relevance to this analysis is the growing political and economical influence of the USA at the turn of the century. Journalist W. T. Stead had seen the growing influence of the United States and argued in 1901 in *The Americanisation of the World* for the creation of the "Reunited States" of Great Britain and the USA (16). This theory is mentioned in the beginning of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, and it seems plausible that Chesterton based his fictional world at least in part on Stead's vision: In *The Napoleon of Notting*

1 A phrase often attributed to Darwin, but really coined by Herbert Spencer (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

Hill "the last wars of the world" took place fifteen years ago (73) and the countries of the world have been split up into large "Powers", that have reached an agreement with each other in order to prevent future wars. This reflects the political situation at the time of Chesterton's writing and foreshadows institutions such as the European Union.

W. T. Stead is only one of a number of authors, philosophers, politicians and other "clever men" mentioned by Chesterton in the first chapter of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, reflecting the philosophical and political theories of the age. What links them together is the starting-point of all their theories: They "took something or other that was certainly going on in their time, and then said that it would go on more and more until something extraordinary happened" (10). Most of the theories that Chesterton presents originated in his own time, and seem to be based on this method. However, Chesterton takes them further yet, into the absurd.

One theory that Chesterton (perhaps surprisingly) puts under inspection in this way is Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Chesterton writes:

> [England] believed in a thing called Evolution. And [evolution] said, "All theoretic changes have ended in blood and ennui. If we change, we must change slowly and safely, as the animals do […] the actual physical force ruling the country, the soldiers and police, grew smaller and smaller, and at last vanished almost to a point. The people combined could have swept the few policemen away in ten minutes: they did not, because they did not believe it would do them the least good. They had lost faith in revolutions. Democracy was dead; for no one minded the governing class governing. (14)

Evolution is seen as a theory that can be applied to society in order to replace destructive revolutions, which sounds positive. However, the fanatical belief in the superiority of evolution has (ironically) led to a state of stagnation, from which it seems difficult to deviate. The kings in Chesterton's narrative are randomly chosen, suggesting some degree of egalitarianism, but they are chosen from the "official class" (14), which only cements the class system further. There is no one to protest this system, because the people have been taught to let all things develop naturally.

Chesterton's random system could be seen as an indirect criticism of the hereditary system. Just as the hereditary system sometimes produces heirs that are directly unsuitable to rule the country, so the system in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* produced Auberon Quin, who is not content to let all things continue the way they have always been, but who tries to turn the world on its head.

If applying the theory of evolution on society leads to stagnation, the idea of

evolution could be seen as something negative, even a device for controlling the people. However, it is important to remember the context of this idea. Since the first chapter of the novel lists a number of philosophies that all have in common that they are ideas taken to their extremes, it seems only logical to interpret the comment on evolution as yet another comment on what could happen if the application of that idea were to be taken too far.

Social questions such as the class struggle, or poverty, are not very prominent in Chesterton's novel. It could be argued that Adam Wayne, the novel's "Napoleon of Notting Hill", brings up the issue of rich versus poor in his words defending Pump Street: "That which is large enough for the rich to covet […] is large enough for the poor to defend" (52). Wayne has grown up in Pump Street, which is why he fights for it when it is threatened by a road development. His words sound noble, as is his attempt to convey the love that poor people may feel for things that hold little value to the rich. However, Wayne's knowledge of the plight of the poor can be questioned. Notting Hill was not (and is not) a poor area of London; The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea lists the building projects in the Notting Hill area in the late Victorian period as "large terraced houses, garden squares and fine villas" (par. 2), suggesting a middle or upper-middle-class population. Therefore, Wayne is likely to have grown up in a middle-class family, rather than one that could be defined as poor.

However, Wayne does something else that is related to the class struggle. When Wayne defends "the Cause of Notting Hill" (57) against those who laugh at the mention of it, he defends the common man:

> I was born, like other men, in a spot of the earth which I loved because I had played boys' games there, and fallen in love [...] These little gardens where we told our loves. These streets where we brought out our dead. Why should they be commonplace? Why should they be absurd? (56-57)

Wayne's primary aim here is to defend his birthplace against those who would ridicule it, but his statement also does something else; what Wayne implies is that all of mankind love the places where they have grown up equally, regardless of whether other people find them commonplace, or even absurd. Wealth is unimportant, what really matters is the personal associations that a place can hold, and in that respect, all men are equal. In a country that had yet to become a proper democracy (universal male suffrage was not introduced until 1918), the idea of total equality was more radical than it is today.

The danger of fanaticism is a theme that is established early on in the novel, along with its opposite: The danger of cynicism. These themes appear in various forms throughout the novel, and are personified by the characters Adam Wayne and Auberon Quin. Quin, who sees himself as a great humorist, mocks the whole world by the archaic customs he forces upon his subjects when he is made king. At his first meeting with Wayne, he believes that Wayne shares his spirit. However, he quickly realises that Wayne's words about how glorious the King's vision is are uttered in all seriousness, which according to Quin makes him a madman. Quin is a pronounced cynic, who believes that "seriousness sends men mad […] All men are mad but the humorist, who cares for nothing and possesses everything" (52).

The King views himself as an artist, the great humorist who takes nothing seriously; compared to him, the passion of Wayne seems honest and pure. For that reason, describing Wayne as a fanatic might seem strange. However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a fanatic as "[a] fanatic person; a visionary; an unreasoning enthusiast", which describes Wayne accurately. Wayne is clearly an enthusiastic man, as well as a visionary, but he is rigid in his beliefs, and therefore unreasonable. According to one of the other Provosts there is "[n]o sign in [his] large blue eyes [...] of ever having heard of a joke" (50). This of course makes him the perfect opposite of the King. However, Wayne's spirit is strong enough to sway even the King by the end of the novel, proving how effective his qualities are. Wayne also shows that fanaticism is dangerous because of its infectiousness: Wayne's fanaticism alone sparked a civil war in a city where previously "[t]here was really no reason for any man doing anything but the thing he had done the day before" (14).

Wayne may be a powerful leader, but in the first chapter of the novel it is implied that there is another type of power that does not lie in military might, nor in the prophesying abilities of the "wise men". Instead it is something "in the eyes of labourers in the streets, of peasants in the fields, of sailors and children, and especially women" (13). These people are, Chesterton writes, playing a game called "Cheat the Prophet", which takes the following form:

> The players listen very carefully and respectfully to all that the clever men have to say about what is to happen in the next generation. The players then wait until all the clever men are dead, and bury them nicely. They then go and do something else. (9)

Chesterton shows that there is a power in common sense that resonates more strongly with the common man than most extraordinary theories. As a result, the common man does not feel the need to listen to outrageous theories, but simply goes on with his daily work.

In the wake of the philosophical revolution brought about by Darwin's theories, common sense might be supposed to be the most common thing in the world. However, Britain at the turn of the century was, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, very influenced by the philosophies of idealism and scepticism.[2] A paper called "A Defence of Common Sense", published in 1925 argued against these ideas using common sense propositions such as: "Many human beings have existed in the past and some still exist" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). What Chesterton does in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is similar, though less obvious. The readers are trusted to be in touch with their common sense enough to see that the absurdities in the novel stem from a lack of it.

In *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, Chesterton criticises the mentality of his time, more than specific aspects of government. Comments on democracy and monarchy can be found, as shown above, but the most important aspects of Chesterton's narrative are the importance of common sense and the praise of the common man – whom Chesterton admires as a person in touch with his common sense.

London – as Above, so Below: *Neverwhere*

The story of *Neverwhere* is set in England in the 1990's, a society that is often referred to as Thatcherite after the woman who for natural reasons has come to symbolise the 1980's in the UK: the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The Thatcherite era ended in 1990 with the Labour Party winning the election, but it left clear traces in England, and echoes of it can be found in Gaiman's novel. In fact, although *Neverwhere* was first published in 1996, Gaiman has stated that he started writing the novel in 1991, right after the end of the Thatcherite era.

Margaret Thatcher came to power in the UK in 1979. She was the first female prime minister in Europe, and came to be the longest serving prime minister in the UK

2 Skepticism "maintains that nobody knows any proposition to be true", and idealism claims that "the world is wholly mental" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

since 1827, keeping her post all through the 1980s (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Despite this, Thatcher was deeply unpopular, and during her term as Prime Minister, she was given names such as "the milk snatcher" and "the iron lady". During her three consecutive terms as Prime Minister, Thatcher undertook a process of changing British industry to the core, coupled with increasing privatisation of various state owned enterprises. According to Keith Buchanan, the number of people living below the official poverty line in the UK almost doubled in less than a decade, increasing from 6 million in 1979 to 11.6 million in 1986. A major contributing factor to this was unemployment rates, which more than doubled in just two years (2).

This kind of economic situation was bound to affect British social infrastructure. Health care suffered, and the number of homeless people grew. In a 1988 article, Buchanan wrote: "It is estimated that the homeless now total 250,000, some 4 million houses do not measure up to minimum standards of health and safety, and that an additional one million houses are simply unfit to live in." (2-3). In London, the so-called Cardboard City close to Waterloo station housed around 200 homeless people in the mid-1980s. According to a BBC News article on the event of its closure in 1998, it had become "a symbol of society's failure to eradicate homelessness" (par. 3). In 1990, the Rough Sleepers Initiative was launched in London. Their purpose was getting the most vulnerable homeless people off the street by means of hostel places, move-on accommodation and similar institutions. Through the 1990s, other projects of a similar type were started, and the number of homeless people once again decreased (Fitzpatrick et al. 2005).

It is clear, however, that Thatcher did do something right. If her only contribution had been increasing poverty and unemployment, she would of course never have been re-elected. The answer lies partly in those working-class people who did not lose their jobs, and partly in the groups of people who were never threatened by factories closing down to begin with.

In a newspaper article appropriately named "How Margaret Thatcher won me over", Andrew Pierce remembers being a first-time voter at a council estate in the late 70's. His father worked on the assembly line at British Leyland, and the whole family was expected to vote Labour. However, like many other companies at the time, British Leyland was heavily beset by strikes, with workers bullied into joining them. Pierce

recalls that “many of the workers were too afraid to vote to stay in work because of the fear of intimidation” (par. 5). Because of this, Thatcher’s promise to weaken the unions and their power to organize strikes was very attractive to the likes of Pierce.

Thatcher's decision to sell off council homes (one of the factors later cited as contributing to the large numbers of homeless people) was by people like Pierce seen as a “master stroke” (par. 10). For the first time, families like his were able to live in a house that they actually owned, and run-down council estates were transformed by the new home owners.

The economy inherited by Thatcher was a weak one. Inflation was high, and because of the many strikes, the country’s manufacturing output was low. The Thatcher government tried to reduce inflation by means involving higher interest rates and higher taxes and spending cuts, and inflation indeed went down. The price, however, was the high unemployment rates outlined above (*Encyclopedia Britannica*).

Despite the economic problems, there were groups of people who did have money. Keith Buchanan writes that people employed in fields like banking, insurance and the leisure industries were doing very well, and because of this, they saw Thatcher in a favourable light (6). The 1980s saw the rise of the “yuppie” or young urban professional, a group of people who were “characterized by conspicuous consumption, unabashed materialism, the acquisition of wealth, and a hunger for luxury goods and designer clothing” (*Oxford Reference*).

When viewing *Neverwhere* as a product of Thatcher’s Britain, the social criticism that is present in the novel seems at once very clear. The main character Richard Mayhew gets to experience the grisly downside of Thatcherism when he loses his job and his flat. On top of it all, his rich and successful girlfriend (most likely a Tory voter), leaves him, because he fails to live up to her standards and expectations. In saving the injured and seemingly homeless girl called Door, Richard not only embarrasses Jessica; his actions are against her beliefs on how society as a whole should work.

Richard’s first meeting with Door is very telling of the attitude that homeless people might have been faced with in the late 20th century:

> ‘Jessica?’ He could not believe she was simply ignoring the figure at their feet.
> ‘What?’ She was not pleased to be jerked out of her reverie.
> ‘Look.’

> He pointed to the pavement. The person was face down, and enveloped in bulky clothes; Jessica took his arm, and tugged him towards her. 'Oh. I see. If you pay them any attention, Richard, they'll walk all over you. They all have homes, really. Once she's slept it off, I'm sure she'll be fine.' (24).

Although a homeless person was far from an unusual sight on the streets of London, Jessica's reaction is remarkable, especially when Richard discovers that the girl is bleeding. Jessica simply points out that they are running late, and that somebody else will come along and take care of it. Jessica's views are a rather extreme version of the Thatcherite idea that the government should not serve as a universal provider. Instead, "[m]ore should be left to the market, the voluntary sector and self-help", according to Dennis Kavanagh in "Thatcherism and the End of the Post-War Consensus" (part 3). Jessica is a single individual, but her attitude reflects that of the government. She may give money to charity (22), but when faced with an actual person in need, Jessica refuses to act. The whole idea that Gaiman presents of a London Below, housing all the people that society has lost track of, is an indirect criticism of the Thatcherite idea mentioned above. There are also direct comments on the issue of homelessness and the attitudes towards it in the text, as shown in the presented excerpt from the novel.

The population of London Below is made up of two kinds of people: The people who have been born and grown up there, and the people who for one reason or another have "fallen through the cracks". The people belonging to the first of these groups usually have some sort of supernatural power, such as Door's ability to open doors anywhere, or the Marquis de Carabas' life, stored in an egg. These qualities make them well adjusted to life in London Below. The second group is more directly connected to London Above, since it is where they originally come from. In most cases, those of the second group have accepted that they can never go back to London Above, and though they might miss their old lives, they have adjusted as well as they can to the dangerous London Below. Anaesthesia, Richard's guide to the first Floating Market, describes what seems to be a not entirely uncommon series of events that led to her ending up in London Below. After running away from an abusive uncle and an aunt who accused her of lying about it, the young girl slept on the streets, eating throwaway fruit from the markets. She tells Richard: "Then I got really sick. I was living under a flyover in Notting Hill. When I come to, I was in London Below. The rats had found me" (87-88).

As an eleven-year-old girl, Anaesthesia represents a particularly vulnerable

group among homeless people: young people who for one reason or another have run away from home. If Anaesthesia attempts to seek help from any of the organisations working to help homeless people, she would risk being sent back to her foster-parents, because she is a minor. Given her experience with her foster-parents, Anaesthesia is not likely to be very trusting of adults, and at age eleven she might not even be aware that there are organisations that could help her. Instead she lives on the streets, exposing herself to a number of dangers.

The problem of runaways is something that is still under discussion in the United Kingdom. In 2001, not many years after the publication of Gaiman's novel, an article on the BBC website stated that "Britain's runaway children *could* be offered counselling and a roof over their heads" (par. 1, emphasis mine). This clearly shows that runaway children previously had nowhere to turn to. Gaiman's solution for the girl's situation is telling: The only way in which Anaesthesia can escape from living on the streets is by falling through to London Below where she still lives a dangerous life as an unappreciated person, but at least she is alive.

Richard's girlfriend Jessica is the polar opposite of Anaesthesia. Jessica lives in "fashionable Kensington" (20) and does her shopping at Harrods and Harvey Nichols. Along with her boss, Mr. Stockton, she represents a group of people without financial worries, who seem to hold only contempt for people like Anaesthesia. Jessica's comment about homeless people all really having homes to go to is particularly telling, and Mr. Stockton expresses similar views in his speech at the British Museum, though his are more implied. He seems to think that all it takes for "some other little penniless brat to start his own communications empire" (194) is inspiration. Mr. Stockton is a self-made man, and should know what it is like not to have any money, but what he seems to be saying is that if he could manage to build a business empire from nothing, then anybody could. This is directly related to Jessica's comment: "If you pay them any attention [...] they'll walk all over you" (24).

In the middle of these two extremes, there is Richard. Unlike his girlfriend, he does not come from the very top of society, but he does work at "one of the finest investment analysts in London" (86), and as such represents one of the types of people who were doing well in the 1980's. On the surface, Richard is just another yuppie working in the city. However, at a closer look the label does not fit him.

Richard is no more of a materialist than the average westerner. He is never shown to covet anything for reasons such as their price or the status they entail. When Richard's life falls apart, he puts some clothes and fruit in a bag and leaves, an act that suggests that the things he owns are there for practical reasons more than anything else. For him, having a well-paid job with a chance at promotion is more about financial safety than the acquisition of wealth. In other words: Richard is a practical, if rather passive character at the outset of the novel. These traits are what makes it possible for the reader to get an objective view of London Below through him.

Gaiman's social criticism is targeted at certain groups. Wealthy people in the novel are generally uncaring, something that is even pointed out by characters in the novel itself. Anaesthesia and the people who like her have fallen through the cracks are on the other hand portrayed sympathetically, and Richard, who resists Jessica's uncaring ideals, learns that the things that he once thought were important mean very little in reality. Richard's choice at the end of the novel reflects the journey he has made, and the insights he has come to on that journey.

In London Below there are no wealthy people, as there is no currency. However, there are important people, and by extension a kind of upper class. These authority figures are in many cases tacitly criticised by the way they are portrayed. The Earl of Earls court is a man who lives in the past; his hall is a monument to his former glory, and indeed, his "real domain" according to one of the characters, is that of things that have been lost or forgotten (160). The Earl can be seen as a caricature of conservatism, ruling over his "tiny empire of lost property" (160), which it is his purpose in life to collect and conserve. The Earl also mentions an aversion to change when he talks to Door about her father: "Your father had a lot of ideas, you know. Asked me about them. I don't trust change" (160-161). This can be directly related to one of the core principles of Conservatism as an ideology: "Government's responsibility is to be the servant, not the master, of existing ways of life, and politicians must therefore resist the temptation to transform society and politics" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). London Below is in many ways a deeply conservative place, and the earl is not the last character to express views in line with this statement.

The character with the most power is also the character who turns out to be the least likeable: The Angel Islington. When Richard and Door first meet the Angel, it

appears to be the very opposite of the conservative Earl. It offers them the last of the wine from Atlantis with the words: “I suppose that you could accuse me of squandering something I should treasure […] But I receive guests so rarely” (200). At first the Angel seems sympathetic, talking about its relation to London Below as a city it takes care of. The Angel promises that both Door’s wish to find out who killed her family and why, and Richard’s wish to return to London Above can be fulfilled. Its promises, however, are false. The Angel only wants one thing, the key to its prison, and it is willing to go to any lengths in order to get it. The key is not only a symbol of freedom to Islington, it is also a symbol of power, since it is implied that the Angel is planning a coup after its return to heaven.

Islington embodies the qualities of selfishness and deceitfulness, extreme versions of qualities that critics of conservatism often associate with the ideology. The quality of selfishness can be linked to the Thatcher era’s pattern of rich people becoming richer than before. Similarly, the quality of deceitfulness can be linked to the promises made to workers in the United Kingdom, of how much better their lives would become under a Conservative government. These promises in many cases failed to deliver, as seen in the rising numbers of unemployed, poor and homeless people during this time.

The only exception to the unsympathetic authority figure is Lord Portico, Door’s late father. Portico is presented as a caring man whose goal in life is to unite London Below. This desire does not seem to have been founded in selfishness, but rather in a deep sense of caring about the city. As Islington puts it: “He worried about the Underside” (326). While Portico’s cause seems to have been a just one, it appears not to have been popular with the denizens of the Underside. Lady Serpentine talks about him as a “[s]illy man. Just asking for trouble” (221), and expresses neither surprise nor sympathy at hearing of his death. The suspicion of change that the earl talked about seems to be a recurring attitude across the Underside, although it is manifested in different ways in different characters.

In portraying Portico as the only truly sympathetic authority figure in the novel, Gaiman advocates his qualities: compassion, along with a sense of responsibility for those in a more vulnerable position. However, Portico’s death along with the attitudes of many of the characters also serve to remind the reader that, regrettably, these are dangerous qualities to possess. They are qualities that are likely to gain a person more

enemies than friends.

The reluctance of many of the characters to support Portico in his cause to unite London Below shows how London Below mirrors London Above; it echoes back to Jessica's views on the homeless and Mr. Stockton's ideas about building a fortune. Events in the novel show that it can even be dangerous to help others; characters who do so without expecting any personal gain from it invariably end up in a dangerous situation. The clearest examples of this are Richard's decision to help Door, and Anaesthesia's guiding Richard to the Floating Market.

In Richard's case, deciding to help Door is not a rational decision, it is a compassionate one. He could just as well have decided to call for an ambulance despite Door asking him not to, but for some reason he did not, and this is the decision that makes him fall through to London Below. In a way not dissimilar to Portico, Richard's compassion puts him in a dangerous situation. Anaesthesia is different, in that she does not choose to help Richard, instead she is chosen by her people, as she is "expendable" (348). Because of this, the role that Anaesthesia plays is more relevant to Richard's understanding of the conditions of London Below than the overarching themes of the novel.

Simply saying that it is dangerous to help others seems to contradict the novel's criticism of the Conservative government's reluctance to help those in need. However, the danger that Richard is put in when he decides to help Door is not altogether bad, since it ends up changing his life in a positive way. What Richard experiences in London Below makes him grow enough as a character to be able to draw conclusions about what really is important in life, and to change based on those conclusions.

Comparative Analysis

The most obvious similarity between *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and *Neverwhere* lies in the portrayal of London as a city populated by odd characters in archaic dress. London is in both novels a city which is not united, but rather made up by a multitude of largely independent boroughs (in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*) or baronies and fiefdoms (in *Neverwhere*). Both of these ideas of London can be seen as intensified versions of the real London, which has been a multicultural melting-pot for centuries. At

a closer look, both novels mirror the societies they were written in, and both novels criticise various aspects of these societies. However, because of the time elapsed between the two novels, it seems more logical to look for more lasting aspects than direct social criticism in a comparative analysis. Lasting aspects may be things such as the way people are portrayed, what qualities the authors link to good or evil characters, and what choices the characters make in the novel.

The Napoleon of Notting Hill has a complex relationship with certain qualities. Adam Wayne is ridiculed as a fanatic in one paragraph, bur heralded for his vision and empathy in the next. In the same way, Auberon Quin, the King, is sometimes seen as a bitter cynic, sometimes as a necessary breath of fresh air. The answer to why this is the case can be found at the end of the novel, when Adam Wayne speaks to the King. His words also make it very clear what Chesterton himself found important:

> You and I, Auberon Quin, have both of us throughout our lives been again and again called mad. And we are mad. We are mad, because we are not two men, but one man. We are mad, because we are two lobes of the same brain, and that brain has been cloven in two. […] But in healthy people there is no war between us. We are but the two lobes of the brain of a ploughman (138).

As shown in the analysis of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, it is the common man who is seen as the best example of mankind by Chesterton. Just as in the beginning of the novel, Chesterton brings up the fact that extremes can never be good. Just as scientific or philosophical theories should not be taken to their extremes, it is not healthy for a single person to believe too much or too little in a thing, the way the fanatic and the cynic do. Balance is shown to be a very important trait in a person, as well as an important aspect for philosophers and scientists to keep in mind.

Richard Gill also mentions this sentiment in his article "G. K. Chesterton: Social Criticism and the Sense of Wonder", in which he writes that Chesterton not only opposed the pessimists of the time, but the optimists as well. Gill quotes Chesterton as saying: "The heresies that have attacked human happiness in my time have all been variations of either presumption or despair; which in the controversies of modern culture are called optimism and pessimism" (qtd. in Gill, 13). The solution, then, is to find a middle way, but it need not be a compromise. In fact, according to Gill, it should not be a compromise (13). Instead, the qualities of both the optimist and the pessimist should be combined in the same person – just like Adam Wayne suggests in the quote above.

The dangers of optimism and pessimism are similar to the dangers of fanaticism and cynicism outlined earlier in this essay. Not only do they cause people to do things that conflict with common sense, they are also dangerous because of the stagnation they cause. Gill explains that the way Chesterton saw it, the optimist sees no need for social change, because mankind is already living in the best world imaginable; the pessimist on the other hand feels that the world cannot be changed, least of all for the better (14).

What mankind needs to do, according to Chesterton, is to reawaken its sense of wonder. Gill links Chesterton's idea of wonder primarily to his non-fiction, but it can be found in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* as well. The places where it is found say a lot about why certain characters – most notably Adam Wayne – are portrayed so sympathetically despite their faults. Wonder is the quality that makes it possible for Wayne to write a book of poetry about the city using terms similar to those used by Romantic poets about nature. Wonder is what causes Auberon Quin to suddenly see the coat-tails of his comrades as two dragons walking backwards, which is implied as being the event that leads to Quin's embracing of the ways of the humorist. In short, wonder is looking at all things as if for the first time, making it possible to marvel at the commonplace. People who do this can appreciate simple, everyday things just as much as a fine banquet, because they feel a sense of wonder at the world's very existence.

Through Adam Wayne, Chesterton argues for the fantastic qualities of everyday things. The wonder that Wayne feels allows him to change the world into a place where more people see the world as he does: A place full of wonder and mystery. A clear example of how the average man is affected by this is the scene in which the King, twenty two years after the civil war, visits Pump Street. The grocer, who at Adam Wayne's visit before the war was very sceptical of Wayne's wonder at all the products in his shop, has now been as taken by them as Wayne once was. He tells the King about the change of mind he has experienced:

> I thought nothing of all the wonderful places that my goods come from, and wonderful ways that they are made. I did not know that I was for all practical purposes a king with slaves spearing fishes near the secret pool, and gathering fruits in the islands under the world. My mind was a blank on the thing. I was as mad as a hatter (121).

A similar change of attitude has occurred in the chemist in Pump Street, and it is later shown that this new mood has infected all of London, inspiring people to erect statues in honour of their boroughs.

The new-found local patriotism is not altogether positive, as it leads to a new battle. However, wonder itself is shown to be a good thing. The common man who Chesterton reveres, symbolised by the grocer, seems happier with his life in general. He seems to feel more strongly than he did before. Most important, perhaps, is that the stagnation from the beginning of the novel is disrupted, things need not continue in a certain way because that is the way they have always been, it has once again become possible to change the world.

But how does this relate to Gaiman? After reading *Neverwhere* and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* in a comparative manner, it seems reasonable to claim that Gaiman's perception of human nature is, if not based on, then at least very similar to that of Chesterton. This would mean that Gaiman did not only take inspiration from Chesterton's portrayal of London when he wrote *Neverwhere*, but from his view of human nature as well.

In *Neverwhere*, Richard is the character through whom wonder is expressed. When Richard is removed from his everyday life in London Above, he starts to see his old life in a new light. Richard starts to long for the common, even the boring. This is partly because common and boring things equal safety for him, but also because it becomes possible for Richard to see these things in a different light, and to see the beauty in them. The first time this is shown expressly is when Richard and Anaesthesia take a short-cut through London Above on their way to the floating market:

> There was no moon, but the night sky was a riot of crisp and glittering autumn stars. There were street lights too, and lights on buildings and on bridges, which looked like earthbound stars, and they glimmered, repeated, as they were reflected with the city in the night water of the Thames. *It's fairyland*, thought Richard. (85)

Gaiman's poetic description of the city at night serves to make the reader feel what Richard is experiencing at this moment. Richard notices the beauty of an ordinary night in the city, a thing that he has likely experienced a great number of times since he moved to London. However, because of the changes his life has gone through recently, he is so taken by it that he compares it to fairyland.

There is a remarkable similarity between the wonder Richard feels in this paragraph to the wonder that Adam Wayne feels in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Wayne, having grown up in the city "saw the street-lamps as things quite as eternal as the stars" (61). Wayne feels this way because he has never known anything else. He is a

child at heart, who does not need any further encouragement to wonder at things like street lights. Richard on the other hand has to go through life-changing events in order to feel the same way, because he started out as an average late 20th century man, distanced from sentiments of wonder.

It seems then, that Gaiman is making a point about the nature of modern people. They have become so engrossed in their everyday lives, their jobs and their televisions that they cannot see the wondrous things in front of them without the occurrence of a life-changing event. Similar ideas can be seen in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*; Adam Wayne is not representative of the way people in general think in the novel, though this changes after the life-changing event of the battle of Notting Hill. There is, however, one major difference, which can be seen in Richard's attitude to London Above.

Richard gains the ability to view his old world from a new angle after he falls down into London Below, which may be part of why he longs so fiercely for his old life. The dangers of London Below scare him and consequently, things which Richard once found boring start to seem wonderful to him. However, this feeling does not stay with him after he makes it back to London Above. Instead, he feels restless and misplaced and is unable to readjust to normal life. In Gaiman's world, wonder is not a perfect state, or a sentiment that will end human misery. Gaiman contrasts the safety of London Above with the unpredictability and danger of London Below, and in this context the wonder at normal life that Richard feels seems very natural.

However, simply viewing the world in a new way will not change anything. When Richard is actually experiencing his normal, boring life again, he finds it hard to appreciate it. Instead of solving Richard's problems by letting him be content with the world as it is, Gaiman lets him change the path he is on. Richard chooses to return to London Below, and in choosing so, he shows that wonder is not enough. Wonder is a marvellous thing to be able to feel, but it will not solve any actual problems.

The life-changing events that Richard goes through in *Neverwhere* allow him to grow enough to make the decision to part with his old life forever. Thus, Gaiman breaks with Chesterton's idea of wonder as something that, generally, will make people happier. Richard is not like the grocer in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, who is taken by all the wonderful things he sells; Richard is a man who gets a taste of a different life, and once he has had that, his normal life seems dull and predictable.

One of the reasons as to why Gaiman only partly takes on the idea of wonder can be found in the way he deals with subjects such as homelessness. Transferring the idea that viewing the world in a new way will make life better onto homeless people makes Chesterton's idea of wonder seem cruel. It also sounds like the sort of idea that is proposed in *Neverwhere* by characters like Jessica, who believe that the homeless all really have homes to go to, the type of idea that Gaiman clearly shows that he does not agree with.

Conclusion

It is clear that both *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* and *Neverwhere* are novels that in various ways have been shaped by the times in which they were written, which is to be expected of novels that express criticism of society. Chesterton's narrative is mainly focused on criticising society as shaped by various philosophies, but more direct political criticism can be found in the novel as well, such as the comments on hereditary monarchy. Conversely, Gaiman mainly criticises society as shaped by politics, namely the ideology of the Conservative Party of the 1980s. However, there are also comments to be found in the novel on things that remain unchanged no matter what party is in power, such as human nature.

Chesterton criticises the many philosophical and political theories of his time, saying that they are all just taking something which they can see happening at the moment and exaggerating it. He ridicules them by exaggerating their theories even further, taking them into the absurd. Through this method, Chesterton argues for the problems of extremes, which also show up in the novel in the form of fanaticism and cynicism. A balanced personality, or ideology, is shown to be a good thing, and the common man is seen as the best example of mankind. What makes the common man a figure to look up to is the fact that he is in touch with his common sense. This in turn makes it harder for him to get caught up in outlandish philosophies. Chesterton praises the idea of wonder, which essentially means looking at all things as if for the first time. This makes it possible for people to appreciate their lives and surroundings in a new way, as they marvel at their very existence.

Gaiman bases his social criticism on the political situation of the UK in the

1980's, the Thatcherite era. He focuses a lot of attention on the large differences between rich and poor, and on society's failure to help those who find themselves in a vulnerable position. Authority in general is portrayed negatively, which in itself can be seen as an implicit criticism of the government. Chesterton's wonder is present in *Neverwhere* as well, primarily in the new way Richard views his old world after he has fallen through to London Below.

However, where Chesterton shows that the capacity to feel wonder at everyday things will enhance people's lives, turning the dull into something fantastic, Gaiman says that wonder is not enough. This can be linked to Gaiman's subject matter; as he deals with the people who exist at the very bottom of the social scale, he knows that simply changing the way they view the world will do little to help their situation. In *Neverwhere*, Richard is allowed the opportunity to change his life, but his choice is not possible until after he gets his old life back. When Richard lives in London Below he can look upon London Above with wonder, but that does not make his immediate situation any easier. In the same way, a homeless person might view the lives of well-off people as things of wonder, but again it will do little to change their situation.

In short, Gaiman takes Chesterton's idea of wonder and develops it further. He shows that Chesterton's idea of wonder mainly applies to the common man that Chesterton looked up to. Looking at things from a new angle can surely enhance the lives of average people, but it is difficult to transfer the idea onto those whose lives are more difficult, such as homeless people. It seems that Gaiman is saying that in order for a person to get something out of the idea of wonder, it is necessary for them to have a safe starting-point.

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