ARTICLE

'The Past Is Below Us': Urban Fantasy, Urban Archaeology, and the Recovery of Suppressed History

Hadas Elber-Aviram*

Few literary genres have been as intimately connected with the field of archaeology as the genre of urban fantasy, which correlates with urban archaeology through a shared concern with the material history of the city. The palimpsestic model of the city discovered by urban archaeologists such as Schliemann and Evans has inspired the multilayered cityscapes of many urban fantasy narratives. These narratives cast their protagonists into the symbolic role of archaeologists who descend into the urban underworld to recover the city's forgotten past. Important work has been done on the representation of archaeology in popular culture, but scholars have yet to comprehensively discuss the thematic links between urban archaeology and urban fantasy. The following paper offers a preliminary exploration of this issue, by focusing on the ways in which urban fantasy negotiates contending histories of the city. The research centres upon two British urban fantasy novels, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996) and Tim Lebbon's *Echo City* (2010).

Introduction

There is something intrinsically archaeological about urban fantasy, but the exploration of this kinship has as much to do with the need to redefine the genre as it does with the desire to trace its hidden affiliations. Although its roots go back to the Victorian age, urban fantasy cohered into a distinct genre only recently, in the late 1970s to mid-1980s, with the work of Michael de Larrabeiti, Charles de Lint, and Emma Bull. As such, its boundaries have yet to solidify, rendering it particularly open to interdisciplinary influences, but also demanding its constant reassessment.

The most commonly used definition of urban fantasy hitherto was formulated by John Clute in his *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997): 'UFs [urban fantasies] are normally texts where fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale which is significantly *about* a real city.' Thus, urban fantasy integrates supernatural forces into a familiar metropolitan milieu to produce a heightened portrait of the metropolis. Where an urban fantasy narrative 'is set in a fantasy city', Clute (1997: 975) adds, 'it has been created not just as a backdrop but as an environment.' Clute (2012) recently added a codicil, however, pointing out that:

'As a publishing category which has risen to enormous popularity in the twenty-first century, urban fantasy has come to denote the subgenre of stories set in an alternate version of our modern world where humans (often with special talents) and super-

* Department of English Language and Literature, UCL, United Kingdom
  h.elber-aviram.12@ucl.ac.uk

natural beings [...] interact via adventure, melodrama, intrigue and sex.'

Contemporary scholars of urban fantasy have thus found themselves increasingly obliged to redefine the parameters of their field, to distinguish the fantastic narratives genuinely concerned with the metropolis 'as an environment' from those that use the city merely as 'a backdrop' to sensationalist adventures.

This article argues that the yardstick for redefining urban fantasy against the proliferation of related narratives can be found in the genre's concern with the material history of the metropolis. A work of urban fantasy would thus be defined by its predominant interest in the concrete, tangible details of the city, and the way in which these details cohere to form a larger narrative of the city's past. Therefore the core trait that marks urban fantasy out from similar genres also strongly links it with urban archaeology, as both the literary genre and the archaeological field share an intense concern with the city's material history. Accordingly, whether set in a real city made fantastic, or in a fantastic city that alludes to a real one, urban fantasy almost invariably follows an archaeological pattern of revelation whereby suppressed material evidence from the past opens up a portal into the secret history of the metropolis.

M. Christine Boyer has observed that the fantastic imagination and the archaeological frame of mind come together in the creation of urban fantasy. Her remarks refer to visual art rather than literature, but they apply equally to the latter. 'Fantasy holds an essential role in any "analogous city" view', Boyer (1994: 178) observes, 'for fantasy is the mediator between an archaeologist's mind bent on exploring the roots and remnants of antiquity and a creative imagination that quotes and remembers only arbitrary and unrelated fragments and traces.' In other words, imaginative creativity and archaeological methodology are both needed to construct a convincing portrait of the fantastic city whose flights of fancy find anchor in scrupulous details of material urban history.

Richard Lehan (1998: 111) has pointed out the impact of urban archaeology's 'discovery of layered cities' - notably Heinrich Schliemann's discoveries in Troy (1871) and Arthur Evans' in Crete (Knossos, 1876) - upon modernist urban literature. Urban fantasy has been particularly influenced by this archaeological find, often adopting the palimpsestic model of the city as a paradigm for its fictional cityscapes. The genre frequently creates a fantastic metropolis whose history is inscribed in successive layers beneath the present-day veneer of routine city life. In these narratives, the fantastic city's subterranean history poses a constant danger to the integrity of the present, as its underground layers harbour supernatural forces threatening to erupt onto the surface. The protagonists of these works accordingly take on the symbolic role of archaeologists, descending into the urban underworld to recover the city's hidden past and contend with its forgotten monsters.

Important studies have been written on the representation of archaeology in popular culture (e.g. Russell 2002), but scholars have yet to comprehensively discuss the thematic links between urban archaeology and urban fantasy. This paper offers a preliminary exploration of this issue by focusing on the ways in which urban fantasy negotiates contending histories of the city. The research centres upon two British urban fantasy novels, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* (1996) and Tim Lebbon's *Echo City* (2010).

A word on the choice of novels is in order. There is always an element of disingenuousness in the choice of case studies, for one seeks out the narratives that best showcase one's argument. Certainly, *Neverwhere* and *Echo City* are overtly and deeply concerned with the material history of the city, and would not have been chosen otherwise. But other urban fantasy novels share this concern with equal or near-equal explicitness, such as Jeff VanderMeer's *Veniss Underground* (2003)

and China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009). I have therefore chosen *Neverwhere* and *Echo City* for their differences as much as for their similarities, for it is by their dissimilarity that they demonstrate the applicability of this article's arguments to a broad range of urban fantasy novels.

Each of these two works belongs to a different sub-class of urban fantasy, as theorised by Alexander C. Irvine. *Neverwhere* belongs to the sub-class that is set in 'a more or less recognizable city', as it takes place in a fictionalised version of 1990s London (Irvine 2012: 200). *Echo City* belongs to the other class of 'stories of the fantastic city', which take place in a patently unreal metropolis that 'creates its own rules' (Irvine 2012: 201). The eponymous Echo City is accordingly haunted by ghosts, invaded by winged humanoids, and underpinned by the secret workings of pseudo-scientific witchcraft. In fact, Lebbon is perhaps more at home with urban fantasy of the first kind, of which his *Hidden Cities* series is a prime example, but *Echo City* was chosen precisely due to its unusual place in the second category. The contrasts between *Neverwhere* and *Echo City* are thus meant to highlight the importance of their similarities and broaden the implications of the following comparative analysis towards a re-evaluation of the urban fantasy genre as a whole.[1]

Who Controls the Past?

In George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), arguably the model for all subsequent urban dystopias, London is ruled by a ruthless and virtually omnipotent Party whose slogan runs thus: 'Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past' (Orwell 2000 [1949]: 260). The Party understands that authentic historical evidence poses the greatest threat to its rule, as proof that the past had been different from the present and therefore that the future could also herald change. Notwithstanding that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a work of urban science-fiction rather than urban fantasy, Orwell's insight that metropolitan

power is exercised and preserved through its regulation of history has become a staple in virtually all the fantastic cities of contemporary Western literature.

Raphael Greenberg has argued that archaeology frequently performs a vital role in hegemonic efforts to dominate contemporary interpretations of the past. Drawing on Paul Ricoeur, Greenberg points out that every stratified society marshals rituals of memory and forgetfulness to justify its power structure. Archaeologists play a crucial part in this co-optation of history for the *ad hoc* needs of the present, creating the past as surely as they recover it, most evidently by deciphering their own findings. More subtly, the very decisions involved in archaeological practice embed both the process itself and the consequent discoveries within national, cultural, and political matrices of meaning. Thus archaeologists often function as agents of political and economic powers that have a vested interest in shaping our understanding of the past to promote specific configurations of the present and the future (Greenberg 2012).

Indeed, archaeology by its very nature seems to be linked to the Gramscian notion of hegemony, broadly defined as the elite stratum of a given society that exercises power through forceful 'domination' and subtler 'intellectual and moral leadership' (Gramsci 1996: 57). Gramsci suggests that the hegemony gestates within a '*historical bloc* in which precisely material forces are the content and ideologies are the form' (Gramsci 1996: 377). Archaeology seems to hold a natural affinity with this formation, because it too enacts dialectic between material force and ideology, excavating material traces of history and endowing them with ideologically informed meaning.

Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* engages with these complexities, imagining hegemony not so much in terms of a privileged group, but as an aggressively dominant representation of London that expresses the power of such a group. This is a view of London that we have

all come to know from advertisements in the Tube and shopping centre pamphlets – the richly leisured and culturally vibrant city, in which the good life and intellectual pursuits set the tone of every street corner, whilst poverty, misery, and injustice are meticulously swept out of sight and mind. In *Neverwhere*, this sanitised image of London is inscribed topographically onto the city's vast array of museums, in the National Gallery, the Tate Gallery, the National Portrait Gallery, and most importantly, the British Museum (Gaiman 2005: 11, 15, 183). Accordingly, it finds its human votary in the overbearing character of Jessica, a marketing executive for a company that sponsors art exhibitions and fiancée of protagonist Richard Mayhew. Jessica's worldview reduces the entire city, including Richard himself, into an enormous museum exhibition that has been dusted off and encased in glass. The epitome of metropolitan history, for her, is 'an extremely large and historically important diamond', an icon of wealth and flawless beauty (Gaiman 2005: 11). Much like the diamond, Jessica's glittery exterior refracts an empty soullessness, as she brackets out of her consciousness the on-going history of London's dispossessed to reaffirm her own economic security and cultural refinement.

Tim Lebbon's *Echo City* concretises the hegemonic representation of its eponymous metropolis in a single historical monument that validates the power of the ruling class. Echo City has been ruled for generations by the cruel theocracy of the Marcellan family, whose claim to power rests on the divine right of 'Hanharan', a messiah who allegedly sprung into existence out of a desert rock and founded Echo City from sand and spittle. This mythical genesis story has been valorised in a statue of Hanharan's hand grasping the 'stone birthshard', an 'eternal symbol of Hanharan's birth and continuing love for the city' (Lebbon 2010: 135). The statue accrues such profound mythical significance that it becomes a yardstick for temporality. When it is vandalised by a courageous dissenter, a horror-stricken audience feels 'as if time itself

has been stretched to the breaking point' (Lebbon 2010: 136).

Subversive Archaeology

'There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse', Michel Foucault argues in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 2005: 8). Yet the true 'horizon of archaeology', according to Foucault (2005: 177), consists of 'a comparative analysis' that 'does not have a unifying, but a diversifying, effect.'

Granted, Foucault treats archaeology as a metaphor for his investigations into the nature of discourse rather than as a specialised discipline and praxis, but his remarks can also be read as a call for a subversive, anti-hegemonic turn in the field itself, through a methodology that favours discontinuities and counter-histories over cohesive historical metanarratives. In this sense, when the protagonists of *Neverwhere* and *Echo City* embark upon journeys that lead them deep into the bowels of their respective cities, their narrative trajectories arguably dramatise the Foucauldian concept of archaeological diversification. In keeping with Foucault's paradigm, the protagonists unlock histories that the hegemony has endeavoured to suppress, concomitantly challenging the hegemonic interpretation of the past.

In *Neverwhere*, the hegemonic representation of London involves turning a blind eye to the city's downtrodden; allowing them to plunge into an under-city termed 'London Below' that lies beneath the surface of the middle and upper-class 'London Above'. London Below contains pockets of London history in its raw form; 'tiny spurs of old-time' that have escaped the sterilisation of London Above to assume concrete dimensions on the underside (Gaiman 2005: 79). London Below is replete with the dangers of displaced history reconstituted as fantastical myth, featuring hungry vampires, genocidal

angels, and deadly pea-soupers. But it is also a place where history diversifies and comes alive, vibrantly contrasting with the ossified exhibitions above it. As Richard descends into the under-city, he discovers a cityscape of medieval marketplaces, feudal courts, ancient paintings, primordial labyrinths, and Victorian-mannered gentleman with a taste for torture. Hence, for all his mounting terror of this strange and menacing underworld, Richard still concedes that walking through London Below 'was like walking through history' (Gaiman 2005: 169).

'*The past is below us*', the saying goes in Echo City, 'a statement of attitude as well as geography' (Lebbon 2010: 78). The Marcellans safeguard their religious genesis narrative by layered construction – each new development is built over an existing urban cluster, pushing material evidence of the city's past below the new ground level. What results is a quite literal urban palimpsest, with subterranean caverns accumulating under Echo City in incessant transformations of the fading present into forgotten history. As the brilliant scientist Nadielle, heir to the line of Echo City's 'Bakers' who specialise in forbidden knowledge, explains to the protagonist Gorham: 'The deeper you go, the further into history you travel. The city doesn't deal with history. It builds over its past, encloses it, shuts it off, and while tradition might persist, the real histories are soon forgotten' (Lebbon 2010: 243). Aptly named 'Echoes' for their residues of lingering history, the city's underground layers are extremely hazardous, being almost impossible to navigate and harbouring melancholy spectres and ferocious cannibals. But they possess a grim majesty emanating from their material preservation of suppressed histories in a medley of 'tumbled ruins of homes', 'slanted ceilings', and 'debris-filled basements' (Lebbon 2010: 270).

Things Lost, Things Forgotten
London Below and the Echoes each preserve a past that has been lost to the surface city, wilfully forgotten by its upper-class people.

As the Lady Door of London Below explains: 'There are little bubbles of old time in London, where things and places stay the same, like bubbles in amber' (Gaiman 2005: 229). These bubbles of displaced time safeguard 'Things lost. Things forgotten' (Gaiman 2005: 160). The Echoes likewise constitute 'places of darkness and forgotten things', enclosing 'old histories built upon, pressed down, hidden away for many eons' (Lebbon 2010: 204, 203).

Conspicuous among the 'things forgotten' in London Below are the histories of London's failure to care for its people. One such example is the history of Anaesthesia, whom Richard meets at the outset of his travels in the under-city. Anaesthesia found herself in London Below after the social services sent her to live with an abusive aunt and the latter's boyfriend. The boyfriend regularly beat Anaesthesia and sexually abused her; appeals to her aunt only incensed the latter to strike her as well. Finally, the girl ended up on the streets, malnourished and seriously ill, until she was magically transported to London Below. For all the dangers that lurk within it, the under-city takes care of its own in a way that London Above manifestly does not, and Anaesthesia soon becomes a respected envoy of the local talking rats.

London Below also absorbs abandoned buildings that represent a broader strain of London history. The malevolent Croup and Vandemar, immortal terrors that assume peculiar airs of Victorian gentility, choose to base their operations 'in the cellar of a Victorian hospital, closed ten years earlier because of National Health Service budget cutbacks' (Gaiman 2005: 71). The boarded-up windows, the rotten roof, the empty hospital wards, and the abandoned hospital supplies all testify to the city's history of conservative fiscal policies that have prevented the sick from receiving proper medical treatment (Gaiman 2005: 71). It is highly fitting that this monument to the legacy of Thatcherism becomes a locus of evil in London Below, where Croup and Vandemar hatch their wicked schemes.

The Echoes preserve not so much histories of failure as histories of grief. Gorham finds among these underground layers material evidence of an entire society, the 'Thulians', who 'were slaughtered, and all traces of their history wiped away'. The story of the Thulian massacre has been preserved in buried structures and artefacts, in 'the burned remains of ancient buildings', 'charred timbers', and more gruesomely, 'the pale shapes of bones' (Lebbon 2010: 253, 251, 252). Gorham's discovery of this evidence acknowledges the disavowed tragedy and provides a redeeming heritage to the Thulians' descendants, the cannibalistic Garthans; this kindles in Gorham a sudden 'affinity with those strange subterranean dwellers' (Lebbon 2010: 255).

Gorham also uncovers a history of individual grief, in the form of a spectral creature called the Lost Man. As his moniker suggests, the Lost Man was an explorer who went astray in the Echoes and has been wandering through them for countless ages. Unfounded rumours across the surface city claim that the Lost Man has become a predatory monster who 'was *happy* to live here', but Gorham discovers in him a lost soul not unlike himself, prompting him to reflect: 'How often could history trap souls such as this?' (Lebbon 2010: 204, 334).

Challenging Hegemonic History
In addition to preserving suppressed histories, the novels' under-cities also destabilise the bastions of hegemonic history in their respective metropolises. *Neverwhere* locates the focal point of London's hegemony in the British Museum, reimagined as a citadel of upper-class pretentiousness. Accordingly, Richard and Door's adventures deflate the pomposity of this symbolic edifice. This subversion begins with their point of access into the British Museum, namely the British Museum tube station, 'a forgotten place' that 'was closed down in about 1933, and sealed off', thereby becoming part of London Below (Gaiman 2005: 169). The narrative dynamic between the museum and its station inverts established spatio-political hierarchies, as it gives nearly equal regard to the station, a dysfunctional ingress and discontinuous space that no longer facilitates travel and exists in a temporal limbo, as it does to the museum, the major cultural institution to which the station is ostensibly subordinated.

Furthermore, the museum itself is exposed as culturally hollow, displaying an exhibition of angels that is 'indiscriminate to the point of trashiness' (Gaiman 2005: 188). The only significant item in the exhibition consists of the 'Angelus'; an archaic cathedral door revered in London Below as a magical portal, but emptied of meaning in London Above. This vestige of the past has been denatured by the exhibition into a fetishised object, as conceptualised by Jean Baudrillard (1981: 93): 'the object eviscerated of its substance and history, and reduced to the state of marking a difference.' In this case, the Angelus marks the difference between the exhibition sponsor's wealth and the rest of humanity's lesser fortune. Richard and Door successfully redeem the Angelus from this ahistorical fetishism by restoring its historical function as a threshold, using it as a gateway into a secret enclave in London Below. The door is utterly transfigured, affecting the triumph of London Below's fantastical renewal of the past over London Above's ossifying and capitalist-driven practices.

An analogous scene occurs in the Echoes, when Gorham discovers 'the forms of old statues' that commemorate 'old city rulers before the Marcellans' (Lebbon 2010: 274). These statues constitute a form of what Karin Sanders has termed sculptural 'bog bodies' that suggest both the proximity and the inaccessibility of corporeal human life in the past (Sanders 2009). They gesture simultaneously towards the presence and the absence, the life and the death, of the people after whom they are modelled: 'They were perhaps the only surviving likenesses of many of these people, all part of the city's story and staring now into an eternal night' (Lebbon 2010: 275).

Furthermore, these statues stress the inadequacy, if not downright falseness, of the Marcellans' official history, as Gorham halts in front of a statue with the realisation that he did not 'recognize the face from one of the many history books he'd read' (Lebbon 2010: 274). These sculptures of former rulers also harken back to the statue of Hanharan grasping the birthshard, the emblem of Marcellan religious history, and contextualise it within a tradition that dates back long before the Marcellans. Hanharan's statue becomes symbolically concatenated with the rulers' self-indulgent custom of erecting statues in their own honour and 'As older ones died, they'd erect new statues to those who took their place' (Lebbon 2010: 274). 'Politicians have always liked attention', Nadielle pithily concludes (Lebbon 2010: 274).

Erased from History
In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the punishment for resisting the Party's control of the past is nothing short of your erasure from history: 'Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten' (Orwell 2000: 21[1949]). This is also the price that the protagonists of *Neverwhere* and *Echo City* pay for their excavation of the forgotten urban past. They are banished into the same collective mental oblivion that had absorbed the under-city.

From the moment he comes into contact with the people of London Below, Richard disappears from the sight and memory of London Above. Jessica does not recognise him, and forgets she ever had a fiancé. Richard's best friend Gary treats him as a stranger, and even trains, taxis, and ATM machines fail to register his existence. 'You can't go back to your old home or your old job or your old life', London Below's Marquis de Carabas explains, 'None of those things exist. Up there, *you* don't exist' (Gaiman 2005: 126).

In *Echo City*, the punishment of oblivion is transferred from Gorham to a more sympathetic character named Nophel, who uncovers the histories of the metropolis' 'Unseen'; abandoned people who have been literally rendered invisible by being forced to drink enchanted 'Blue Water' (Lebbon 2010: 126, 131). On a mission to save the city, Nophel is compelled to drink the Blue Water himself and not only disappears from sight, but also fades out of memory. '*We're removed from the world*', the Unseen Alexia explains, and in a particularly eerie moment: 'She looked at Nophel as if she had never seen him before, […] and perhaps he was nothing in her memory at all' (Lebbon 2010: 156, 160).

The worst part of the protagonists' erasure from collective history and individual memory is that they too begin to doubt the validity of their existence. Richard undergoes a trial where he suffers from visions of people from London Above who claim that he has hallucinated all his experiences in London Below and urge him to take his own life, to 'END IT ALL' and 'PUT YOURSELF OUT OF YOUR MISERY' (Gaiman 2005: 251). Significantly, he is saved from self-destruction by the touch of a bead from Anaesthesia's necklace. Material evidence of the history of this forgotten girl revives his sense of his own reality and self-worth.

Nophel suddenly finds himself in a ghost city 'that held no life at all, not even his own'. He feels himself becoming a nonentity in this colourless shadow-metropolis, egged on by Alexia who describes it as: 'The final existence of the Unseen' (Lebbon 2010: 166). He regains purchase on life, however, by grasping that his own materiality exists outside of people's warped perception. Shortly before meeting Alexia, he realises that: 'The Blue Water acted on the minds of those around him, rather than on his own physiology', and this realisation allows him 'to control its effects upon his own mind' (Lebbon 2010: 126).

Richard and Nophel overcome the impulse towards self-annihilation, but they can never truly reclaim their former lives. Once erased from history, they must continue to live

on the margins, in the realm of the forgotten. Richard temporarily returns to London Above, only to discover that his bourgeoisie life has become as colourless to him as Nophel's spectral city: 'I thought I wanted a nice normal life. I mean, maybe I am crazy. […] But if this is all there is, then I don't want to be sane' (Gaiman 2005: 371). Nophel fully realises that '*I'm never going back*' and ends up dying with the destruction of 'the city he both loved and hated' (Lebbon 2010: 342, 167).

The Monster under the City's Bed(rock)

Sigmund Freud has argued for a return of the repressed, whereby 'something which is secretly familiar […] has undergone repression and then returned from it' to become a distorted symptom that obsessively recurs in the individual's psychic life (Freud 1955: 245). Moreover, Freud drew upon urban archaeology to describe these psychic mechanisms of memory and repression, likening the psyche to a city (Freud 2002[1930]). *Neverwhere* and *Echo City* are thus in line with Freud's teachings when they evoke the return of the repressed on a mega-metropolitan scale, as repressed urban history takes on the form of an immense monster arising from the deepest pits of the under-city.

In the nadir of London Below lurks 'the Great Beast of London', an ancient creature that has become 'extinct in the world above', but like other forgotten London histories, maintains a fantastical existence in London Below (Gaiman 2005: 213–4). During the reign of King Charles I, the Beast was a domestic animal that a local butcher 'was going to fatten up for Christmas' (Gaiman 2005: 168). Escaping imminent slaughter, the Beast 'vanished into the sewers' where 'it fed on the sewage, and it grew, and it grew. And it got meaner, and nastier' (Gaiman 2005: 168). Subsisting upon the waste of London Below, it imbibes discarded traces of the city's layered past, and its own body appropriately becomes a tapestry depicting the Beast's history of strife: 'They say his hide

bristles with swords and spears and knives stuck in him by those who have tried and failed' (Gaiman 2005: 228).

The lowest level of the Echoes harbours the terrifying 'Vex', a nightmarish monster created by the first Baker. Ironically, it was originally purposed to 'watch over the city, be its heart and mind, its health and conscience', but it soon becomes a hideous embodiment of the city's diseased orthodoxy of tyrannical oppression and merciless self-interest (Lebbon 2010: 357). The Vex began to violently misbehave soon after its creation, and the Baker decided to correct her mistake by casting it down into the Echoes. Her disavowal of responsibility for this living being to which she had given life becomes emblematic of Echo City's broader repression of mistakes, tragedy, injustice, and atrocity. The Vex has accordingly 'been growing' much like the Beast of London, and even more explicitly than the Beast, it forms a signifier of repressed urban history. True to Freud's model of dark return, 'it's climbing back up' (Lebbon 2010: 357).

Richard defeats the Beast of London in a climactic scene where he goes beyond witnessing history to become an integral part of it. Richard sheds the vestiges of his old life and remakes himself into a medieval knight as he raises a legendary hunting spear and stabs the Beast. This atavistic and yet historically resonant act rids the under-city of the monster even as it transfigures Richard into 'the greatest hunter of London Below' (Gaiman 2005: 318). Richard is thus fully initiated into the under-city, as symbolically figured in his newfound ability to navigate the most ancient section of its preserved histories, the pre-Roman labyrinth, as if 'he knew every twist, every path, every alley and lane and tunnel of it' (Gaiman 2005: 320).

Echo City is not so lucky. With the rise of the Vex, the city's repressed past finally catches up with it: 'It's history exploding. It's been under pressure for so long, and now it's all coming back' (Lebbon 2010: 495). Gorham's journey and Nophel's investigations are not entirely in vain, however, for their

discoveries enable the last-minute creation and distribution of an inoculation that allows some of the city's residents to escape into the surrounding desert and survive its otherwise lethal radiation. Hence, Gorham and Nophel's excavation of their city's forgotten histories affords them the chance to partially mitigate the horrible consequences of historical repression, granting their fellow urbanites an opportunity to begin life anew elsewhere.

Conclusion

This article has suggested that the juxtaposition between urban archaeology and urban fantasy can help redefine the boundaries of the latter genre, by highlighting its core interest in the material history of the city. We can now speculate that urban fantasy may have something to offer urban archaeology as well. Keith Matthews has lamented the current state of affairs in which the general public seems keener to accept the conspiracy theories of fringe archaeology than to ponder the nuanced analyses of professional archaeologists (Matthews 2002). Urban fantasy could help address this problem, by serving as a mediator between the archaeologist and his or her broader audience.

As an accessible genre that clearly labels itself as fiction, and yet forcefully reminds us of the significance of our urban history, urban fantasy may provide a bridge between the avid fantasy reader and the specialised knowledge and practice of the urban archaeologist. Urban fantasy could also offer new perspectives for archaeologists themselves, as it celebrates a subversive archaeology that opposes hegemonic practices of historical exclusion and self-aggrandisement. The archaeologist of urban fantasy is the ethical excavator, the hero who digs in precisely those spots where others turn a blind eye, risking oblivion to give the past a new lease on life. He or she thereby opens up a future where those who are marginalised in the present might one day be afforded an equal share of dignity.

The dialogue between fantasy literature and archaeological practice surely invites further study. For example, urban fantasy's occasional use of professional archaeologists as characters who investigate their cities' histories, rather than the more common use of amateurs, is well worth examining (e.g. China Miéville's *The City & The City* and Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* quartet). The depictions of history in rural fantasy, and the extent to which they similarly partake of archaeological paradigms, form another worthy topic of investigation. Whatever our interest, there can be little doubt that the nexus between the fantastic imagination and the archaeological discipline opens up fertile grounds for deep on-going excavation.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] I am not the first to compare *Neverwhere* and *Echo City*. Elana Gomel has presented such a comparison in her excellent study, *Impossible Spaces* (Routledge, to be published 2014/5). For further reading on urban fantasy, this study is warmly recommended.

References

Baudrillard, J. 1981 *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St Louis: Telos Press.

Boyer, M. C. 1994 *The City of Collective Memory; Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: MIT Press.

Clute, J. 1997 Urban Fantasy. In: *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 975–6.

Clute, J. 2012 Urban Fantasy. In: *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (digital version). DOI: http://

sf-encyclopedia.co.uk/fe.php?nm=urban_
fantasy

Foucault, M. 2005 *The Archaeology of Knowl-edge*. London; New York: Routledge.

Freud, S. 1955 The Uncanny. In: *The Stand-ard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XVII. Lon-don: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 217–52.

Freud, S. 2002[1930] *Civilization and its Dis-contents*. London: Penguin.

Gaiman, N. 2005 *Neverwhere*. The Author's Preferred Text. London: Headline Review.

Greenberg, R. 2012 'יצרני העבר' (Hebrew). אודיסיאה 17, DOI: http://odyssey.org.il/224835.

Gramsci, A. 1996 *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Irvine, A. 2012 Urban Fantasy. In: James, E and Mendlesohn, F (eds.) *The Cam-bridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200–13.

Lebbon, T. 2010 *Echo City*. London: Orbit.

Lehan, R. 1998 *The City in Literature; An In-tellectual and Cultural History*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Matthews, K. 2002 Archaeology and the Ex-traterrestpids, Martian Monuments and Beyond the Infinite. In: Russell, M (2002), 129–60.

Orwell, G. 2000[1949] *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Penguin Books.

Russell, M. 2002 *Digging Holes in Popular Culture; Archaeology and Science Fiction*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

Sanders, K. 2009 *Bodies in the Bog and the Archaeological Imagination*. Chicago; Lon-don: University of Chicago Press.