

UNIVERSIDAD DE COSTA RICA  
SISTEMA DE ESTUDIOS DE POSGRADO

GALWAY KINNEL'S JOURNEY OF SELF-DISCOVERY IN  
*THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES*

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en Literatura Inglesa

ELIZABETH QUIRÓS GARCÍA

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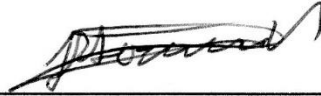
## Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Juan Pablo, Mari, José, my mother and my departed father.

## Acknowledgements

I thank my family for being with me, believing in me and always loving me. Thanks to Ph.D. Norman Marín Calderón for all his support, advice, patience, and work and to Dra. Sandra Arguello Borbón for her unconditional collaboration. To Máster Martín Arguedas Núñez for his encouragement and to Sra. Lilliana Retana Campos for listening to me.

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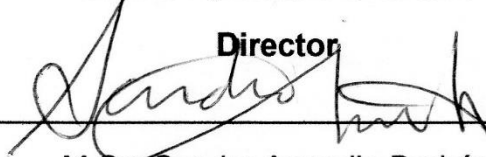
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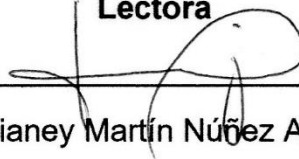
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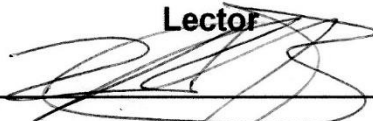
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Elizabeth Quirós García

**Sustentante**

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## RESUMEN

Este trabajo de investigación se basa en un análisis del poemario *The book of nightmares* de Galway Kinnell utilizando como base teórica el enfoque mítico. Con este fin, se utilizará el aporte de Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell y Octavio Paz principalmente; así también, se discutirá el trabajo de Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida y Jonathan Culler para estudiar el concepto de estructuralismo y el de opuestos binarios. Esto con el objetivo de analizar el viaje que el yo lírico realiza para comprender que la vida y la muerte son una unidad indisoluble. Es así como, el yo lírico inicia un viaje de auto-descubrimiento durante el cual comprende las diferentes funciones del mito en la vida de los individuos, su necesidad de completar ciclos que permitan su desarrollo dentro de una sociedad y, finalmente, comprender que hay elementos concretos que proporcionan al ser humano la oportunidad de descubrirse en la naturaleza.



## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis presents the analysis, from a mythical and archetypal stance, of the hero's journey in Galway Kinnell's *The book of nightmares*. Hence, the scholarly contributions of Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell and Octavio Paz will be mainly utilized; likewise, the work of Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida and Jonathan Culler will be considered and discussed to study the concept of structuralism and binary oppositions. All this with the objective of analyzing the journey of self-discovery of the persona to understand that the binary oppositions of life and death are a unit. Also, the quester learns about the different functions of myth in the development of individuals as well as their need to complete cycles in life that will allow them to grow emotionally and psychologically. Hence, the hero will comprehend that concrete natural elements may provide human beings with the opportunity of learning about themselves.



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Nombre Completo: Elizabeth Quiroz García

Número de Carné: 873067 Número de cédula: 107820585

Correo Electrónico: elizabethquiros@gmail.com

Fecha: 5 de febrero 2020 Número de teléfono: 8823-8657

Nombre del Director (a) de Tesis o Tutor (a): Norman Macián Calderón

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Justification

Galway Kinnell is one of the major North American contemporary poets although his work is unknown to many. Kinnell is “one of our most accomplished poets, a fact that is one of the best kept secrets among contemporary writers, known only to a select group of poets who recognize his skills” (Calhoun 1992, p. ix). Kinnell sculpts the words of life because, when experiencing his poetry, “[i]ntelligence becomes less cerebral and involves the heart and other old caves of the body, and poetry resists becoming what someone has called ‘upper-brain-roof-chatter’ and dwells, among earthly things, and consciousness deepens, running in the deeper passages of life” (Nelson 1987, p. 1). In fact, Kinnell succeeds in making poetry a work of the everyday life: objects, animals, feelings, and diverse situations that make people participate of the action of living.

The aim of this study is to analyze Kinnell’s *The book of nightmares* from a mythological approach. While there have been different approaches to reading Kinnell’s book-length poem, their primary concern is Kinnell’s work in relation to other poets of his generation rather than the analysis of the book-length poem as a unity in which archetypes, myth, and dichotomies intersect. Hence, there are very few works that analyze the poem from an archetypal stance and the aim is to contribute to scholarship with this research. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the Jungian archetypal approach will be assumed as well as Campbell’s pattern of

journey of the hero. Moreover, the analysis of how this latter archetype is present in the poem will be studied taking into consideration the use of natural imagery to be able to understand the binary opposition of life and death.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

For decades, some critics (Aristotle<sup>1</sup>, St. Thomas de Aquinas, Locke, Ortega y Gasset, Gould, to mention the most prominent) have believed in the widespread idea that the human mind is a blank slate and that its structure surfaces from the processes of socialization humankind goes through, such as religion, family, and school. In contrast, others (Pinker, Jung) deem true that the human mind is not a blank slate and there are undistinguishable psychic structures (archetypes) that are common to every person inhabiting the world. Carl G. Jung (1903-1955) belongs to the latter group. For him, the symbolic elements of cultures around the world can be very alike because they materialized from the archetypes that are shared by humankind. Consequently, the primeval past, shared by all, develops into the foundation of our psyche prompting us to act in accordance to not only to what

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<sup>1</sup> For Aristotle poetry. "is a more philosophical and higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (in Butcher 1951, p. 35). Moreover, according to Butcher (1951) the object of poetry in Aristotelian thought is "as of all the fine arts, [is] to produce an emotional delight, a pure and elevated pleasure" (p. 221)

humanity considers characteristic of a specific time and place but to some knowledge of a disremembered past that echoes the present.

According to Jung (2006) in his book *The undiscovered self*, “by exploring our own souls, we come upon the instincts and their world of imagery should throw some light on the powers slumbering in the psyche, of which we are seldom aware so long as all goes well” (p. 107). As he states, there is much more in our psyche than we know, and regarding art, poetry being one of its genres, Jung affirms that “great art till now has always derived its fruitfulness from the myth, from the unconscious process of symbolization which continues through the ages and which, as the primordial manifestation of the human spirit, will continue to be the root of all creation in the future” (p. 110). If these universal patterns that seem to revolve around cultural products as well as the unconscious realm have an impact on our behavior, there is another more detailed archetype, delineated by the scholar Joseph Campbell (1938-1987) who, utilizing the works of Jung, Freud, and Genep, built a model of the hero in the literary text and his/her journey. This journey is referred to as the “monomyth,” a cyclical journey that is carried out by the hero; indeed, for Campbell, there is a primary structure in all mythology that focuses in three general stages: separation or departure, the trials and victories of initiation, and the return and reintegration with society.

According to Campbell (2004b), in *The hero with a thousand faces*, “everywhere, no matter what the sphere of interest (whether religious, political or

personal), the really creative acts are represented as those deriving from some sort of dying to the world; and what happens in the interval of the hero's nonentity, so that he comes back as one reborn, made great and filled with creative power" (p. 28). For this scholar, the journey of the hero becomes a means to study what life is about and the responsibilities that individuals, as members of a community, may have. Another vital element found in Campbell's theory is the existence of a duality, not just in humankind as Jung states (*anima* and *animus*), but in every aspect of life. Accordingly, for every representation a person may find in the world, concrete and abstract, there will be another representation that is opposite but equal; and this duality will allude to all things being one and the same. Additionally, Campbell discusses the element of the "cycle of life" (cosmogonic cycle) in which the hero goes on the journey to achieve enlightenment. And it is this latter what the hero in Kinnell's book-length poem *The book of nightmares* seeks.

Subversion found in Kinnell's literary piece consists of a journey of self-discovery for which the acceptance and experience of death through a life cycle, in which living involves death and death living is not only necessary but essential. Most human beings have been taught to have living as the center of their interests and fear death. Though, for Kinnell the latter starts at the moment of birth; it is a paradox that when we start living in the world we also start dying. In other words, "living life" is accepting death as our companion; besides, according to Kinnell's vision of the world, both are part of a necessary cycle to become one with nature. Octavio Paz

(1995) in his book *El laberinto de la soledad*, confirms this revelation when he states that

¿Quizás nacer sea morir y morir nacer? Nada sabemos, todo nuestro ser aspira a escapar de esos contrarios que nos desgarran, pues si todo (conciencia de sí mismo, tiempo, razón, costumbres, hábitos) tiende a ser de nosotros los expulsados de la vida, todo también nos empuja a volver, a descender al seno creador de donde fuimos arrancados. Y le pedimos al amor – que, siendo deseo es hambre de comunión, hambre de caer y morir tanto como de renacer – que nos dé un pedazo de vida verdadera, de muerte verdadera. No le pedimos la felicidad, ni el reposo, sino un instante, sólo un instante, de vida plena, en la que se fundan los contrarios y vida y muerte, tiempo y eternidad pacten. Oscuramente sabemos que vida y muerte no son sino dos movimientos, antagónicos pero complementarios, de una misma realidad. Creación y destrucción se funden en el acto amoroso; y durante una fracción de segundo el hombre entrevé un estado más perfecto (p. 343)<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> “Perhaps being born is dying and dying is being born? We know nothing, our whole being longing to escape opposites that tear us apart, if everything (consciousness of ourselves, time, reason, customs) belongs to us, those expelled from life, everything pushes us forward to go back too, to descend to the bosom of the creator from which we were pulled out. And we ask love – that being desire is hunger for communion, longing to fall and die just as to being reborn – to give us a piece of true life, true death. We do not ask for happiness, nor for rest, but for an instant, one single instant of complete life in which the opposites, life and death, and time and eternity, merge and come to an agreement. Obscurely, we know that life and death are but two movements, antagonistic but complementary of the same reality. Creation and destruction merge in the loving act; and during a fraction of a second, man has a glimpse to a more perfect state” (my translation).

Like Paz, Kinnell believes that humanity denies itself the deepest experience of real life: there has to be a reconciliation of binary oppositions<sup>3</sup>. As Paz states, people look for an instant to complete life and this can only be achieved when polarities come together and become one in ephemeral flashes.

### 3. Scope of topic

Considering the reading of *The book of nightmares* through an archetypal approach, myth is essential. Thus, from the many differing theoretical approaches to myth and archetypes, those of Northrop Frye, Carl Gustav Jung, and Joseph Campbell are favorable for this particular study due to the fact that these scholars work with the mythical and archetypal position. Consequently, these theoretical frames will offer the approach for reading the book-length poem aiming to converge on the relation between the content and context of the text with the theories chosen for the analysis. Accordingly, the theories of Jung and Campbell will be interrelated in that they develop a critical basis for discussing the concept of myth and the archetype of the hero's journey. Jung (2006), in *The undiscovered self*, indicates

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<sup>3</sup> According to Selden (1989), "Binary oppositions' (BO's) are fundamental to structuralist thought. They also appear to be fundamental not only to human thought in general but even in some cases to the natural order itself. Forms of binarism are present in human thought from the earliest times. Dualisms in philosophy and religion (subject and object, God and man, mind and the external world, organic and mechanical, temporal and eternal, and so on) are the very foundations of entire world-views. The concept of 'privatives' is also important in this context. We can describe the world in terms of the absence of certain qualities. Darkness is the absence of light; the iron is cold when it lacks heat; an object is still when it lacks movement. (...) Structuralists have argued that binary oppositions are fundamental to human language, cognition and communication. We use BO's to mark *differences* in an otherwise apparently random sequence of features, and thus to give shape to our experience of the universe" (pp. 55-56).



that an archetype “when represented to the mind, appears as an image which expresses the nature of the instinctive impulse visually and concretely, like a picture” (p. 81). It is through the reading of *The book of nightmares* from a mythical and archetypal stance that the function of the hero’s journey will be analyzed, alerting readers to specific and precise constructions of the journey to attain the resolution of binary oppositions (life-death) when “one/ and zero/ walk off together” (Kinnell 1971a, p. 73). In Kinnell’s *The book of nightmares*, the three main phases of the monomyth will be analyzed as follows:

1. Separation or departure: a classic situation in which the hero faces his call and needs to enter the dark forest, find the great tree and the chatting brook besides underestimating the façade of the carrier of the power of fate. These elements can be found in poems I, II, and III.
2. Trials and victories of initiation: this second traditional phase in the monomyth represents the movement forward into a hazardous journey that may be physical or psychological, premeditated or accidental. And so, it happens in *The book of nightmares*. Poems IV to VIII lead the persona into an unknown world where he listens and sees symbolic elements of life and death and when he feels trapped in the face of life as a fly may feel trapped in a spider’s

web, feeling alone for he “has no one to turn to because God is my enemy. He gave me lust and joy and cut off my hands” (Kinnell 1971a, p. 30).

3. Return and reintegration with society: after undertaking different ordeals and learning his lesson, the hero needs to bring back to society the knowledge acquired throughout the journey. In poems IX and X, the hero returns, positioning himself “On the path winding/ upward, toward the high valley” (Kinnell 1971a, p. 65).

As a final point, regardless of the classification of Galway Kinnell as a postmodernist, neoromantic, and imaginative poet, most of the criticism on his writings deals with the interpretative approaches to his poems and his distinctive style and themes, but no analyses seem to have been done in terms of this research. Consequently, utilizing both, the mythical and archetypal perspective, poses a commendable opportunity to demonstrate that this theoretical approach is still a valuable means for literary texts.

#### **4. Objectives**

##### **A. General objective**

To analyze, from a mythical and archetypal stance, the function of the hero's journey in Kinnell's *The book of nightmares* as a process of self-discovery throughout the celebratory resolution of the binary oppositions of the life-death cycle.

##### **B. Specific objectives**

1. To examine the different functions of myth in the poem-book.
2. To characterize the archetype of the hero's journey in the ten-part poem.
3. To analyze the use of natural imagery in *The book of nightmares* to acquire understanding of the resolution of the life-death binary oppositions.

#### **D. Methodological framework**

The present study aims at analyzing, from a Jungian archetypal perspective and Campbell's mythological patterns, the function of myth and the archetype of the hero's journey in Kinnell's *The book of nightmares* as a process of self-discovery throughout the celebratory resolution of binary oppositions of the life-death cycle. In other words, this research concentrates on the persona's inner process of exploration and the resulting acquisition of self-knowledge as two opposites, life and death. This theoretical approach will consider the poem's persona as a mirror to trace myth and symbols as recurrent byproducts of humanity's collective imagination. For the purpose of this analysis, the conceptualization of archetypes will be utilized on the literary text, for as scholar Edinger (1972) asserts,

Jung's most basic and far-reaching discovery is the collective unconscious or archetypal psyche. Through his researches, we know how the individual psyche is not just a product of personal experience. It also has a pre-personal or transpersonal dimension which is manifested in universal patterns and images such as are found in all the world's religions and mythologies (p. 3).

These archetypal images present in Western culture, which many times refer to primitive phenomena, activate features of life, death, birth, and heroes, among others, in all kinds of texts. Thus, to be able to complete the research objectives, this thesis will be divided in four main stages, being the first, an introductory chapter in which the reasons for discussing Kinnell's poem-book will be presented as well

as the statement of the problem and scope of topic. Secondly, a chapter will be devoted to the review of literature that will present the work of Galway Kinnell being discussed through the works of different critics and writers; moreover, the theoretical framework that will sustain the analysis of the book length poem will also be presented. In this case, the work of Carl G. Jung, Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye, mainly, will be examined to understand the journey of the hero in *The book of nightmares*. Outlines of the theoretical positions of the different theorists will be offered and the relevance of each in relation to reading myth and archetype will be demonstrated. Nevertheless, there will also be a segment on structuralism and its scholars, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and Jonathan Culler (1944-) specifically to discuss the concept of *binary oppositions*, interpretation, ideology and semiotics.

Thirdly, the discussion and analysis of the poetic work will be divided in three chapters, one that will examine the different functions of myth in the poem-book; another will characterize the archetype of the hero's journey in the ten-part poetic work; and the last one will analyze the use of natural imagery in *The book of nightmares* to expose the resolution of the life-death binary opposition.

The final stage in this investigation will consist on the conclusions reached after completing the analysis of Kinnell's work. Hopefully, this last section will propose that this approach for analyzing postmodern poetry can provoke further

critical inquiry in the field of poetical studies through a mythical and archetypal stance, even though different theories and approaches materialize continually.

## CHAPTER I

### ANTECEDENTS TO *THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES*

#### A. Review of literature

Some critics have designated Kinnell's poetry as an example of postmodernist<sup>4</sup> poetry<sup>5</sup> for it embodies two conspicuous traits of this movement: the poem appears to be personal and it also resembles spontaneous speech. Mills (1970a), quoting Dickey, asserts that:

Perhaps to a degree more than is true for other poets, Kinnell's development will depend on the actual events of his life... for what we encounter as an essential ingredient in his work as it grows is not only the presence of the poet as a man and speaker but his identification, through thematic

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<sup>4</sup> According to Davik Mikics (2007), in his work *A new handbook of literary terms*, "Postmodern artists deviate from the monolithic purity incarnated by the International Style in architecture and Abstract Expressionism in painting (both popular in the mid-twentieth century). Frequently, they use a mixture of styles, contaminate the visual with the verbal, or play jokes on the idea of artistic greatness that modernism took so seriously. Alan Wilde writes that, while the defining feature of modernism is its urge to repair, or else rise above, a disjointed, fragmented world, "postmodernism, more radical in its perceptions, derives instead from a vision of randomness, multiplicity, and contingency: in short, a world in need of mending is superseded by one beyond repair. Modernism spurred by an anxiety to recuperate a lost wholeness in self-sustaining orders of art or in the unselfconscious depths of the self . . . reaches toward the heroic in the intensity of its desire and of its disillusion. Postmodernism, skeptical of such efforts, presents itself as deliberately, consciously antiheroic" (p. 241). In other words, postmodernism is tolerant of, and even revels in, the waste land of contemporary chaos that Eliot, Yeats, and Pound protested against. For this reason, postmodernism is sometimes accused of being merely 'affirmative' rather than 'critical:' aping the trends of the surrounding culture in a piecemeal, unreflective way."

<sup>5</sup> Calhoun (1992) affirms that "David Perkins identifies the forms of recent poetry as a mixture of the old and the new, with a preference for the freer forms: 'traditional and free verse in narrative, dramatic monologue, long meditation, list, catalogue, and lyric, including sonnet, song, chant, litany, spell and mantra'" (p.10).

recurrences, repeated images revelatory of his deepest concerns and most urgent feelings, with the experiences his poems dramatize... we shall try to see how Kinnell, using the considerable imaginative and linguistic powers at his command from the beginning, explores relentlessly the actualities of his existence to wrest from them what significance for life he can (p. 67).

Besides being a postmodern poet, Kinnell makes of his life and experience his poetry, and as Young, in Nelson's (1987) *On the Poetry of Galway Kinnell*, affirms "the poet presents himself as the protagonist of his poem, moving through a natural setting" (p. 140). Somehow, Kinnell becomes a poet who communicates, simultaneously, in a "simple" but also "elaborate" way his vision of life. Tuten (1996) asserts that "Kinnell explained that as poetry moves away from 'formal beauty,' it is better able to 'discover the glory of the ordinary.' His is a 'poetics of the physical world,' devoted to the 'most ordinary thing, the most despised' that, like Emily Dickinson's fly, 'may be the one chosen to bear the strange brightening, this last moment of increased life'" (p. 1). Kinnell's poetic work is distinctive in that he moves from a more structured form to attain the postmodern arrangement of a freer pattern.

Kinnell's poetical work has also been dedicated to an extraordinarily reliable assortment of interests such as his concern for the natural world, the common humanity of man/woman, death, politics, and the primitive. In terms of the means used to communicate his aim, he concentrates on the physical to transcend human life. Though much literature dealing with Kinnell's work contemplates the possible



meaning/interpretation of his poems and the influence of other poets on his work, the following section will describe Kinnell's growth as a poetic creator to consecutively focus on his poetry and the associated topics. Principally, this review of literature will thematically recapitulate the symbols and archetypes in the creation of his poetic work like the simplicity of the natural world and the primitive drives of humanity, the ephemerality and eternity of life, and the role that poetry may have in the social and political realms of life as studied by scholars and literary critics.

### **1. The poet: His life and work**

Galway Kinnell was born on February 1, 1927, in the United States of America, Providence, Rhode Island and died on October 28, 2014 in Vermont. His parents were both immigrants to the United States from the United Kingdom. From 1933 to 1943, he attended public school in Rhode Island, until he received a scholarship to attend Wilbraham Academy in Massachusetts for his senior year. In 1948, as Calhoun (1992) affirms, he graduated from Princeton where "he was a brilliant student, graduating *summa cum laude*," in 1949, he received an M.A. in English in the University of Rochester; from 1951-55 he lived in Chicago "working as a supervisor of the liberal arts program at the University of Chicago's downtown campus." Kinnell is considered one of the major North American poets of the XX century and is depicted as "one of our most accomplished poets, a fact that is one of the best kept secrets among contemporary writers, known only to a select group of poets who recognize his skills" (Calhoun, 1992, ix).

At Princeton, he was influenced by W. S. Merwin, poet and critic. He introduced Kinnell to the work of other poets like Yeats and Eliot. After graduating from Princeton, he received his master's degree from the University of Rochester and started his creative writing teaching career in Europe and the Middle East. Many of his works mirror his experiences of the world. Kinnell was awarded different prizes, like the Pulitzer Prize for *Selected Poems* in 1983 and the MacArthur Foundation Grant for Creative Work in 1984. His honors include the National Institute of Arts and Letters Award, the Shelly Memorial Award of the Poetry Society of America, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Brandeis Creative Arts Award, and the Award of Merit Medal from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Furthermore, he taught in different places as a poet-in-residence, in countries like Iran, France and Australia. He returned to the United States in the 1960's and took action in some political movements, including his poetry readings against the Vietnam War; moreover, he worked in favor of racial equality, as for him, it seems that a segregated humanity was not the way society should have evolved. He worked on voter registration and workplace integration in Louisiana for those African-Americans who had been discriminated against because of skin color.

Kinnell wrote primarily poetry and a novel: *Black light* (1966). Some of his poetry books are *What a kingdom it was* (1960), *Flower herding on Mount Monadnock* (1964), *Body rags* (1968), *The book of nightmares* (1971), *The avenue bearing the initial of Christ into the new world: Poems 1946-64* (1974), *"Saint Francis*

*and the sow" Broadside Series (1976), Walking down the stairs (a collection of interviews) (1978), Mortal acts, mortal words (1980), Selected poems (1982), How the alligator missed breakfast (1982), The past (1985), When one has lived a long time alone (1990), Imperfect thirst (1996), A new selected poems (2000), and Strong is your hold (2006).*

Tuten (1992) asserts that "[w]hile Kinnell's verse may seem to follow a Platonic pattern, moving from the real to the ideal, more accurately it should be described as discovering the mysterious within the things of this earth" (p. 137). In fact, his poetry, in general terms, deals with life and his experiences as a person that is exposed to "mortality as all breathing creatures are" (Calhoun, 1992, p. 6). This understanding of the impermanence and humanity of each person is portrayed in his book-poem *The book of nightmares* in which there is some sort of mystical journey where the persona accepts his/her death, along with the death of other creatures, as a process that every person should accept in his/her life. Interestingly enough, this acceptance of mortality materializes when his children are born. This text commences with the birth of Maud and completes its journey with another birth, Fergus. "Lastness" is the last poem that completes the persona's journey full circle through the use of elements like the imagery presented in the first poem: "Under the Maud moon." There is polarity and cycle, the two major movements of myth as stated by Joseph Campbell in his theory.

Zimmerman (1987) alludes to Kinnell when he says that he invokes his children, Maud and Fergus, because “they live with death almost as animals do,” with a “natural trust in life’s rhythms” (p. 154). This text, *The book of nightmares*, is structured as a journey poem in which there is acceptance of death as part of humanity’s mortal existence along with that of other beings. Another vital characteristic of this text is that it is inhabited by binary oppositions. There is life and death, father and children, a howl and a song, a “Don’t cry” and an “Or else, cry.” Moreover, there are recurring images like the tramp, whose shoes the persona puts on to walk down the road, the “path of vanished alphabets” (Kinnell, 1971a, p. 50). And it is from this alphabet that other images come into being: reading and writing. It seems as if life were an experience in which we write our moments of happiness and pain and from which we interpret other people’s life moments.

There is also the bear and the hen. The former is portrayed as a witness for all humanity while the latter is presented as a metaphor for men and women; the hen lives and dies but in it there is the gift of life. It stops being itself when it dies but it then starts again as part of the cosmos as when it becomes one with humanity when being consumed. Another essential image portrayed in the poem-book is that of a hug, “the snap / and re-snap of the same embrace being torn” (Kinnell, 1971a, p. 3). There seems to be a yearning for communion, a desire for achieving completeness that mirrors the loneliness felt by humankind, the idea of a man/woman made to love and share but incapable to do so.

Finally, this review will focus on four general topics discussed by Kinnell's critics: 1. Simplicity in the natural world and the primitive; 2. Marriage and parenthood; 3. Politics and society; and 4. Ephemerality and eternity of life: mortality and/in *The book of nightmares*. The decision to make this categorization of topics originates from the major themes discussed by Kinnell in his literary work and also related to the path of analysis. Many of Kinnell's poems deal with nature and becoming one with it; moreover, he examines marital life and children in some of his work; for example, in *The book of nightmares*, the reader is introduced to his children: Maud and Fergus. Another topic that is essential in this poet's work is politics and its impact in society; it seems that for him being part of nature also positions him politically to defend and fight for what he considers valuable and he does it in a peaceful way through reading and writing. Finally, one of his concerns as a human being is the duality life-death that he discusses in several poems and *The book of nightmares* is one of them.

## **2. Simplicity in the natural world and the primitive**

The poetical world of Galway Kinnell is inhabited by nature and the physical world. Keane (Tuten, 1996) declares that his poetry is "an elementary poetry – a poetry of dark woods and snow; of wind and fire and stars; of bone and blood. His subjects are perennial: love illumined and made more precious by the omnipresence of death" (p. 77). As Keane emphasizes, Kinnell's poetry mirrors the simple moments experienced in life and for him, the "moments of epiphany and

transcendence occur only by our becoming deeply familiar with the world” (Tuten 1996, p. 86).

It seems that the natural world and the basic instinctual drives of humankind mean to be one with the self and with nature. “Earthly” experiences and objects become his source of inspiration. Nelson (1987) asserts that “very few contemporary poets care or dare or are able to communicate the peculiar pleasure of words on the tongue as vividly as Kinnell” (“Introduction”, p. 6). Kinnell’s poetry began as relatively formal and structurally intricate texts, but he moved to a simpler diction and to an overall freer structure. Diction and structure in his poems mirror life as a simple moment of transcendence into the universe, and as the writer himself has declared, poetry, in general, pursues wholeness when the person in the poem is any person and as the poem develops, this person morphs into an animal and the animal keeps on morphing until it becomes a stone and if the stone could utter a word, that would be its language. In other words, silence is also language.

Indeed, the “animal world,” the primitive, is a subject that is significant in the poetry of Galway Kinnell. Many of his poems deal with the instinctive nature of animals and even when some of his poems do not, they present animal imagery as part of the holistic vision of the poet. In *the poetics of the physical world*, Kinnell (1971b) discusses his position towards the “natural” in contemporary poetry:

Why does it see, in the modern poem, that the less formal beauty there is, the more possible it is to discover the glory of the ordinary? I think of

Donatello's statue in wood of Magdalen: her body ravaged, her face drawn with suffering, her hair running down her body indistinguishable from her rags. She is in ruins. Yet her feet remain beautiful. The reason they are beautiful is that they have touched the earth all their life. In the same way, in the bedraggled poem of the modern, it is the images, those lowly touchers of physical reality with remain shining (p. 116).

It is in the experience with the simple elements of everyday life (feet touching the earth for example) what makes people experience transcendence. In "The Poet as Healer," Edelman (1981) sustains that Kinnell approaches language as being part of the "natural" world in the sense that words are used to communicate knowledge, emotions, and feelings (p. 218). Moreover, Nelson (1987) asserts that it is "clear that for him words are alive. He thinks of them, for example, not as becoming obsolete, but extinct: 'When I encounter an old word on the verge of extinction, which seems expressive, I feel excited. I can't help entertaining the possibility of rescuing it...'" (p. 5). Kinnell appears to embrace not just objects, concrete and abstract, but their means of communication: language. Even words seem to be alive in his poetical world for he takes words no longer used in contemporary communication or used in different intellectual realms and gives them the opportunity of rebirth and signifying in his work; as a result, words like *carrion*, *orts*, *fenks*, and *sordes* can be found in his book-length poem giving the reader the

opportunity to experience them as part of the life of the persona when discovering his path.

Likewise, Taylor (in Tuten 1996), emphasizes that “many of Kinnell’s poems are about exploration, discovery, and vision. Most often they concern the poet’s exploration of the natural world, of ‘primitive’ nature (mountains, unsettled plains, sea coasts, deserts, fields, and woods in snow)” (p. 163). Therefore, his work is devoted to life in what has been accepted as “natural” and “primeval.” For Nelson (1987), the way in which Kinnell sees and experiences life is connected to how language is also experienced; his poetry demands the use of all senses to be understood, making the written words “alive” through the receiver of the message. The poet himself affirms that the intersection of language and communication goes beyond the transaction of meaning through the use of words. Meaning is achieved from the moment a baby is born; and it is through sound and emotions that children unconsciously manage to communicate and understand others; thus, we could extrapolate that humankind may communicate better if we take into consideration the connotational elements of words to signify. For example; the most basic and primitive act of communication, as that of the mother and the child, fosters an exchange of meaning without the interference of the spoken word. In Kinnell’s poetic work, the primeval is emphasized. Susan Weston (Tuten, 1996) declares that “now I realize that they [some verses from Kinnell’s poem]<sup>6</sup> occurred as a comment on

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<sup>6</sup> “And she who is born, / she who sings and cries, / she who begins the passage, her hair / sprouting out, / her gums budding for her first spring on earth, / the mist still clinging about / her face, puts /her



our loss of critical innocence: we can no longer take childlike pleasure in the text – put our hands in the poet’s mouth – for the song has become not a physical thing but an intellectual formulation” (p. 205). Suddenly, poetry is to be felt and experienced to develop a cognitive lecture; Weston shares the poet’s preoccupation with the overthinking phenomenon that somehow affects our relationship with others and the world limiting our way to see “clearly.”

On his part, Mills, Jr. (1970a) affirms that a significant number of Kinnell’s poetic work takes into consideration the natural world that offers him infinite possibilities for his “imaginative meditation.” These natural images range from creeks to more primitive and basic needs in life like food and shelter. It is through this entrance to the natural world that the critic and reader can also encounter a threshold “into a primitive state of identification with the nonhuman (p. 54)”, as Aseel Abdul-Lateef Taha (n.d.) states, in *The allegorical use of rituals of hunting in Galway Kinnell’s “The bear.”* It seems that in his poetry, the acknowledgement of humankind’s primitive and archaic drives may lead to a moment of liberation and harmony with life itself.

It is then when the primeval is portrayed as essential of the human experience of life. And it is within the primitive that Kinnell expands this experience with the symbolic constituent of fire, as a basic element in life cycles of constant

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hand / into her father’s mouth, to take hold of his song” (“Under the Maud moon,” Kinnell, 1971a, p. 5).

transformation and an infinite process of death and resurrection. Howard (1980), in *Alone with America: Essays on the art of poetry in the United States*, affirms that there is agony in knowledge and that in order for life to exist, life itself must be consumed, “must be reduced to ash in order to be redeemed – gives Kinnell’s poetry its astonishing resonance, the accents of a conflict beyond wisdom as it is beyond pity” (p. 260). It is this paradox that makes Kinnell’s poetry so attractive, just as humankind is permeated with unresolved polarities. Moreover, Williamson (Bloom 2010) in “From language against itself: The middle generation of contemporary poets” states that poets “as few others, must live close to the world that primitive men are in: the world, in its nakedness, which is fundamental for all of us – birth, love, death, the seer fact of being alive” (p. 170). And this is what Kinnell does in his work, that is, he takes the readers back to their most rudimentary beginning to make meaning of life. On his part, Mills Jr. (1970a) affirms that in his poetry, Kinnell faces “himself and the conditions of the world simultaneously, without mediation or disguise. It should be said, however, that Kinnell employs other means than nature for cutting to the bone of existence, though intimate acquaintance with other living creatures and with the earth is of primary importance to his work” (p. 68). Definitely, in his poetry, there is a robust connection with nature that allows the reader to appreciate the natural world: earth, trees, flowers, animals, and even rocks; however, his work is not subjugated to these. Moreover, Atlas (in Nelson 1987) affirms that Kinnell is so “close to his subject, the natural world in all its tyranny and

splendor, that his sympathies are readily translated into the richness of cadence and language that poetry should always have” (p. 97). It is Kinnell transmuting ordinary experiences of babysitting, cooking, traveling and the sort into extraordinary every day happenings that become a source of inspiration and revelation through his poetic work.

It is an undeniable fact that Kinnell’s poetic work deals with the natural world to such an extent that it borders the most primordial elements of humankind. Being one with nature is a central subject matter that he has developed in most of his works. Moreover, he is unrelenting in trying to tell his readers that it is through nature that we may come to understand who we are. Alan Williamson (in Nelson 1987) declares that in Kinnell’s poetry the “truly important educative experiences become, then, experiences of unlearning: empathy with animals, primitive and peasant cultures, the wilderness; a reacclimatization to solitude in nature” (p. 170). Kinnell’s poetic work blooms in nature and its elements to make the words and the poem as a unit intensify the reader’s experience of the world; making the reader understand that s/he also belongs to the primitive, to the instincts that tend to be hidden by different social masks.

### **3. Parenthood and marriage**

This family theme traverses Kinnell’s poetic world and in *The book of nightmares*, it is still more evident for the poem starts with the birth of his daughter Maud and concludes with that of his son Fergus. Calhoun (1992) emphasizes this

last appreciation when he declares, discussing *The book of nightmares*, that “there is, significantly, another difference in this book, proceeding from his care as a parent of his children” (p. 73). Moreover, Tillinghast (in Tuten 1996) asserts that “*The book of nightmares*, especially, is Kinnell’s gift to his children. I can think of no more moving statement of a parent’s heart-breakingly illogical hope of shielding a child from the death he accepts for himself” (p. 113). Even when for him, in order to achieve eternity a mortal death needs to be experienced, the thought of his children suffering makes the persona want to protect them. Davis confirms Tillinghast assertion when he declares that the first poem in *The book of nightmares* is “a personal ceremony in praise of the birth of the poet’s daughter” (p. 62). Moreover, Davis (in Tuten 1996) affirms that “The nightmare vision is passed on from generation to generation. As the father dies into his son so the son is born into the vision of nightmare which the father has lived through” (p. 67). Hence, the father knows what is going to happen in the future and, somehow, would like to prevent his children from suffering and grief. The aforementioned first poem can be experienced as Kinnell’s gift of love to his children, reaching afar his own impermanence.

Additionally, Calhoun (1992) sustains that Kinnell’s poetry is

This poetry written by a poet who is aware he must now accept his responsibilities as a family man. Consequently, from the rituals of childcare, there are moments of realization, epiphanies that transcend the lonely

sensibility of the persona. Now possible is an actual fraternity with others – not just through love for his children, but a new relationship with his wife... (p. 74).

Consequently, Kinnell's discussion of family life not only depicts his concern for his children but it also circumscribed to the care and love felt for his wife. Discussing marital life and sexuality, Tuten (1992) asserts that "[s]exuality is, for Kinnell [and Whitman], the most sacred dimension of human physicality and the ultimate means of communication between two individuals" (p. 139). Moreover, this scholar affirms that "[h]e shares with Whitman the desire to remind humanity of the sacredness of sexuality" (p. 136); and it is this sacredness that he portrays in some of his texts.

#### **4. Politics and society**

Besides nature, as well as family life, politics and social problems is another topic explored by Kinnell's critics. For instance, M.L. Rosenthal & S. Gall (1983) discuss the fact that poetry is part of the political arena and writers' work; moreover, these critics declare that politics belong to humankind since civilization belongs to humankind,

It is the politics of shared awareness and urgency; and the world of the sequence is one of adult intelligence and candor, of a truthfulness about oneself and one's views that need not be forced, because it is simply a condition of existence. All the issues of empirical politics – war and peace,

sexual and racial repression, ecology, atomic energy – seem to enter these sequences naturally, as part of their awareness, just as they do in one's intimate personal relationships (p. 417).

In consequence, Rosenthal (1973) declares that “political awareness, experientially rather than just ideologically conceived, is consciousness of one's present moment as a focal point of history” (p. 418). Furthermore, Tuten (1996) affirms that “the turbulent decade of the sixties was important for Kinnell both professional and personally” (p. 4); moreover, Calhoun (1992) asserts that during “1963, with the outbreak of civil rights protests in the South, he became a social activist, working in the registration campaign for the Congress of Racial Equality in Louisiana” (p. 4). This personal historical moment exhibited in “The last river” is a reflection of Kinnell's involvement with politics in that it is a poem that speaks up about the race/segregation problems and his experience in the civil rights movement in the United States during the 1960's. Moreover, during the eighties, “Kinnell's political activities began afresh with a new target: nuclear weapons and nuclear energy. He organized an antinuclear reading, Poets Against the End of the World, at Town Hall, in New York City in 1982” (Calhoun, p. 5). Consequently, all his efforts to share his political standing and preoccupation are presented in some of his major works.

As a matter of fact, capitalist society focuses on maximizing the purchase of objects and services to make human kind forget about growing older, suffering,

aging and dying, as if death were independent from life. In fact, to help individuals reconcile with their future annihilation may be one of the most difficult tasks there is. A reconciliation of this kind involves coming to terms with oneself and diminishing anxiety, a challenging task indeed. Powell (2000) affirms that many a times, "... the poet becomes both a reader of history and ultimately its victim. This solution takes as a given the inevitability of death, in fact, it supposes death as the only remaining certainty. Death and the invariable decay of the body, in some perverse sense, the new divinity. Death as an inevitable progression recues history from chaos" (p. 24). One of the moments all living creatures will experience is death, this is the sharing of life, maybe not tonight or tomorrow but someday. Being mortality life's twin, all the differences that may exist while breathing will become simple surface details.

Likewise, Atlas (in Nelson 1987) in his "Autobiography of the present" acknowledges the fact that this poem to which Mills refers to mirrors Eliot's sense of spiritual disintegration in modern cities, and "like Eliot's, Kinnell's is a religious poem, in which the chaotic forces of survival (in this instance, the turbulent, jumbled life of New York's lower East Side; along Avenue C) ultimately preside over the terror latent in our late stage of civilization" (p. 96). For Kinnell, human beings have deteriorated so much that the place chosen as setting is New York, Avenue C, where the passerby can see different types of people, especially Puerto Ricans, African Americans and Jewish people, at different tasks in different shops and street vendors that make the city even noisier. As Rowland (in Tuten 1996) declares, "His

ability to make us glimpse the wonder of being repeatedly transforms the rubble and slums of New York's Avenue C" (p. 43). This is not the avenue of the bistros or nice cafes neither the most "dangerous" one but the "crazy avenue," just as New Yorkers state when saying: "Avenue A, you're all right. Avenue B, you're brave. Avenue C, you are crazy. Avenue D, you're dead."

However, Nelson (1987) affirms that this poem is Kinnell's supply of an unsuccessful bombardment of mythical, biblical, and literary references that turns his "pathos into Camp sentiment and his avenue into a Hollywood set" (p. 188). Nelson (in Nelson 1987), when discussing Kinnell's poetic work and quoting critic Terry Comito, affirms that "all the swarming multiplicity of the scene only emphasizes the ceaselessness of a dissolution in which human life seems to share the fate of what it feeds upon, but Kinnell will not confront the way his descriptions of decay challenge is vision" (p. 189). In a way, Kinnell longs in desperation for a way of life in which all humanity would attain back the lost dignity and respectfulness of a "mythical" past. Probably Lévi-Strauss's (1978) same concern when he affirms that "We are now threatened with the prospect of our being only consumers, able to consume anything from any point in the world and from any culture but losing all originality" (p. 7). Consumerism has trapped humankind making them forget who they are.

Williamson (Nelson 1987) affirms that "poets, as few others, must live close to the world that primitive men are in: the world, in its nakedness, which is



fundamental for all of us – birth, love, death; the sheer fact of being alive” (p. 170).

For him, poetry

written under such premises, the personal self is underplayed not out of shame, or an Impersonal Theory, but because it is seen – as in Rimbaud – as internalized history... To transcend the ego is to go beyond society as well... The truly important educative experiences become, then, experiences of unlearning: empathy with animals, primitive and peasant cultures, the wilderness; a reacclimatization to solitude in nature; the evocation of a Jungian collective unconscious through meditation or surrealism... Most of these poets share that view that language is one of the most powerful agents of our socialization, leading us to internalize our parent’s, our world’s definitions, and to ignore the portions of our authentic experience – the experience of the body and the unconscious – that do not express themselves directly in verbal terms. (The poets I have in mind are James Wright, Robert Bly, W.S Merwin, Snyder, and Kinnell...) (p. 170).

As Williamson affirms, it is through language that humankind experiences life and paradoxically language prevents people from experiencing life at its fullest for as humanity seems to technologically and scientifically advance their capacity to communicate with others seems to recede. Moreover, he acknowledges the fact that Kinnell is part of the first generation of poets “to confront concentration camps and the atomic bomb, the fully revealed destructiveness of civilized man” (in Nelson,

1987, p. 171). Thus, Kinnell takes a position against mainstream pro-war American culture and moves forward to criticize humankind and its interest in annihilation and obliteration of the other. Kinnell will present his interest in preserving life, liberty, and equality.

Moreover, Rosenthal & Gall (1983), when discussing Kinnell's *The book of nightmares*, make distinctive emphasis on the thematic of war in this text, "[t]he war specifically the Vietnam War. The mad speaker of the second part tells of obsessively shooting down the 'little black pajamas jumping / and falling,' whether or not they are 'friendlies'" (p. 471). Regarding this war and the political focus of Kinnell regarding this political-civil conflict, Zimmerman (1987) argues that certainly "one imagines that artists, like Kinnell and Bly, who denounced the Vietnam War were more interested in contacting the unconscious than were President Johnson and General Westmoreland" (p. 82), looking for this repository of disremembered recollections of a more peaceful and egalitarian world. Moreover, Calhoun (1992) states that for Kinnell, the major reason for writing political poetry responds to being human and part of a world (p. 21). Hence, Kinnell's portrayal of the world and its conflicts (social, political and/or economic) through his poetical texts search for the best inner qualities humankind has to offer to themselves and other living creatures on earth: solidarity among people, freedom and its implications, and a more egalitarian society for all.

## 5. Ephemerality and eternity of life: Mortality and/in *The book of nightmares*

The topic of death and life as inseparable polarities is part of Kinnell's poetic footprint. Calhoun (1992) affirms that Kinnell "belongs to a tradition in American poetry that accepts death as an important subject" (p. 22). It seems that for the poet, death portrays attributes that represent the extinction that human beings fear and simultaneously what many people desire, that is being one with the universe; in other words, death becomes a paradox: avoiding it but yearning to belong. It is because of this internal struggle that he wants to expose and discuss, through his poetry, that there may be as a solution: the acceptance of death as part of the life continuum. Davie, quoted by Mills Jr. (1970a), states that, regarding Kinnell's perception of the life-death cycle, that he is "left to explore 'relentlessly the actualities of his existence to wrest from them what significance for life he can'" (p. 19). This critic goes further into affirming that this poet yearns for the spiritual and even though he has tried to reach this aspiration, his efforts have been unsuccessful (p. 159). However, Molesworth (in Nelson 1987) asserts that as Kinnell suggests, "death represents the last absolute perspective; its very finality makes it a magnificent possibility, or rather, the source of magnificent possibilities" (p. 49). Indeed, humankind cannot escape death; however, if accepting death and learning to live with it there is the likelihood of experiencing life in a singular way for at this revelatory moment, each moment of life will be appraised differently. In other words,

when an individual realizes that life depends of death and vice versa, there is the hope that every second lived will be enjoyed at its fullest.

Furthermore, for Nelson (1987), "Kinnell's poetry represents in large part an extraordinary four-decades-long and still ongoing meditation on time and mortality" (p. 12). Calhoun (1992), on his part, asserts that the poet "belongs to a tradition in American poetry that accepts death as an important subject... Kinnell's attitude is almost one of gratitude for having found a universal subject that restrains him from being 'self-absorbed' and introspective, personal and confessional... it is a topic that does not allow him to be niggardly interested in his own experience to the exclusion of everybody else's" (p. 24). As a matter of fact, Kinnell's poetry circumscribes the understanding of death to every single living being, not only people.

As has been discussed, for Kinnell, death becomes an instant that human beings must face; Toskar (1981) declares that Kinnell's subjects that interlace "through his work are the most basic to human existence: that a man must suffer and die in a brutally dehumanized hostile world... It is then no surprise that a man so infused with his own mortality might look about himself at the world of physical objects with renewed intensity" (p. 363). Thus, as for the poet, being aware of this binary opposition, life-death, he can apprehend his inner and outer experiences through the objects that surround him.

Mills Jr.(1970a) states that "death, suffering, the will to elude the body's mortality, and the brute facts of the actual world: Kinnell's imagination turns these

themes over and over, dwelling on the insoluble enigmas of life's significance or lack of it as these emerge in the process of his own living (p. 72). As Mills Jr. discusses, Kinnell's poetry deals with the subject of mortality as he, himself, experiences it; moreover, Nelson (in Tuten, 1996) asserts that "Kinnell is an elegist who finds consolation and a measure of glory in the fact of mortality itself. It is because we die, and because we know that his in unavoidably so, that human life is worthy of a unique intensity" (p. 101). Accordingly, Kinnell's vision for humankind is that of acceptance of mortality and death as a means of experiencing life. It is this juxtaposition of opposites that makes his work so enticing and intriguing since human beings are made up counterparts and it is not until we understand this duality that life offers and that not everybody can apprehend and own.

Death is an experience that one day will materialize and the only hope Kinnell, essentially, grasps is our continuation with and within the universe and all its inhabitants. Knowing this, Kinnell takes his poems to translate his own knowledge of the life-death process just as Nelson affirms: "Kinnell is also drawn to abstractions, discursiveness, the direct expression of ideas, and even didacticism in his poetry. The description which evokes and celebrates the sow, for example, is preceded by a sort of lesson on the often-forgotten beauty that even the lowliest things contain" (p. 102). Somehow, Kinnell's poetry reaches beyond the aesthetic pleasure of poetry to lead the reader into an understanding of simple everyday

moments that help humanity rise above their mortality for in the simple moments of life is where transcendence is met.

From the moment I started reading this book length poem, I could not stop thinking about life at its best: in simple everyday moments and in how death has been erroneously perceived, for death is the fact that makes life possible and vice versa. Our death, all people's deaths, and Kinnell's own death are ultimately described in his work which some may consider a morbid undertaking for the living are not expected to discuss death; however, Kinnell's interpretation of this natural event challenges the vision of most westerners. When encountering death, each earthly being belongs to an infinite continuum in which life and death not only juxtapose but also overlap. Kinnell presents a constant involvement with the reality of death and the impermanence of all living things. Furthermore, his work presents a strong play of polarities, he, himself, in Lee Zimmerman (1987) states that from "one point of view, the book is nothing but an effort to face death and live with death" (p. 73). Death is the most probable happening of life so, Kinnell's call is to learn to admit that the "wages of dying is love."

The major influential studies on Galway Kinnell's *The book of nightmares* discuss the leading idea of the book-poem as well as its symbols and images in general. Scholars and critics have predominantly questioned and discussed this poet's "obsession" with death and the use of nature and natural imagery in his work. Nonetheless, though vastly associated to these arguments, previous studies have

not considered the reading of *The book of nightmares* from both, a mythical and archetypal stance. Therefore, this present study intends to fill this theoretical gap, consequently, enriching the analysis of the text and offering a fresh reading of and through, mainly, Jung and Campbell's theoretical frameworks.

## **B. Theoretical and referential framework**

Since the present study seeks to analyze the particulars of the function of myth and the archetype of the hero's journey in *The book of nightmares* by means of examining the resolution of the binary opposition of the life-death cycle; this section will mainly examine the theories developed by preeminent scholars Carl G. Jung (1875-1971), Northrop Frye (1912-1991), and Joseph Campbell (1938-1987). Specifically, the selected corpus of theory will predominantly concentrate on Jung's analytical psychological approximation to the myth of the hero and Campbell's archetype of the quest. As the endeavor to better support Jung's and Campbell's propositions, the works of other scholars like Jonathan Culler, Jacques Derrida, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Octavio Paz will also be included in this section. Finally, the present theoretical framework will thematically include four vital subjects, closely related to the aim of the study; first, the idea of the conscious and unconscious realms of the mind, second, the theory of myth and archetypes; third, the process of individuation (the path to self-knowledge) along with their diverse complementary topics; and fourth, an overview of structuralism and key terms for this research as binary opposition, interpretation, ideology, and semiotics.

In the XIX century, the scholar J.G. Frazer published *The golden bough*, book in which he studied religious rituals and myth from different cultures around the world. According to Nandi (2016) and based on his analysis of archetypal patterns "Frazer argues that the death-rebirth myth is present in almost all cultural



mythologies and is acted out in terms of growing seasons and vegetation. The death-rebirth myth is symbolized by the death (i.e. final harvest) and rebirth (i.e. spring) of the god of vegetation (p. 58). Consequently, it can be asserted that Frazer's approach to mythology is based on the concrete elements of the physical world and his central motif is the archetype of resurrection, specifically the myths describing the assassination of the divine sovereign while Jungian criticism on its part aims at understanding the literary work and its connection with the *collective unconscious*<sup>7</sup>.

Taking into consideration these common elements, Jung worked and developed the concept of archetypes. According to Maduro & Wheelwright (in Sugg1992), "Jungian theory holds that the mind is not a tabula rasa at birth but that there is an archetypal ground plan built into the structure of the human brain" (p. 182). Hence, humankind shares immaterial content in their psyche and the primeval representations that Jung sees that repeats is what he addresses as archetypes. According to Jung, there are repetitive patterns that stem from structures in the human mind that are considered common to people from all around the world; these patterns are motifs, themes, narrative organization of the text, characters, and

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<sup>7</sup> Gras (1981) cites Jung when defining the collective unconscious: "... to the degree that human brains are uniformly differentiated, the mental functioning thereby made possible is also collective and universal. This explains, for example, the interesting fact that the unconscious processes of the most widely separated peoples and races show a quite remarkable correspondence, which displays itself among other things, in the extraordinary but well-authenticated analogies between the forms and motifs of autochthonous myths. The universal similarity of human brains lead to the universal possibility of a uniform mental functioning. This functioning is the collective psyche" (p. 472).

images that are found when analyzing a work of literature under the lens of archetypal and mythical criticism. Consequently, much of the aim of this research will be to look for an understanding of these universal patterns in Kinnell's book-length poem.

Another scholar who influenced archetypal literary criticism is Maud Bodkin (1951) with her book *Archetypal patterns in poetry*; she affirms that, when reading poetry and considering Jung's understanding of the human psyche, "the special emotional significance possessed by certain poems – a significance going beyond any definite meaning conveyed – he attributes to the stirring in the readers' mind, within or beneath his conscious response, of unconscious forces, which he terms 'primordial images,' or archetypes" (p. 1). She rejects the notion that archetypes are inherited in the structure of the brain; instead, for her, archetypes are persistent cultural symbols that are passed through generations via folklore, myth and literature. That is why, when analyzing poems, she affirms that "to bind associations together, the words within the haunting rhythm must play their part unaided, holding attention while the forces of feeling and attendant imagery negotiate in the antechambers of the mind" (p. 309). On the same token, Abrams (1999) declares that

Archetypal literary criticism was given impetus by Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* (1934) and flourished especially during the 1950s and 1960s. Some archetypal critics have dropped Jung's theory of the collective

unconscious as the deep source of these patterns; in the words of Northrop Frye, this theory is 'an unnecessary hypothesis,' and the recurrent archetypes are simply there, 'however they got there'" (p. 13).

Archetypal criticism, considering Jung's position on the collective unconscious and his analysis of universal patterns, developed during the second part of the XX century influencing different scholars as Campbell.

In brief, mainly, the positions of Jung and Campbell on mythical and archetypal criticism will be studied as the theoretical basis of this research. Campbell's pattern of the monomyth will be contemplated in the discussion for the movement in *The book of nightmares* is "forward," its journey is that of acquiring self-knowledge and rediscovering life; in other words, it is about understanding that life is to be experienced. Moreover, Frye's approach to myth and archetype will also be considered, when necessary, due to the fact that his and Jung's positions on the definition of archetypes offer an accurate background to understanding how myth is structured as well as what its relation to ideology is.

### **1. Jung's analytical theory of symbols, archetypes, and images**

Carl G. Jung was part of the psychoanalytic movement of the beginning of the XX Century. In the first years of his career, he became a disciple and follower of Sigmund Freud; moreover, he shared with the latter a common identification with the nature of the unconscious and its importance in trying to understand the human psyche. However, the understanding of the nature of the unconscious by Jung

diverged from Freud's position. Jung's vast contribution to the field of psychology is indeed related to the concept of the psyche, term coined to signify the soul or spirit and that at the turn of the XX century it increasingly came to refer to mind. When analyzing the structure of the psyche, Jung characterized four psychological functions that link every individual to the world, and which are:

1. Sensation: this function will tell the individual that "x" exists.
2. Thinking: its role is to say what *something* is.
3. Feeling: its task is to determine *the worth* something has.
4. Intuition: it allows to see the *possibilities* in the situation faced or the object.

Moreover, in Jungian psychology, one person's psyche can be seen as their total personality and it may circumscribe to a person's behavior, thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Consequently, if the mind is in control of who a person is, Jung's outmost concerns was to find paths to understand it. Hence, he divided the mind into three main realms that are the consciousness, the persona unconsciousness, and the collective unconscious, all of them in a dynamic interplay that will lead into potential growth and change: the individuation process.

### **The individuation process**

First, the conscious realm of the psyche can be described as one's field of cognizance which consists of the psychic contents a person has access to. At the center of this field of awareness, Jung locates the ego that is understood as an

individual's personality, just as the person is conscious of it. The ego forms the center of the field of consciousness and becomes the subject of all personal acts of consciousness. Therefore, the ego constitutes the filter for the different actions, considering the contents of experience are reflected in consciousness and which other are repressed, eliminated, or ignored. Acting as a filter, the ego becomes a cornerstone to the personal unconscious. In relation to the term of the ego and according to Freudian theory, it refers to the psychic structure that is going to intervene between society's laws (superego) and the primitive and instinctual drives (the id). In the case of Carl Jung, the ego is considered as a more dynamic and complex representation of the self which is composed of a conscious and unconscious aspect, and the same time it is collective and personal.

Regarding those elements that may have been disqualified and omitted from the ego, due to any kind of disapproval, being it social, cultural or familiar (parents), Jung circumscribes them to the *shadow*. However, even when the shadow may represent negative characteristics of a person, it might also embrace positive characteristics that were unable to be developed by the subject. On the other hand, the term *persona*, in Jungian terminology, reveals the characteristics that a person decides to hide or exploit. Hopcke (1989) states that "Jung saw the persona as a vital sector of the personality which provides the individual with a container, a protective covering for his inner self" (p. 141). As a result, an individual can have

different personae that will act according to the environment in which s/he works, studies or lives (professional and personal life).

Furthermore, the personal unconscious<sup>8</sup> refers to those events that an individual has not consciously been aware of; in other words, they have remained under the threshold of consciousness and have been absorbed subliminally. Following Jungian model of the personal unconscious, there may be many events that the ego represses or disregards for different reasons (stressing, deemed insignificant, simply forgotten). These events do not disappear completely from the psyche but occupy the personal unconscious and may have the potential to later influence unconsciously the individual's personality. The personal unconscious is not simply a receptacle of forgotten memories but the conscious and unconscious realm of the mind of a person where both dynamically interact and play an integral role in his/her life. One example of how the personal unconscious influences the life of an individual through behavior is via what has been defined as "complexes." For Freud, complexes arise due to childhood traumas; for Jung, instead, the root of complexes resides in a deeper and more fundamental level of the psyche than the personal unconscious, level that he defined as the collective unconscious<sup>9</sup>. Jung's

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<sup>8</sup> According to Campbell (Sugg, 1992, p.79), the personal unconscious "is composed largely of personal acquisitions, potentials, and dispositions, forgotten or repressed contents derived from one's own experience, etc."

<sup>9</sup> Rodríguez (2009) asserts that "la mente del niño no es una *tabula rasa*, libre y pura como suponía el empirismo ingenuo; sino más bien, una estructura mental configurada desde el nacimiento y desarrollada a través de las experiencias de la vida en compleja interacción con otras personas, con el medio y con la propia madurez neuronal del sujeto. Implica, por supuesto, un largo proceso evolutivo" (p. 73).

idea of the collective unconscious is one of his most important contributions to the field of psychology. He proposes that in addition to the personal unconscious that is mainly composed of the individuals' lives experiences, the collective unconscious will conform from universal elements that are inherited and that all human beings share.

Jung's invention of the collective unconscious was stimulated by far-reaching analysis of the unconscious material of his patients such as their dreams and fantasies as well as his studies of comparative religions and mythology. Jung found out mysterious similarities in his patients' dreams but there were also uncanny similarities in major mythological motifs and religious symbols around the world. Hence, in the first part of the XX century, Jung (1961) did an extensive process of self-analysis defined as "confrontation with the unconscious" (pp. 170-199) and it is in this period that he defined and described the structures of his theory on archetypes and the collective unconscious, among others. According to Jung (1934), in his work *Archetypes and the collective unconscious*, from the unconscious realm

[...] there emanate determining influences which, independently of tradition, guarantee in every single individual a similarity and even a sameness of experience, and also of the way it is represented imaginatively. One of the main proofs of this is the almost universal parallelism between mythological

motifs, which on account of their quality as primordial images, I have called archetypes (p. 58).

Consequently, the concept of “archetype” is distinctive of Jung’s terminology. As Jung’s research continued, he realized that many symbols form part of mythology, stories, fairy tales, and all kinds of artistic and creative human productions which he unified in the concept of the collective unconscious. In the light of this reading, all human beings have access to an infinite experiences and knowledge of the human condition that lies below the personal unconscious. Samuels (1985), in his book *Jung and the Post-Jungians*, affirms that

Jung begins from the human interaction in analysis or from observation of life, develops a theory which is then illustrated by comparative material or further observation. Only then could the mass of imagery and data from many sources be organised. The organisation itself then helps to understand one aspect or other of human behavior. Thus, the process is circular: human material - theory - illustration - application to human behavior (p. 5).

Accordingly, Jung’s theory develops into a continuum in which human experience becomes the source of knowledge that is then clarified and contrasted to other resources and as a result knowledge about human behavior is attained.

On his part, in *Man and his symbols*, Jung (1964) affirms that



Man uses the spoken or written word to express the meaning of what he wants to convey. His language is full of symbols, but he also often employs signs or images that are not strictly descriptive... What we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious meaning. It implies something vague, unknown, or hidden from us (p. 3).

Therefore, the words used by humankind are not as simple as a dictionary entry; on the contrary, words are filled with meaning, within a connotative realm, based on the person's usage of word(s). Hence, even when all people relate to the denotative meaning of a word, the latter may have a different representation in the psyche of the person that is using it. He goes further affirming that due to the fact that there are incalculable "things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend... Man also produces symbols unconsciously and spontaneously, in the form of dreams" (p. 4). Thus, the realm of meaning, through which people try to understand the inner and outer self and the world around, goes beyond what can be explained logically.

### **Archetypes**

As the world is populated by many different kinds of people in dissimilar places, one way to attempt to understand humanity is through a comparative method that can be utilized to reach a possible understanding of mythology and its

particulars. Consequently, it is through a comparison exercise of certain repetitive patterns in different cultures, separated by time and distance coordinates, that recurring models are discovered. Jung defined these patterns as “archetypes,” which etymologically come from “arche” that means primordial and “typos” that means typical. These archetypical images will circumscribe to the most primordial elements of human existence and experience; they manifest in people as influential and vigorous images that have repeated through time, from thousands of years ago to today.

Moreover, there are other patterns which give rise to specific motifs, as common in all mythology as in any individual's life. They are often discussed in terms of personifications which appear in dreams, but they can also be seen in themes of stories, mythological or lived. According to Adamski (2011) the “most important archetype is the self, which symbolizes the fullness of personality... archetypes that have the strongest impact on the human being are persona, shadow, anima/animus. They are so strong that they should be treated as separate and distinct elements of personality” (p. 565). These five main archetypes can be explained as follows:

1. The Self: this archetype is symbolized by a circle, especially if it is divided in four quadrants; and it signifies the coherent whole, in other words the unconscious and the consciousness reunited.
2. The Shadow: this pattern is part of the unconscious mind and represents the weaknesses and primeval instincts of the individual.

3. The *Anima*: this model is an element of Jung's theory of the collective unconscious; moreover, in the male unconscious, it represents the feminine inner personality.
4. The *Animus*: this archetype can be understood as the opposite of the anima; in other words, it represents the male inner personality in the female unconscious.
5. The *Persona*: this pattern is the "face" that individuals decide on presenting to the world; each person will choose his/hers in order to make an impression on others.

The same phenomenon will occur with other innate dispositions from which the unconscious emerges through basic symbolic representations like:

1. The mother: it represents an idealized version of a woman who is a nurturing mother; therefore, this pattern will represent what people have come to believe they want or see in a mother figure.
2. The child: this archetype is usually characterized by an individual or a god who is pondered an innocent without corruption. A character like this will generally represent hope and will provide the knowledge that develops from his innocence.
3. The maiden: as the "the child," this archetype will embody purity, innocence, and naiveté.

4. The hero: represents a pattern that faces danger and adversity but that displays courage and the will for self-sacrifice and morality.
5. The wise old man: it is typically represented as a kind and wise father-type figure. He would use his knowledge to offer guidance; besides, he may be presented as “foreign.”
6. The trickster: the archetype of the trickster, the dishonest person (fraud), refers to that individual that has the ability to be a master shapeshifter and a master of lying. It is fundamental to assert that besides these aforementioned characteristics, the trickster even when they question and mock authority, may also bring new knowledge.

Furthermore, all of the above are described as helpful and dangerous at the same time. Similarly, the rebirth psychic pattern discussed by Jung (1970a) is subdivided in five different categories that are:

1. Metempsychosis: it refers to the idea that humankind experiences different existences, so life is prolonged.
2. Reincarnation: this idea of rebirth affirms that life is continuous, and individuals may have access to memories lived in previous existences.
3. Resurrection: this concept refers to the return of human life after facing death; moreover.
4. Rebirth: this concept refers to the idea of improving and healing without changing one's essential nature.

5. Participation in the process of transformation: this stage is considered an “indirect rebirth;” in other words, the individual experiences change when s/he participates in a ritual (takes place outside the person).

As Jung revealed, in every person underlies the collective unconscious and with it different archetypes that connect individuals to the world of the urges, signs and patterns of thinking and behaving that are inherited from our predecessors. On the same token Bodkin (1951) asserts that archetypes are “experiences which have happened not to the individual but to his ancestors, and of which the results are inherited in the structure of the brain, a priori determinants of individual experience” (p. 19). Hence, these primordial images, aforementioned, belong to a collectivity but are experienced individually.

## **2. Joseph Campbell and his theory of the monomyth**

J. Campbell is widely known for his vast research on the importance of myth. Moreover, he is also a prominent scholar who influenced literary criticism in the second part of the XX century. In his book *The hero with a thousand faces*, he analyzes the omnipresent story of the hero to which he ascribes psychological universal meaning. Consequently, Campbell endeavored to develop the theory of the *monomyth* which is essentially a story that underlies myths from throughout the world. But before starting this discussion, it is crucial to consider that, throughout the monomyth, symbols and archetypes can be discussed and analyzed in an attempt to understand humankind and its deeds. According to Campbell (2004b),

the monomyth is "a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation, initiation, return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (p. 23) and according to Phillips (1975, p. 2) can be presented as follows:

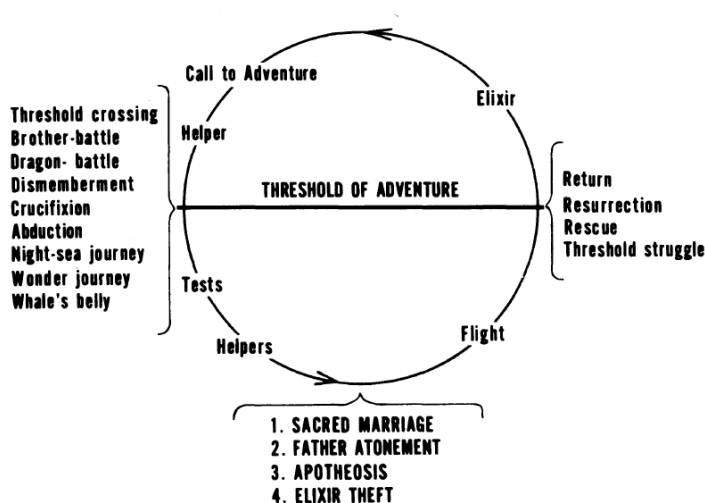


Figure 1. Description of the monomyth or journey of the hero according to Phillips (1975).

Campbell (2004b) declares that in order to understand the diagram we must take into consideration that

The mythological hero, setting forth from his common-day hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark... or be slain by the opponent and descend in death.

Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again – if the powers have remained unfriendly to him – his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir) (p. 211).

According to Campbell, the hero quest happens to exist in many cultures around the world and throughout time this pattern has prevailed with some minor differences. This model can be approached as the manifestation of humankind to represent its dilemmas and trying to understand the happenings in their lives. Rodríguez (2009) affirms that human beings belong to a

Mundo de signos, símbolos, mitos y metáforas. Sin ellos la especie humana se hubiera extinguido hace milenios, porque parece incuestionable que el mito desempeña un papel esencial en la vida cotidiana y en el intercambio social; está en los fundamentos de la cultura y en la forma cómo contemplamos el mundo. Desde el mito se define nuestra acción o inacción, así como nuestro lugar en el universo” (p. 66)<sup>10</sup>.

Consequently, the hero's journey, macro o micro, will be experienced by every single person around the world, because this voyage is about progression and learning in any realm of life. Rituals are performed every day in life among different audiences. As members of society, individuals face moments of separation from family, friends, or colleagues, to encounter ordeals through which they might achieve more knowledge to learn about themselves. There might be people who consider this reading of how human beings' lives are interpreted as very positive for, as its premise, you can find the notion that we can improve life, enrich the relationship with others, and then grasp understanding of the self and experiencing life.

### **Defining myth and mythology**

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<sup>10</sup> “A world of signs, symbols, myths, and metaphors. Without them, humankind would have disappeared millenniums ago, it seems unquestionable that myth performs an essential role in everyday life and social exchange; it is in the fundamentals of culture and in the way in which we perceive the world. Our action of inaction is defined from myth likewise our place in the universe” (my translation).



In general, the term “mythology” represents an insightful evidence of humanity’s belonging to a past, present, and future time. Barthes (1999) in the book *Mythologies* affirms that “It is not any type: language needs special conditions in order to become myth...But what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form” (p. 109).

Defining the term myth can be laborious work in the sense that, depending on the approach used, the term might have responded to different interests. Usually, for the majority of people without an academic background in the field, a myth is an ancient story of gods and goddesses that foster a sense of community. These stories are then not “real” but a fabrication of the human psyche. Halpé (2011) in “Between myth and meaning: the function of myth in four postcolonial novels” affirms that

Myths are, by nature, both untrue and true. What separates a myth from any other kind of narrative is a peculiar affective quality or narrative potency that carries its ideological matter in disguise. This “affect” elevates myth above ordinary speech and aligns it with the rhetoric and matter of sacred narrative. As such, mythical narrative requires a collective investment from its author and audience that elevates speech and story to the status of a myth (p. 3).

It is fundamental to consider that myths must be approached symbolically as to reveal “truths” about the humankind psychic existence and that myths exist today; or as Barthes (1999) affirms

There are no eternal ones; for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have a historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things (p. 110).

Consequently, myth can be defined neither by its object nor by its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning: for instance, the arrow which is brought in order to signify a challenge is also a kind of speech. Besides defining the term myth, it is also critical to state its purpose; consequently, Campbell (2004b) affirms that “it has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back” (p. 7). As he asserts, humankind requires rituals and representations to function in society. Thus, even when people might not be aware of myth and rituals as part of their lives, he affirms that they do participate in rituals through simple and everyday acts like eating. As a matter of fact, meeting new people, greeting friends or acquaintances, or performing any activity, we all follow rituals that make us who we are, developing individual and

communal mythologies. Campbell (2004a, pp. 104-108) enumerates four main functions of mythology:

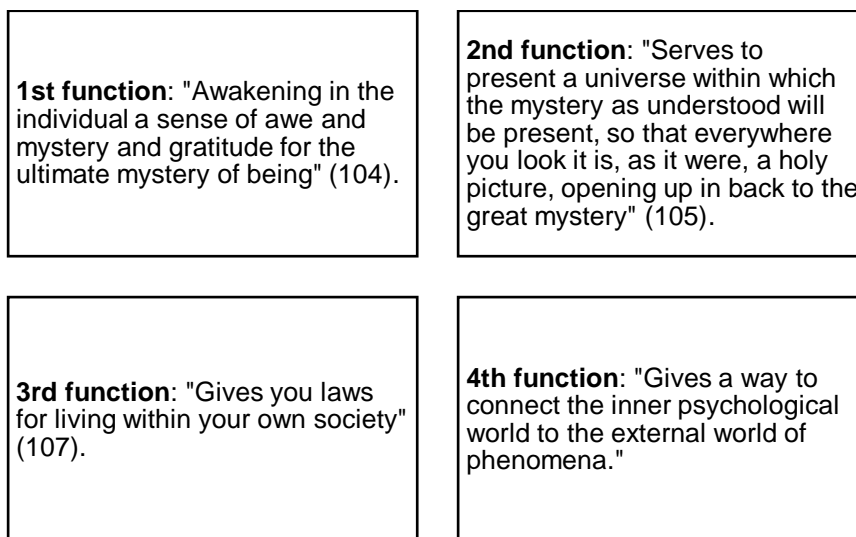


Figure 2. Functions of mythology as presented by J. Campbell (2004a)

As presented in the previous figure, mythology is part of the individual as well as the society to which the person belongs.

### **Myth as ideology**

In order to fully understand ideology as a key to understand humankind, it is essential to remember the two levels of signification: the denotative and the connotative. The first one is seen as fundamentally representational and relatively self-contained. The latter mirrors the values which are associated to the sign. However, there is a third level of signification that is often "forgotten" and that is: myth. Myth reflects the variable and cultural concepts that support the structure of a

specific worldview. The reference to the term myth takes readers to fables and legends of gods, semi-gods and heroes that work as primordial types in a primitive view of the world. Nevertheless, for Barthes (1999), myths are the dominant ideologies of the world that display a message. Thus, this message, does not only refer to oral speech or written discourse but to other types of texts of life like publicity, photography, films, cartoons, and comic strips. Hence, the “message,” as this theorist affirms, refers to “any significant unit or synthesis, whether verbal or visual” (p. 111). As stated before, if any significant unit or sign belongs to a construction of an ideological process, then myths become shared ways of conceptualizing a sign within a culture. How does this process occur? Who are the ones that lead the process of signification?

As part of a myth, people become defenders of an ideology and they compare and contrast themselves in terms of other myths reinforced by the canon, for example: beauty, suffering or joy. Since poetry is a signifying practice of a given time and a place, it can reflect or reject the myths culture has come to accept as “true.” Paz (1995) states “En el mundo moderno todo funciona como si la muerte no existiera. Nadie cuenta con ella<sup>11</sup>” (p. 192). For Paz, as we will see for Kinnell, everything suppresses death: “las prédicas de los políticos, los anuncios de los comerciantes, la moral pública, las costumbres, la alegría a bajo precio y la salud

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<sup>11</sup> “In the modern world everything works as if death did not exist. Nobody counts on her” (my translation).

al alcance de todos que nos ofrecen hospitales, farmacias y campos deportivos<sup>12</sup>.”

Paz, like Kinnell, affirms that the world has made people believe that death is not part of life but its punishment (p. 192).

Paz (1995) affirms that “la criatura – el ser en su inocencia animal – contempla lo Abierto, al contrario de nosotros que jamás vemos hacia Adelante, hacia lo absoluto”<sup>13</sup> (p. 197). For him people are frightened and do not dare to see death as what it is, a unity that has death in it; and “[L]o abierto es el mundo en donde los contrarios se reconcilian y la luz y la sombra se funden<sup>14</sup>” (p. 197). Life and death complement each other; one cannot exist without the other. In ancient cultures, death was part a continuation of life and the corpses were buried with their belongings for their life would continue after this; nevertheless, it seems that this reading of the world has changed for this contemporary society.

### 3. Northrop Frye’s mythical criticism

When discussing mythical criticism in the Twentieth Century, Frye is one of the most influential critics. In 1951, he published the article “The archetypes of literature.” In this article, he not only discussed primitive rituals but also nature myths that he patterns on the seasonal cycles. This text was the also precursor of *Anatomy*

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<sup>12</sup> “the speech of politicians, commercial advertisements, public morality, customs, cheap happiness, and the promise of everyday health offered by hospitals, drugstores and sport courts” (my translation)

<sup>13</sup> “The child – the being in its primitive innocence – stares at the Open, contrarily to what we do, us who never see beyond, towards the Absolute” (my translation).

<sup>14</sup> “The Open is the realm where the contraries reconcile, and light and darkness become one” (my translation).

*of criticism* (1957), book that develops an elaborate critical theory that is based on archetypal literary genres; most specifically, he discussed the role of archetypes and myth when creating meaning in literary texts. For Frye (1971), an archetype is “a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience. And as the archetype is the communicable symbol, archetypal criticism is primarily concerned with literature as a social fact and as a mode of communication” (p.99). Frye defines the archetype as an image that is so recurrent in literary texts that is likely to be recognized by the reader as an element of an individual’s literary experience.

Frye analyzed different scholars like Freud, Blake, Frazer and Spengler besides studying as a source *The Bible*; however, Jung’s idea of the *collective unconscious* seems to have been particularly important in his analysis (Sugg, 1992, p. 21). Jung’s ideas offer Frye a counterpoint to his analysis and construction of archetype. It is important to consider that Frye takes Jung’s notion of the archetype as a source for his *Anatomy of criticism*; however, he will differ from Jung’s standpoint. For Frye, myth will be mediated and adapted to individual specificities while for Jung myth responds to a phenomenon in which all myths will eventually return to a point in the psyche.

### **Mythoi theory**

For Frye (1951), rituals are part of individuals’ life and when they are performed their meaning is underlying the act itself. Moreover, he asserts that “[t]he

myth is the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence, the myth is the archetype” (p. 104); moreover, he affirms that “[i]n the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility and partly god or archetypal human being” (1951, p. 110). It is then that he establishes four different phases of the myth (myth as genre) and that are:

1. Comedy: the mythos of spring, dawn, and birth phase.
2. Romance: the mythos of summer, zenith, and marriage or triumph phase.
3. Tragedy and elegy: the mythos of autumn, sunset and dead phase.
4. Irony and satire: the mythos of winter, darkness, and dissolution phase.

It is then that Frye proposes that literature exemplifies the repetition of the life cycle through nature’s phases of being born, growing, maturing, declining and dying, and then resurrecting (rebirth and the reiteration of the cycle). Frye aligns comedy with the mythos of spring because this genre is differentiated by the birth of the hero, renewal and rebirth; moreover, spring embodies the conquest over winter and darkness. Summer is paired with romance because the former is the culmination of life in the seasonal calendar, and this genre will usually culminate with marriage and triumph. The tragedy genre is linked to autumn since it represents *the fall* or demise of the protagonist. Finally, satire is paralleled to winter for it is *dark* genre which

conveys a disenchanted and mocking form; moreover, satire will foster a return to chaos and to the downfall of the hero.

Most of Frye's interest is in "the function and effect of archetypes" (Nandi, 2016, p. 59), and he affirms that "[t]he archetypal critic studies the poem as part of poetry, and poetry as part of the total human imitation of nature that we call civilization. Civilization is not merely an imitation of nature, but the process of making a total human form out of nature" (Frye, 1971, p. 105). Thus, it is in this juxtaposition of realities that one mirrors the other. Accordingly, the context of the genre will govern how an image should be decoded; hence, Frye defines five natural domains:

1. Human: this realm can be tragic or comedic. For the former, the human world will be understood as community centered and wish-fulfilling; on the other hand, the latter will resemble a world of separation and a fallen hero.
2. Animal: depending on its focus, comedic or tragic, animals would be attained as docile and gentle or rapacious and predatory.
3. Vegetation: nature will be divided either in a pastoral and green flowery gardens and places (comedy) or barren and dangerously wild vegetation (tragedy).
4. Mineral: the mineral will be comprised of rocks, temples and buildings representing the comedic or deserted places and in ruins that will exemplify the tragic.



5. Water: placid rivers and brooks will characterize the comedic while the deep seas and floods will embody the tragic.

Frye takes the different phases of myth and parallels the natural domains that individuals experience in life and the rituals that may associated with them. Thus, literary myth criticism, considers that for humanity, rituals have a special implication for they are not performed as nature develops its natural process but, a human ritual “seems to be something of a voluntary effort (hence the magical element in it) ... a ritual being a temporal sequence of acts in which the conscious meaning of significance is latent” (Frye, 1951, pp. 103-104). On his part, Beltrán (2009) affirms that

Lo que hace grande a Frye es su disposición a dar alguna respuesta al gran problema que plantea el acontecimiento literario en su conjunto. Esta disposición se funda en la certeza de que no son posibles las respuestas parciales (de ahí su reivindicación de “toda la literatura”) y de que tampoco son demasiado útiles las propuestas que conciben el acontecimiento literario como un reflejo o consecuencia de otro fenómeno (sea antropológico, psicológico o político, entre otras posibilidades)<sup>15</sup> (p. 55).

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<sup>15</sup> “What makes Frye great is his disposition to give an answer to the problem that literature poses. This disposition is founded on the certainty that there is no room for half-answers (that is the reason why he discusses literature as a whole) and that the proposals that consider literature as mirroring or responding to another phenomenon are not useful (be it anthropological, psychological, political, among others)” (my translation).

Fletcher (1975) backs up his idea when affirming that “Frye apparently loves poetry for its own sake, a quality not always present even among the most brilliant critics” (p. 742). However, Frye’s position regarding literary studies did not come to be proven correct for he could not achieve the liberation of literary texts from other disciplines as today literature is usually studied under different theoretical approaches and archetypal criticism analyzes literature as a multidisciplinary genre. It is this last characteristic the one that leads this research into valuing elements from structuralism and post structuralism as fundamental to understand myth, archetype and the monomyth.

#### **4. Structuralism, deconstruction and main theorists: Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Derrida and Jonathan Culler**

Even when the overall aim of my research is to analyze, from a mythical and archetypal stance, the function of the hero’s journey in Kinnell’s *The book of nightmares* in order to attain self-knowledge of the life-death cycle, it is fundamental to consider other scholars’ approaches to the understanding of texts, in this case Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, and Culler will be studied for a better understanding of the term binary oppositions and sign.

Lévi-Strauss was an anthropologist who established a profound self-criticism trying to make a balance between the *civilized* and the *primitive* (considering an ethnocentric point of view). He coined influential terms that are now used like cultural diversity and multiculturalism terms that emphasize the importance of always

respecting the differences among the different groups of people. He defines his field of study as structuralist anthropology; for Lévi-Strauss (1978)

there is nothing more than that in the structuralist approach; it is the quest for the invariant elements among superficial differences. (...) what we call structuralism in the field of linguistics or anthropology, or the like, is nothing other than a very pale and faint imitation of what the hard sciences, as I think you call them in English, have been doing all the time (p. 2).

Thus, for him structuralism is a system in which every element in a group would only be understood by its relation to other elements for they are all part of a larger structure. Likewise, in the late 40's, Derrida, an underprivileged student due to his origin (Algerian and Jewish) moved to France to continue his studies; in the late 1960's he started developing ideas that dazed the world. The term that most people associated him with is deconstruction; this term in its most basic sense implies the disassembling of an extreme allegiance to an idea and learning to see the aspects of the *truth* that may be buried in its opposite. Meaning, for deconstruction, is not a product but a process that makes it impossible to favor a fixed center/origin in the construction of meaning. Similarly, in the mid 70's in the United States, Culler became the voice of structuralism in this part of the world. According to his position, there is a need to return to Ferdinand de Saussure's to do more research on *langue*, the shared system of language in a society. Moreover,

Culler believed in literary competence<sup>16</sup>, giving readers an internalized set of rules that govern the act of interpretation; consequently, there should be a different shift in terms of interpretation, from the text to the reader.

Furthermore, if all the underlying structures of meaningful events and practices could be analyzed, the result will reveal patterns that characterize the systems that make these practices possible. In brief, the positions of these three intellectuals in regard to binary oppositions, interpretation, and ideology, within the realm of semiotics, will be studied to attempt to understand the underlying structures of signification in terms of binary oppositions and signs in Kinnell's *The book of nightmares*.

### **Literary structuralism**

Literature, as a social product, has been studied through different approaches and literary structuralism is one of those. However, before analyzing what it means, it is important to consider that for structuralists language does not exist in isolation but only in a system; consequently, meaning is produced through the analysis of the interacting elements of the social/cultural context from which it develops. This critical

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<sup>16</sup> Lazar (1993) discusses Chomsky's notion of 'grammatical competence' and in regards to literary competence affirms that "[t]his is the idea that all speakers of any language possess an internalised grammar which allows them to produce and understand utterances which they may not have heard before, provided that these utterances conform to the grammatical rules of the language they are speaking. In the same way, some theorists, in particular Culler, have argued that effective readers of a literary text possess 'literary competence', in that they have an implicit understanding of, and familiarity with, certain conventions which allow them to take the words on the page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meanings" (p. 12).

position assumes that there has to be a specific order as Lévi-Strauss (1978) affirms:

To speak of rules and to speak of meaning is to speak of the same thing; and if we look at all the intellectual undertakings of mankind, as far as they have been recorded all over the world, the common denominator is always to introduce some kind of order. (...) the need probably exists because there is some order in the universe and the universe is not a chaos (p. 4).

Hence, within the scope of structuralism, meaning will be created through the examination of the interrelating elements of the social/cultural framework from which it arises. Moreover, for structuralists, the work of the Swiss scholar Ferdinand de Saussure, at the beginning of the XX century, has been profoundly influential. Selden & Widdowson (1993) affirm that he “makes a fundamental distinction between *langue* and *parole* – between the language *system*, which pre-exists actual examples of language, and the individual utterance” (p. 104). Thus, *langue* becomes the shared system of language in a society and *parole* the single speech acts of people; as a result, language is perceived as being passively assimilated by the persons and it is not private.

Moreover, for Saussure, signs can exist only in opposition to other signs since their meaning depends on their value relationships to other signs (binary oppositions – BO's). Selden (1989) asserts that structuralists “have argued that binary oppositions are fundamental to human language, cognition and communication. We

use BO's to mark *differences* in an otherwise apparently random sequence of features, and thus to give shape to our experience and to the universe" (p. 56). The term binary is used due to the fact that when identifying phonemes (the smallest meaningful unit of sound), individuals will make use of different binary oppositions to discriminate between otherwise alike sounds. It should be noted that for Culler, distinctively, binary oppositions are a tool used by the reader to assign meaning to literary texts; Culler (2011) declares that "[t]o read something as literature is to consider it as a linguistic event that has meaning in relation to other discourses: for example, as a poem that plays on possibilities created by previous poems or as a novel that puts on stage and criticizes the political rhetoric of its day" (pp. 33-34). Hence, individuals create meaning through a comparison-contrast experience that leads to interpretation. It should not be forgotten that for Culler, the literary act is a response/reaction of culture and its products; consequently, when writing a text there will be a need for reading and it is in this last phase that meaning will be analyzed.

When considering the act of interpretation, for structuralism, the sign is composed of the signifier and the signified:

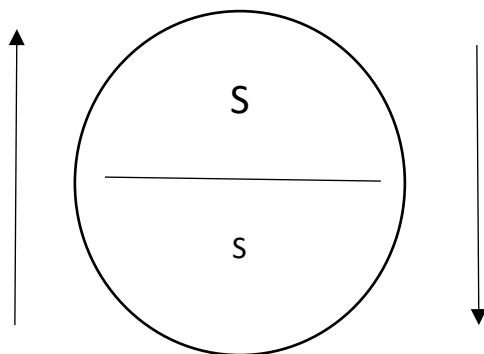


Figure 3. Signified and signified.

Saussure assigns two characteristics to the sign:

1. Arbitrariness: there is no natural bond between the signifier and the signified. There is nothing that logically links a particular sound image to a concept.
2. Linearity of the signifier: the signifier exists in time and that time can be measured as linear (not being able to utter or write two words at the exact same time).

Language is a sign system that many value as fundamental and it is ruled by arbitrariness and linearity. For structuralists, language presents the following characteristics:

1. Language structures the perception of the world; in other words, individuals make sense of the world through language.
2. Language is understandable as a system of signs.
3. Literature is thought as a manifestation of sign systems.
4. No sign system is completely understandable, each capture part of a sign's meaning.

If language is a system that is comprehensible within its signs, being it a system, its analysis is based on the field of semiotics, the study of sign systems. It is the philosopher C.S. Peirce (Selden & Widdowson, 1993; Eagleton, 1996) the

American founder of semiotics. He distinguished three different types of signs: the icon, the index and the symbol. In general, we can affirm that while the icon will be present when the sign resembled, in some way, what it stood for; when the sign is associated with its referent, there is an index; and the symbol will have an arbitrary or conventional link in relation to its referent.

Semiotics is a field that is both communication and a signifying process. It is a transformative reading of “reality” that awakens a state of alerting in the readers opening gates for the generation of different meanings, for different reader-writers with the same text. Eco (1980), in his book *Tratado de semiótica general*, states that “un Proyecto de semiótica general involucra una teoría de códigos y una teoría de la producción de signos” (pp. 25-26)<sup>17</sup>. The first refers to semiotics as a signifying practice while the latter deals with the communication process that takes place every time there is communication. Semiotics as a science emphasizes the role of the sign systems, in every person and culture, for the construction of a subjective and/or communal reality. This is a science that can help people be aware that many times what they consider a “normal” or “common” decision or situation is not so innocent. For, although everything around us exists, either if addressed or not as a sign, we get to know and experience life through signs. People cannot see beyond what their

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<sup>17</sup> “A general semiotic project involves a theory of codes and a theory of the production of signs” (my translation).



sign system allows them to see. As a result, the concept of an objective reality does not exist. That is just a mere illusion of contemporary society.

What is decisive in semiotics is that it provides a unifying framework for working with different signifying practices in which all can be read including painting, sculpture, writing processes, body language, photography, literature, and speech, among others. This is how people can get to know that what seems “natural” and/or “universal” or “normal” has been generated by the sign system that surrounds them. For Zeledón & Pérez (1995),

El principio de cualquier discurso ideológico es el "sujeto" dirigido y construido a través del discurso; las interpelaciones (políticas, religiosas, familiares) coexisten articuladas en un discurso ideológico de relativa unidad. Como "sujeto", cada persona recibe - a través de los procesos ideológicos - una identidad social. Como resultado, es imposible renunciar a una ideología personal sin perder la propia "personalidad", es decir, omitir las características del sistema al que se pertenece (p. 3)<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> “The principle of any ideological discourse is the ‘subject’ addressed and so constructed through the discourse; the interpellations (political, religious, familiar) coexist articulated in an ideological discourse of relative unity. As a “subject,” every person receives – through the ideological processes – a social identity. As a result, it is impossible to resign to a personal ideology without losing the own “personality;” in other words, omitting the characteristics of the system to which one belongs” (my translation).

With time, this system becomes, according to Dodd (1995) more homogenized through the media that are believed “to create changes in economics, values, tastes, languages, families, and institutions” (p. 237). Consequently, he states that the media:

Dominate our perceptions of an even, since it is precisely through some medium that we become aware of many events in our world. To put it loosely, we become the recipients of those scenes that the director selects, the reporter pens, and the gatekeeper for the news service allows to go through the wire. Should error exist, listeners have no way to check reality since the medium has, in a sense, become the reality (p. 240).

However, if studied through semiotics any sign is a construction of the ideological process in specific time and space coordinates. People believe that common sense suggests that they are unique individuals with a unified identity and ideas of their own. Through semiotics we can get to know that is the sign system of every culture the one that creates and maintains a sense of identity. The sense of “self” emerges from conventional and pre-existing conventions that we did not create. We cannot say that we are pre-determined for this or that kind of life but what we can affirm is that we are shaped by our system of signs. Nevertheless, it cannot be forgotten that there are many inconsistencies, incoherencies, and gaps in life that offer a chance for social change. And, most importantly, that the role of

ideology is to suppress all these instances in the interest of the dominant groups, so that there is no trembling of the status quo. Either it can be felt or seen, the construction of reality is part of a struggle between those in power and those who are not, but who might likely switch positions to see the world through different glasses.

Consequently, this study will examine the field of myth and archetypal criticism in relation to the book-length poem by Galway Kinnell, *The book of nightmares*. Positions by Carl G. Jung and Joseph Campbell, Octavio Paz, Northrop Frye, and Roland Barthes will be provided to demonstrate the relevance of each in relation to analyzing this long poem. The first discussion chapter will be devoted to the examination of the functions of the concept of “myth” in the text. It must be recalled that humankind has been bestowed upon former knowledge and wisdom to understand the world not only denotatively but also connotatively, and the access to this information can be done through symbols and archetypes; and it is this undertaking the one that will be seized in the study of this book-length poem.

## CHAPTER II

### UNDERSTANDING THE FUNCTIONS OF MYTH THROUGHOUT *THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES*

*The book of nightmares* is a *vers libre* poem that has been considered by many scholars as Galway Kinnell's masterpiece due to its unity and powerful message about humanity. For some other critics, like Donald Davie, "Galway Kinnell is a man who hungers for the spiritual, who has no special capacity for spiritual apprehensions, who has been culturally conditioned moreover to resist the very disciplines that might have opened him up to the spiritual apprehension he hungers for" (in Nelson 1987, p. 159). It is a fact that nowadays people hunger for spirituality and that many label themselves "seekers of truth;" however, this is not the case with Kinnell's poetry. It can become a problem, as Kinnell himself states, "that readers, especially those trained in universities, tend to look straight off for a symbolic interpretation" (Kinnell 1978 p. 61) His poems are about life and about all that he has experienced because his verses stop "telling what once happened to this or that person, and turn to the reader and try to generalize about what happens to us all" (Kinnell 1978, p. 42). He works with life and what it entangles. Supporting this thesis, Denise Levertov declared that:

I read the whole *Book of Nightmares* to my class at our final meeting, a grand farewell, and everyone, including me, thought it magnificent. "A universe,"

said one, after the last words and a long silence. It encompasses within the breadth of it both political rage and satire, and the most lyrical tenderness, and holds them together: coheres (in Nelson 1987, p.135).

Hence, in *The book of nightmares*, Kinnell thrives in discussing life as a matter of everyday experience; even though its title may generate some apprehension in the readers. The nightmares discussed in this poetic text are the situations humankind may dread to face, as walking in “dead shoes” (p. 19), facing death, there is no other road. Jung (2010) affirms that “[t]o discuss the problems connected with the stages of human development is an exciting task, for it means nothing less than unfolding a picture of psychic life in its entirety from the cradle to the grave” (p. 95) and so does this poem. Moreover, Kinnell believes that humanity denies itself the deepest experience of real life: there must be a reconciliation of binary oppositions. This collection of poems opens with a verse that celebrates a baby’s birth, Maud’s; and as she is starting to come out into the world, she “press[es] a knee or elbow / along the slippery wall, sculpting / the world with each thrash – the stream / of omphalos blood humming all about you” (p. 5). There is a mother delivering a baby that “skids out on her face into light, / this peck / of stunned flesh / clotted with celestial cheesiness, glowing / with the astral violet / of the underlife. / And as they cut / her tie to the darkness / she dies a moment, turns blue as coal, / the limbs shaking” (p. 6). The moment of birth also becomes the moment to start experiencing death because “she dies a moment.” People look for an instant of

complete life and this can only be achieved when polarities come together and become one.

In this poetic collection, Kinnell speaks to Maud and Fergus – his children; however, this fact does not constrain the poem to be enjoyed by others, as Nelson states “[A] poem expresses one’s most private feeling; and these turn out to be the feelings of everyone else as well ... The poem becomes simply the voice of a creature on earth speaking” (8). There is not a unique addressee but an idea that Paz portrays in many of his texts: that of an atemporal temporality. Consequently, this study examines the field of myth and archetypal criticism in relation to the book-poem by Galway Kinnell, *The book of nightmares*, as well as the reconciliation of binary oppositions. To achieve this purpose, positions by Carl G. Jung and Joseph Campbell, Octavio Paz, Northrop Frye, and Roland Barthes will be provided to demonstrate the relevance of each in relation to reading myth and archetype in this book-poem.

## **A. Introduction**

When defining myth, denotatively or connotatively, and acquiescing with such explanation, has usually presented a difficulty for humankind. Henderson (1995), trying to understand the term, states that today the historical accounts of humanity are regaining life through the symbolic images and myths of a distant past that emerge in the artistic expressions present in the world’s ancient treasures, from small artifacts to old languages. It cannot not be thought-provoking to consider that

the mind, still not totally understood, preserves hints from earlier eras of development that at a conscious level are ignored; however, at an unconscious level, most people respond to them without being aware. Campbell (2004a), on his part, asserts that “myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestations” (p. 1). For Campbell, myth becomes the source of knowledge and creativity that decant into life. On his part, Barthes (1999) affirms that myth “is a system of communication, that it is a message ... Myth can be defined neither by its object nor by its material, for any material can arbitrarily be endowed with meaning: the arrow which is brought in order to signify a challenge is also a kind of speech” (pp. 109-110). Consequently, the language that is spoken transmutes into Campbell’s “human cultural manifestations” that societies experience every day. Just like Campbell and Barthes, Jung affirms that myth morphs into a metaphor for human corporal practices and activities. Moreover, for Jung, the archetypes represent elemental psychic patterns that all humans have in common and through and into which people organize their personal experiences.

Considering the previous discussion of the word *myth*, and the limitations that a single definition may present, a categorization of its purposes will be presented. Campbell (2004a) works on recording the different functions that concur in myth:

1. the reconciliation of consciousness to the preconditions of its own existence with gratitude and love;
2. the understanding of life and existence to an individual's consciousness, maintaining a sense of mystical awe;
3. the validation and maintenance of a sociological system, the rights and wrongs according to a particular group of people;
4. the psychological learning members of societies go through in the different stages of life individuals' experience (from birth to death).

It is through the analysis of these functions that this chapter will be developed in search of a better understanding of each in the book-length poem, *The book of nightmares*. For the aim of the literary analysis of this poem, this chapter will focus on the complete text as a unit and not on specific poems or sections of poems. Consequently, Campbell's proposal on the functions of myth in society will be utilized as its guiding principle.

## **B. The functions of myth**

Joseph Campbell was a scholar who dedicated his professional life to the study and analysis of the mythologies of different cultures and at the same time he tried to apply this knowledge to the lives of contemporary individuals. Hence, for him, mythology offers a guiding rod to understand the place of the people in the universe; furthermore, it is through this set of rules that society may flourish into purposeful communities. For this scholar, each of these functions provides a model



for human beings on an individual level and that is probably why Campbell (1991) asserts that “[a] ritual is the enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth” (p. 103).

### **1. The mystical function**

Campbell’s first function of myth is the metaphysical or mystical function that focuses on “evoke[ing] in the individual a sense of grateful, affirmative awe before the monstrous mystery that is existence” (Campbell 2004a, p. 6); for this scholar, the mysteries found in life and the universe comprise those that connect to the existence of the divinities and human experience. An example of this type of mythology is what Campbell identifies as “The Great Reversal.” This myth recounts the story of humankind and how it fell from the grace of the gods (depending on the culture being analyzed) and it looks for some kind of reconciliation, for trying to understand the reasons why life presents difficulties, like facing death, and for instilling mystery in the cosmos. It is Campbell (2004a) who affirms that “life lives on life (...) This business of life living on life – on death – had been in process for billions of years before eyes opened (...) The organs of life had evolved to depend on the death of others for their existence” (p. 3). And this being the first function of myth, he declares that “[t]he only way to affirm life is to affirm it to the root, to the rotten, horrendous base. It is this kind of affirmation that one finds in the primitive rites” (p. 4); rituals that Kinnell summons in his work in order to understand the preconditions of its own existence.

Remarkably, *The book of nightmares* has been considered Kinnell's autobiographical poetic piece for it confronts directly the rhythms of existence from birth to death. This book-poem invokes the poet's relation to his own self as a parent, husband and individual as well as his finding of who he is and what the life-death continuum may offer. In "Under the Maud moon" and "Lastness," first and last poem respectively, Kinnell convokes his children, Maud and Fergus, to acknowledge a characteristic feature of this life-death cycle; it seems that for Kinnell, to come into being also involves dying to what has been experienced before, even at the moment of birth. In the first poem, the tropes of birth, death, nature and madness guide the reader into understanding how through living death is also experienced. Nevertheless, before starting the discussion of this first section, it is essential to analyze its title. The moon's name is Maud, a feminine German name that translates as "powerful battle;" furthermore, it is also vital to notice that the events in the poem will happen at nighttime as the title signals: "Under the Maud moon." It is at this time when the baby, that is "powerful in battle," is being born and so does the speaker emphasize when he depicts the moment of delivery and states that

Her head  
 enters the headhold  
 which starts sucking her forth: being itself  
 closes down all over her, gives her  
 into the shuddering

grip of departure,

As the baby is born, the professionals in charge of her delivery have to hold the baby's head out of the womb until she is born; it is at this moment when as experiencing life, the baby simultaneously experiences death as the "(...) the slow, / agonized clenches

making / the last mold of her life in the dark" (p. 6). The imagery presented in this previous line echoes a painful moment for the baby, physically and emotionally, for she is taken from life to death, into that "grip of departure," and vice versa in an endless continuum. For the speaker, it is in this moment when Maud is born that, "the old lonely, bellybutton" is being emptied to start life from the dark into dark "[a]nd as they cut / her tie to the darkness / she dies / a moment / turns blue as coal;" this baby girl dies a moment in order to live. Her "limbs shaking / as the memories rush out of them (p. 6);" those memories that the baby has had in the womb disappear to *re-start* her life in society.

Indeed, the life-death infinite course is invoked in the imagery presented. When a baby is born s/he also dies to darkness as s/he comes to "the light" because in the concrete world individuals share life with death, which is the only constant. The trembling extremities of the baby mirror the embrace he proclaims as a torn one that in its defectiveness achieves perfection. Furthermore, Kinnell's constant involvement with the reality of death and the mortality of all living things is further depicted when, as the delivery of the baby takes place, the doctors "hang her up /

by the feet,” and as “she sucks / air, screams / her first song – and turns rose” (p. 6). As the persona signals baby Maud’s birth, the first position to take in life, after being delivered, is that of an inverted cross that may signal future grief and pain for the baby. Furthermore, as she breathes air for the first time, she is awakened into what is known as life and it is at this moment when her “slow, / beating, featherless arms / already clutching at the emptiness” (pp. 6-7) resemble the desolation in life the speaker has formerly felt when his “held note / remains – a love-note” that twists “under [his] tongue, like a coyote’s bark, / curving off, into a /howl” (p. 4). His voice transforms into a cry of desperation that cannot be understood. Just as the baby’s “slow” wings cannot take off to fly, the persona is not able to sing but to moan.

It is in this primitive and ritualistic moment of birth when humankind is faced with death, humanity’s other side of the scale; because, like animals, babies trust the natural rhythm of life, they do not wonder or question, they confide in the mystery of life. Moreover, Campbell (1991) affirms that as members of a society we *think* we “seek a meaning for life;” however, he states that what we are “seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on purely physical plane will have resonances within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel that rapture of being alive. That’s what it’s all about, and that’s what these clues help us to find within ourselves” (p. 5). Besides, Campbell (2004a) affirms that for a person to understand the first function of myth, the sense of wonder towards the inscrutability of existence must be experienced, just as the old traditions of the world

have accepted it as it is, realizing that life is something that consumes itself (p. 104). As this scholar declares, for life to be, it should nourish on life; thus, in the second section of the book-length poem, “The hen flower,” death will be summoned exactly at the moment of the death of the hen:

When the ax-  
 scented breeze flourishes  
 about her, her cheeks crush in,  
 her comb  
 grays, the gizzard  
 that turns the thousand acidic millstones of her fate  
 convulses: ready or not  
 the next egg, bobbling  
 its globe of golden earth,  
 skids forth, ridding her even  
 of the life to come (p. 12).

Like human civilization, nature is involved in the binary opposition life-death and this perception of the speaker is depicted in the imagery of the hatchet presented –a tool for carving – that becomes a metaphor for dying that as is simultaneously murdering and being perfumed by the breeze. This seemingly contradictory illustration is reiterated when the comb turns gray, as it loses its bloodstream; and the gizzard, that has ground the hen’s food, convulses. However,

it is in “the next egg, bobbling” that life may be found and even though the hen is “rid” of it, humankind is not, for it feasts on the hen. Thus, it is through approaching death that life keeps going. As with other poems, Kinnell chooses the hen as a totem animal to show, like in the moment of his daughter’s delivery, that life leads to death but that in death there is life. Such statement may be read as contradictory; however, it is this fact that makes the persona amaze in the mystery of the universe. This “impermanence” of life has been a subject of abundant works through time, and death has become its undeniable companion.

In section seven of this poetic work, “Little sleep’s- head / sprouting hair in the moonlight,” Kinnell portrays a view of life in which even though there may be sorrow and evil in the world there are also moments of awe. Through the presence of the father’s experiences and the daughter’s innocence, the persona leads the reader to a destination where in order to experience life, you have to go beyond, embracing sorrow and bliss, life and death altogether, to make life worth living. In the first part of the poem, Kinnell presents a father and a daughter clinging to each other: “... you cling to me / hard / as if clinging could save us (p. 49).” They are holding each other tightly for a moment that may seem, to the speaker, eternal; however, it is finite. Kinnell’s idea of his daughter clinging to him and the speaker to her seems to reflect on the need for filling in the emptiness that may be present in the life of an individual. This emptiness, and it can be affirmed this loneliness he feels, a missed connection that the persona senses is presented in the metaphor of

his “broken arms” (p. 49) that are cured as he embraces his daughter. Feasibly, the hero’s awareness of the emptiness is that of not understanding the life-death binary opposition because for him there only seems to exist one of these two: death. Moreover, he seems to be distressed and wonders he about his child as he states:

... I think  
you think  
I will never die, I think I exude  
to you the permanence of smoke or stars

The quester ponders on what the child might be thinking, and he sees in him the shadow of mortality, just as the image of smoke that may be strongly perceived for some moments vanishes as time elapses or stars that are not commonly experienced as being. This thought is reinforced as the hero moves forward and takes courage to face the child and tell her:

Yes,  
you cling because  
I, like you, only sooner  
than you, will go down  
the path of vanished alphabets,  
the roadlessness  
to the other side of the darkness (p. 50).

The affirmation in the first line of this *vers libre* displays an imaginary conversation with the daughter in which he confronts his fears and accepts his death, earlier than his daughter's; moreover, the metaphor of the "path of vanished alphabets" confronts the reader with another apparent contradiction for this path has no road, it is "the roadlessness" that leads to its concurrent other that is not its opposite but its reflection: "the other side of the darkness." Moreover, this section of the poem seems to ponder on how people live in a puzzling world that can be wonderful and awe-inspiring but also a terrifying place in which "life lives on life" (Campbell 2004a, p. 3). Thus, life should be experienced every single moment; Jung (2010) affirms that "[t]o discuss the problems connected with the stages of human development is an exciting task, for it means nothing less than unfolding a picture of psychic life in its entirety from the cradle to the grave" (p. 95) and Kinnell broadens this perspective when he declares in *The book of nightmares* that "the wages of dying is love" (p. 53)

Somehow, humanity has tried to create an "empty" illusion of clinging to others in order to be "saved" from the life they may live. However, they can only radiate "the permanence of smoke or stars, / even as my broken arms heal themselves around you" (Kinnell 1971a, p. 49) and lasts only for a while. Kinnell's reference to this empty or torn embrace is present all through *The book of nightmares* portraying the image of the inability to preserve affectionate relationships among people; moreover, this characteristic of the poetic text is



highlighted in section VII. For the quester, individuals soon forget those who die, all their deeds, sorrows, joys, loves, hopes, and fears. Sooner or later everyone "...the roadlessness /to the other side of darkness / your arms /like the shoes left behind, / like the adjectives in the halting speech / of old men, / which once could call up the lost nouns" (pp. 50-51). The ultimate end for humankind is oblivion; however, for Kinnell, individuals have to attain pleasure in the experience of living because sooner or later, they will simultaneously encounter their demise, death, and their beginning, like the hen in section III of the poem when after killing the animal, the speaker finds life as "the next egg / bobbling /its globe of golden earth, / skids forth, ridding her even / of the life to come" (p. 12). The hen has been denied of seeing the life that may come from her death and the quester is confronted with an inverted scene in which death leads to life through the metaphor of "golden earth globe" symbolizing fertility, resurrection and a potential bearer of life and creation. More importantly, its color, golden, can be considered a metaphor of the sun and this light comes from darkness as the persona has seen:

(...)

by corpse-light, in the open cadaver

of hen, the mass of tiny,

unborn eggs, each getting

tinier and yellower as it reaches back toward

the icy pulp

of what is, I have felt the zero

freeze itself around the finger dipped slowly in (p. 13).

Paradoxically as it may seem, progression at this moment of the poem is moving backwards into the darkness to reach light that “mass of tiny / unborn eggs” that the rearward they are, the yellower they become. At this moment of the quest, the hero seems to have trespassed the boundaries between life-death to experience a puzzling moment of a perceived contradiction of the life-death binary opposition. Consequently, this incident will affect the speaker as he, in section VII, and as the poem progresses, the persona envisions his daughter as an adult, with the person she loves, in Paris, at the end of the Pont Mirabeau<sup>19</sup>, enjoying time together, experiencing life as it comes for which the persona tells her: “If one day it happens / you find yourself with someone you love / in a café at one end / of the Pont Mirabeau, at the zinc bar /where white wine stands in upward opening glasses” (p. 51) be careful not to make the mistakes he made:

and if you commit then, as we did, the error

of thinking,

*one day this will only be memory,*

learn,

as you stand

---

<sup>19</sup> A French monument.

at this end of the bridge which arcs,  
 from love, you think, into enduring love,  
 learn to reach deeper  
 into the sorrows  
 to come – (pp. 51-52).

For him, these moments of joy are part of life, but individuals have to be aware that life abridges itself into what has been experienced, physically and emotionally, for at the end all that has been lived “will only be memory.” At “the end of the bridge that arcs,” a metaphor of a transformation, he summons his daughter to “learn to reach deeper” as he did at the “opened cadaver / of hen” (p. 13) so that she could “touch / the almost imaginary bones / under the face, to hear under the laughter / the wind crying across the black stones” (p. 52). He beckons her to learn to see the coexistence of two realms, life and death, and he lures his daughter to understand this inner dichotomy that lies on humankind as portrayed in how “under the laughter” the wind also cries. He tells her to comprehend that as she may caress someone’s flesh, the face, she is concurrently caressing the bones, death, underneath the skin, that when there is bliss (the laughter) there is also pain that life is to be lived. So, he exhorts his daughter to

(...) Kiss  
 the mouth  
 which tells you, *here*,

*here is the world.* This mouth. This laughter. These temple bones.

The still undanced cadence of vanishing (p. 52).

The poem's life-death binary opposition is present in these last verses when the persona encourages his daughter to kiss the person next to her and feel the "temple bones," the metaphor or the word "temple" revealing the divinity within people's mortality. The metaphor of the temple is of utmost significance as, traditionally, it is in temples where god is worshipped and individuals attend it in their search for the holiness. However, in Kinnell's poem, eternity and divinity lies within humanity's imperfection as well as mortality. For the hero, to see a face and touch those bones that cannot be seen – the skull underneath, — to hear the laughter as well as the pain and to know that there is a undanced "cadence of vanishing" that one day will come to be met, are Kinnell's advice to experience all that is fundamentally human. It is through oppositions, laughter-cry, temple-bones, sorrow-love, that life is comprehensible, but individuals have to be aware of this veiled contradictory truth.

Furthermore, the setting in this part of the poem becomes an allegory to the life-death experience for as the bridge bends, it signals humanity's life cycle. However, this cycle more than feared should be welcomed for underneath the external features of a countenance there are bones, and beyond the resonance of a laughter there may be pain, puzzling enough, humankind is made up of opposites and even if we are not yet facing death "we will walk out together among / the ten

thousand things, / each scratched too late with such knowledge, the wages / of dying is love” (pp. 52-53). Furthermore, mortality for Kinnell is not an isolated moment in time but an incipient element of the phenomenon that has been defined as “life.” Hence, his everyday life-death experience is everybody’s experience, it is through and his own sense of wonder and acceptance of this antagonistic equation that he resolves this misunderstood continuum.

## **2. The cosmological function**

Linked to the mystical function of myth, the cosmological one “present[s] an image of the cosmos, an image of the universe round about, that will maintain and elicit this experience of awe [or]...present an image of the cosmos that will maintain your sense of mystical awe and explain everything that you come into contact with in the universe around you” (Campbell 2004a, pp. 7-8). In the past, cultures of primitive people created myths to understand natural phenomena; consequently, the elements of nature that they could not understand were explained through these myths. Nowadays, even when science has transformed and built on knowledge and reason, there is still mystical awe when new questions arise from scientific erudition. To summarize, it can be said that the cosmological function offers an image of the concrete world that will act as the means for metaphysical thought. Campbell’s cosmological function then serves to present a cosmos in which the sense of awe in the individual is fostered.

In *The book of nightmares'* section I "Under the Maud moon," the reader is constantly presented with such a universe even when the poem relates to simple and everyday life tasks and decisions. The first encounter for the persona and the reader is "[o]n the path, / by this wet site / of old fires- / black ashes, black stones, where tramps / must have squatted down" (p. 3). This setting seems to display a damp place where old fires have burned and have left ashes and stones, both black, both mysterious, like the vagrant that will wear the *shoes of wandering* to find out that the path has been walked by others and that his experience is individual and communal for s/he besides sitting by the path "gnawing on stream water, / unhousing themselves on cursed bread,/failing to get warm at a twigfire– " (p. 3); this is a speaker who is in despair, empty-handed, and desolate who fails to get warm. After this saddening picture of a reality, the persona stops to "gather wet wood, / cut dry shavings" (p. 4), and he does it all thinking about his baby girl "whose face / I held in my hands / a few hours (...) only to keep holding the space where she was" (p. 4). The connection that exists between him and the infant is so intense that even when she is not with him, he senses her presence in her absence; for him, the fact of his daughter not being with him makes him comprehend what it means to be with her.

As the persona advances in his quest, the scene morphs from the enigmatic and lightless beginning to a glowing one; the persona ignites a fire in the rain. Fire and rain, opposites, become one and unite: "I light / a small fire in the rain" (p.4).

This paradoxical image offers the speaker the possibility to experience that through the elements, the metaphysical is accomplished. Suddenly, the experience becomes personal and as in an alchemical dream, the four elements in the natural world are present: water, fire, earth, and air; consequently, it is a moment of facing life as it is, death's companion, for "(...) the deathwatches inside/ begin running out of time, I can see/ the dead, crossed limbs/ longing again for the universe" (p. 3), because humanity will move towards its ending and beginning, like the totem hen. This latter emblematic animal directed him to realize that life is an endless cycle and that death is its cohort. The life found in the hen is also present when the persona "can hear/ in the wet wood the snap/ and re-snap of the same embrace being torn/ The raindrops trying/ to put the fire out/ fall into it and are/ changed: the oath broken" (p. 4), for death does not conquer life or vice versa, they are both elements of a continuum and "the oath sworn between earth and water, flesh and spirit, broken,/ to be sworn again,/ over and over" (p. 4). This metaphor of a contract seems to be an endless cycle that is unceasingly sworn in which the reader is presented with a fact never thought of before, for life and death depend on each other; moreover, this endless promise is attested "in the clouds, and to be broken again, / over and over, on earth" (p. 4). These two opposite realms where the oath is perpetually sworn, heaven and earth, are traditionally symbolic of mortality (earth) and eternity (heaven). The moment an individual understands his/her moment on

earth, s/he will understand that death is life and vice versa, there cannot be one without the other.

This apparently contradictory opposition, flesh-spirit, is comprehended better in little children, for they live within the primitive, in terms of the co-existence of the life-death experience of binary oppositions. Infants display no knowledge of what culturally has been defined as “death” or “life,” they simply live life. Consequently, they exist in the most primeval stage possible and that is why the speaker meditates Maud’s words: “I have heard you tell/ the sun, don't go down, I have stood by/ as you told the flower, don't grow old, / don't die” (p. 49). But, in “dead shoes” (p. 19) is a metaphor of the life-death cycle that will continue to be lived and experienced and what is termed life will lead individuals towards death, there will be fire but there will also be “raindrops trying / to put the fire out” (p. 4); thus, life-death should be lived every single moment. To strengthen this position, the hero wishes he could spare his daughter from the grief that life-death bring:

I would blow the flame out of your silver cup,  
 I would suck the rot from your fingernail,  
 I would brush your sprouting hair of the dying light,  
 I would scrape the rust off your ivory bones,  
 I would help death escape through the little ribs of your body,  
 I would alchemize the ashes of your cradle back into wood,  
 I would let nothing of you go, ever (p. 49).



The quester would do anything to prevent his little girl from suffering; but he is conscious that that is not feasible. This fact is portrayed in the poem through the use of this verse's syntax and the use of a conditional phrase; moreover, the use of imagery in the lines mirrors the speaker's longing to prevent her from dying. The hero "would blow the flame out of your silver cup," this silver cup is a metaphor for his daughter's fate: death. Moreover, he would not let death subjugate her; instead, he "would suck rot from your fingernail" and "would brush your sprouting hair of the dying light." As he describes his craving to make his child withdraw from mortality, he understands that a baby, in her traditionally associated purity, will experience death for he "would scrape rust off your ivory bones." Thenceforth, he personifies Death as an entity that is trapped in mortality and he "would help death escape through the little ribs of your body;" besides, he would be willing to practice alchemy turning death into life as morphs "the ashes of your cradle back into wood;" so that, he "would not let nothing of you go ever" (p. 49).

It seems that humankind is constantly questioning life and its phases at a conscious level, and so does the speaker in the poem. Jung (2010) states that "[o]ur psychic processes are made up to a large extent of reflections, doubts and experiments, all of which almost completely foreign to the unconscious instinctive mind of primitive man" (p. 95). The child does not wonder about any situation in life, for her life is to be lived at the moment, a variety of *carpe diem*; on the contrary, the persona wonders and grieves life and its demise. In the poem, the quester is afflicted

by all the thoughts and uncertainties individuals consciously face when they are aware of the mystery of perishing. The persona, considering his unattainable wish, believes that he will protect the child from death

until washerwomen

feel the clothes fall asleep in their hands,

and hens scratch their spell across hatchet blades,

and rats walk away from the cultures of the plague,

and iron twists weapons toward the true north,

and grease refuses to slide in the machinery of progress,

and men feel as free on earth as fleas on the bodies of men,

and lovers no longer whisper to the presence beside them in the

dark, *O corpse-to-be* . . . (p. 50).

However, death cannot be avoided since mortality exclusively belongs to living beings and so he admits that washerwomen will never stop “feel[ing] the clothes” as they wash them; besides, the imagery used of domestic animals, like hens, will be used as a source of nourishment by humankind and they will never be able “scratch their spell across hatchet blades” to avoid their death. He then inverts traditional Western thought and affirms that civilization is a plague and that rats are somehow attracted to it with such intensity that they will never “walk away.” After this inversion, the speaker questions apparent political peace and technological progress as well as the negative consequences they have brought to society as he

asserts that iron will never “twist[s] weapons toward the true north” neither does grease “refuse[s] to slide in the machinery of progress.” Nevertheless, after this excruciating acceptance of mortality, the speaker’s strongest stated image is: “and lovers no longer whisper to the presence beside them in the / dark, *O corpse-to-be.*” The hero makes reference to a couple laying together at night who instead of uttering words of care and love they murmur “*O corpse to be;*” this short statement becomes his line of defeat against death.

However, besides suffering there is also love and the desire of protecting and caring for those who love and are loved. As well as the sun does “go down” (p. 49) and the flowers “grow old” (p. 49) and die, people’s life belong to a succession that may not be completely understood but that must be accepted. “And yet perhaps this is the reason you cry, / this the nightmare you wake screaming from: / being forever / in the pre-trembling of a house that falls” (p. 50), that is the nature of humanity for everybody is ephemeral and temporal and the reconciliation of these oppositions is difficult to be accepted. People will all become a “corpse-to-be,” some sooner than others, but no one can “help death escape through the little ribs of [their] body” (p. 49). Like children who believe their parents will never die, adults may seem to deceive themselves when not acknowledging that time cannot be stopped, that it does not matter the deeds, life will keep on feasting on life, so there must be an alignment and acceptance of the fact that life is ephemeral.

Humankind lives through and in cycles, and living is a personal experience that is at the same time communal and, nowadays, it has even gained tints of worldwide experiences through social media. Considering this fact and pondering on Campbell 's statements, "[...] the second function serves to present a universe within which the mystery as understood will be present, so that everywhere you look it is, as it were, a holy picture opening up in back to the great mystery. The work of the artist is to present objects to you in such a way that they will shine" (2004a, p. 105). When considering Kinnell's depiction of his love for the child, it is clearly understood that the speaker would do magic to keep the child alive but life, as an element of a cycle, is not as basic as that; it is a unique personal experience that goes beyond the mirage of human flesh, for in death it regains its being. Hence, it is not until individuals realize that through the concrete the mystical is achieved and that through death life reaches its purpose that they will comprehend the reason for living. Thus, Campbell (2004a) affirms that the "second function of mythology is to present an image of the cosmos, an image of the universe round about that will maintain and elicit this experience awe" (p. 7); moreover, he asserts that this cosmological function "gives you a field in which to play the game that helps you to reconcile your life, your existence, to your own consciousness, or expectation, of meaning" (p. 7). This function will aim at explaining why situations, ideas, or objects are the way they are.

On the other hand, Jung (1970) does agree with this conception of acquiring comprehension when he proclaims that

If I want to understand an individual human being, I must lay aside all scientific knowledge of the average man and discard all theories in order to adopt a completely new and unprejudiced attitude. I can only approach the task of *understanding* with a free and open mind, whereas *knowledge* of man, or insight into human character, presupposes all sorts of knowledge about mankind in general ... Since scientific knowledge not only enjoys universal esteem but, in the eyes of modern man, counts as the only intellectual and spiritual authority, understanding the individual obliges me to commit *l'èse majesté*, so to speak to turn a blind eye to scientific knowledge (p. 9)

This function of myth disregards scientific experience to favor individual experiences of humanity in the world and consider that “The individual, however, as an irrational datum, is the true an authentic carrier of reality, the *concrete* man as opposed to the unreal ideal or normal man to whom the scientific statements refer” (Jung 1970, p. 11). Moreover, Kinnells’ *The book of nightmares* reveals a mythical experience that develops and evolves at the present time, in the present place, and with the present people as “(...) I walk out now, / in dead shoes, in the new light, / on the steppingstones/ of someone else’s wandering” (p. 19). At the end, humanity walks the same shoes, feels similar experiences, and performs alike tasks. People all wear “dead shoes in the new light,” the path down “vanished alphabets” will be

there as long as individuals exist on earth. But to find this alphabet path, the persona wonders if it is

a twinge

in this foot or that saying

*turn or stay or take*

*forty-three giant steps*

*backwards, frightened*

I may already have lost

the way: *the first step*, the Crone

who scried the crystal said, *shall be*

*to lose the way* (p. 19).

This perceived contradiction when feeling pain as “a twinge” is felt and the hero wonders about “turn[ing]” or “stay[ing]” or “tak[ing] / forty-three giant steps /backwards;” moreover, as the Crone states “the first step (...) shall be to lose the way.” As a matter of fact, finding when losing becomes one of Kinnell’s gifts when considering awe and this assertion could not be appreciated unless it is understood that humanity belongs to its past as well as to its present and its future. The way back and the movement forward become one, for one nourishes on the other and then both can exist in the same realm. In people’s life experiences, we all share *shoes*, individuals tend to live cycles and actions are repeated but every person must “lose the way” to find his/her own path in life, for both directions, backward and

forward, are ultimately one. Another important element in this section of the poem is the personification of the feet as entities that talk and communicate directly with the speaker, this featured is signaled by the use of italics, same strategy used to indicate the old woman's declarations. As can be experienced, in this process of inner learning, the hero this encounter with different people and the personification of various elements is an essential element in understanding his role in the community.

### **3. The sociological function**

Campbell's sociological function is the one that he perceives as the most adaptable due to the advancements of science. This scholar asserts that this third function is intended to "validate and maintain a certain sociological system: a shared set of rights and wrongs, proprieties or improprieties, on which your particular social unit depends for its existence" (Campbell 2004a, p. 8). In the past, individuals were given rules and guides for living in society and they accepted these for questioning was discouraged; in this way, the status quo was maintained. In the twentieth and twentieth-first century, questioning and not blindly accepting what is told, is part of the political, scientific and cultural agenda in many Western nations; even when this fact may not mirror reality. Hence, the individual and his/her decisions are emphasized over the communal; consequently, this shift in thinking has pushed into weakening the functions of myth. Then, as community ties become less strong, individualism is emphasized. However, in Kinnell's *The book of nightmares*, even

when the quest is undertaken by the hero (an individual action) the knowledge to attain will benefit other individuals. In section I, "Under the Maud moon," the persona commences his quest on a path where opposites merge: a fire is lighted in the rain, a baby is born while the "deathwatches inside / begin running out of time," and warm words are spoken "in the rain." It is then, after this visualization of the nature of humankind, a blending of opposites that the hero starts moving towards the understanding that from death, life emanates, and will hopefully help society to approach as one element of the continuum. To understand this notion, the quester affirms to

... have glimpsed  
 by corpse-light, in the opened cadaver  
 of hen, the mass of tiny,  
 unborn eggs, each getting  
 tinier and yellower as it reaches back toward  
 the icy pulp  
 of what is, I have felt the zero  
 freeze itself around the finger dipped slowly in (p. 13).

Contradictorily, as it may seem, the progression is backwards as he glances at the opposition of life-death: "corpse-light;" moreover, he has felt the "tiny /unborn eggs" as he reaches in the direction of "the zero, the boundary between life and death. It is in this movement that the persona comprehends that as he reaches



inside the hen's corpse, life exists. Suddenly, death implies life and birth entails death. Fact that is re-experienced when the speaker encounters a second cadaver of hen, in which he realizes this time killed by another animal, weasels. This time, the hen's head was not "thrown back / on the chopping block" (p. 11) but killed and as the speaker holds her up, he can see a tiny egg falling out of the dead body, a recollection of life. But this vision entailed a larger message as the hen's wings flew towards the infinite: "the arms of the Bear" (p. 14):

And I went up  
 to the henhouse, and took up  
 the hen killed by the weasels, and lugged  
 the sucked  
 carcass into first light. And when I hoisted  
 her up among the young pines, a last  
 rubbery egg slipping out as I flung her high, didn't it happen  
 the dead  
 wings creaked open as she soared  
 across the arms of the Bear?

Just as the hero faces the cadaver of the hen and its entrails in a domestic setting, he undergoes the same experience but in a different setting that demands distinct features. In the "henhouse," the hen had been "killed by the weasels" and

he sees "the sucked / carcass into first light," moment that echoes his first encounter with a dead hen. The corpse is positioned against the light to remind humanity of this apparent paradox: death as the life's associate. To reinforce this appreciation, he lifts the hen's remains and from them a "rubbery egg slip[s] out" to remind him of the seemingly contradiction of finding life in death. Moreover, the quester wonders if "the dead / wings creaked open as she soared / across the arms of the Bear?" He ponders on his understanding that in death life is experienced and without one the other cannot exist, lessons apprehended to fulfill the third function of myth. Moreover, since poetry is a signifying practice of a time and a place, it can reflect or reject the myths culture has accepted as true. People become defenders of an ideology and they compare and contrast themselves in terms of other myths reinforced by the canon, for example: beauty, suffering, joy.

Likewise, when myths are culturally analyzed we see how certain values, beliefs and attitudes are supported and others are suppressed. However, when trying to attain this task, being a product of the same culture becomes troublesome for as part of the culture situations and reactions, for example, may be taken for granted, and people tend to agree with the dominant ideology. According to the hero, humankind has invaded earth with their "trespassing;" furthermore, he questions the decisions made by different individuals in different periods of time and "exterminate[ing] one billion heathens, / heretics, Jews, Moslems, witches, mystical seekers, / black men, Asians, and Christian brothers / every one of them for his own

good...” (p. 42). The killing of heathens and heretics by Christians, or Jewish people and Muslims as well should not conform to human behavior; however, as with other phenomena, it is accepted. The enslavement and murder of black and Asian people is also criticized sarcastically by the speaker. Consequently, institutionalized norms and laws that have been imposed on the majority by those who have grabbed economic, cultural, and political control are not to be questioned.

Thus, the hero questions and doubts the wrong done upon those that society considered different or dangerous by the dominant ideology. People must never die for their “own good” (p. 42) nor must creatures be executed “for being subhuman” (p. 42); however, this is a common practice that the persona criticizes. Humankind is easily inclined to accept that that the media presents; moreover, there are also “things taken for granted,” and there is an agreement with the dominant ideology<sup>20</sup>. Bové (in Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1990) in his article “Discourse,” states that “discourse produces knowledge about humans and their society” (p. 56); in fact, through the analysis of the literary works of different eras and cultures much

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<sup>20</sup> Eagleton (1996) affirms that “[t]he largely concealed structure of values which informs and underlies our factual statements is part of what is meant by 'ideology'. By 'ideology' I mean, roughly, the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in. It follows from such a rough definition of ideology that not all of our underlying judgements and categories can usefully be said to be ideological. It is deeply ingrained in us to imagine ourselves moving forwards into the future (at least one other society sees itself as moving backwards into it), but though this way of seeing *may* connect significantly with the power-structure of our society, it need not always and everywhere do so. I do not mean by 'ideology' simply the deeply entrenched, often unconscious beliefs which people hold; I mean more particularly those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power” (p. 13).

information can be analyzed apart from the “official discourse” of the groups in power – political, economic, and religious. The writings and verbal manifestations of a certain historical period are based on its own notions of truth, power, and reality. As stated by Bové, the aim of discourse is “to describe the linkages between power, knowledge, institutions, intellectuals, the control of population and the modern state as these intersect in the functions of the systems of thought” (pp. 54-55).

This concept of discourse, power, and myth is what Kinnell portrays in the extermination of so many humans by other humans. The massacre of indigenous civilizations is meditated upon when he asserts: “a whole continent of red men for living in unnatural community / and at the same time having relations with the land” (p. 42). The speaker seems to delve into an interior monologue in which he wonders about the difference among people’s origin and skin color and the way in which other creatures on earth are led to extinction: “one billion species of animals for being sub-human / and ready to take on the bloodthirsty creatures from other planets” (p. 42). Furthermore, the persona questions humankind’s sanity and acutely mocks their fear of finding “bloodthirsty creatures” in outer space for they are vicious beings that have not yet acknowledged their gory inner features. Besides this made-believe social construct in which murder is permitted, Kinnell examines the concept of a deity and its gifts to humanity in the Western world. In section IV of his poem, “Dear stranger extant in memory by the blue Juniata,” the persona states that she is an enemy of God for “[H]e gave [her] lust and joy and cut off [her] hands... [S]he asked

why should [she] love this body [she] fears” (p. 30). She has a body she is suppressed to use according to her will that has been constructed by the frames that own power.

For Western civilization god/nature gives a body too restricted to human needs and those who dare change this vision of life are not easily accepted by the “majority.” Moreover, in the poem “Little sleep’s-head sprouting hair in the moonlight,” Kinnell retakes the issue in a more ingenuous way when:

In a restaurant once, everyone  
 quietly eating, you clambered up  
 on my lap: to all  
 the mouthfuls rising toward  
 all the mouths, at the top of your voice  
 you cried  
 your one word, caca! caca! caca!  
 and each spoonful  
 stopped, a moment, in midair, in its withering  
 steam (p. 50).

Every person on earth has physiological needs, for example to defecate; however, acknowledging this fact in front of others is not well accepted by the norms of courtesy established by the social group in power, economically and intellectually,

especially “In a restaurant” having “everyone / quietly eating.” Eating in a restaurant is a social activity that demands certain behavior and manners at the table. Those that do not fulfill the requirements, like a toddler’s voice “cry[ing] / your one word, caca! caca! caca!” and making the rest uneasy and uncomfortable to the point that “each spoonful / stopped, a moment, in midair, in its withering / steam;” people could not eat when hearing the word “caca.” This word is not proper in public places although all people know and experience what it is. There is a tendency to avoid “unpleasant” images of life and remember those that only bring a sometimes superficial state of happiness and peace. As a result, as long as we are part of a social group and signs keep on being produced and reinforced, we have to understand them. It becomes a matter of surviving in the world. Society has separated the good from the bad but, it is impossible to live without the conjunction of both; this is a denial of human biological needs that are never discussed in public or even acknowledged but that are necessary for a healthy life is illustrated in Kinnell’s verses.

Hence, language as a sign system has presented humanity with the phenomenon of interpretation. If the sign is composed by the signifier and the signified, and if the understanding of their merge would depend on the reader, this book-length poem offers different opportunities to the interpreter to achieve meaning. Throughout *The book of nightmares* there is a constant reminder on the motif of words and writing, being this latter the one that brings forward the

questioning for signifying. It is from the songs the persona “used to croak / for [his] daughter / in her nightmares” to the “ferris wheel writing its huge desolate zeroes in neon the evening skies” to

... the Twentieth Century of my nightmare

on earth, I swear on my chromium testicles

to this testament

and last will

of my iron will, my fear of love, my itch for money, and my madness (p. 38).

There is nothing left on a will but words, and with “writing” there has to be interpretation. The “chromium testicles” that are witnesses of his oath represent a sexuality that remains with “no oxidation.” The persona has been led to lose his sanity through an unpleasant dream in which there is anxiety in loving, there is greed in people, and consequently he finds no fulfillment. These images echo Lévi-Strauss’ (1978) words when he affirms that “[w]e are now threatened with the prospect of our being only consumers, able to consume anything from any point in the world and from every culture, but of losing all originality” (p. 7). He is scared of loving and he craves for money, elements that have driven him out of his mind since he cannot fully understand life and its phenomena. Indeed, it is necessary to have signs<sup>21</sup>, if not, how can the world and life on the planet be understood? Moreover, it

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<sup>21</sup> Monaco (2000) defines the term sign as consisting “... of two parts: the signifier and the signified. The word “word,” for example – the collection of letters or sounds – is a signifier; what it represents

cannot be forgotten that is through signs that there is meaning construction. And this is an ideological issue. According to Zeledón & Pérez (1995) every human being, for his/her condition of a thinking being, is part of the ideology, and any chance for clarification or the simple choice of one definition and not another, makes him/her be ideological: “La ciencia de la ideología es en sí misma una ideología, funciona como tal y tiene que afirmarse ella misma como lo que es” (p. 3)<sup>22</sup>. All decisions made in life and all positions taken respond to an ideological denomination. Ideology, meaning the way society perceives itself, will embody the assumptions and frameworks that people employ to understand their surroundings, and it will also supply with all the rules and beliefs that individuals hold so that they can then behave properly.

Language becomes the representation of the only feature that differentiates human civilization from other living beings. The persona is in despair and feels that he has never awaken from an unpleasant dream in which there is fear, greed, and madness; and for him there is absolute desolation that only language, somehow, can soothe him as “[he] finds [himself] alive / in the whorled /archway of the fingerprint of all things” (p. 58). Moreover, the use of language he makes is

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is somethielse again – the ‘signified.’ In literature, the relationship between signifier and signified is a main locus of art: the poet is building constructions that, on the one hand, are composed of sounds (signifiers) and, on the other, of meanings (signifieds), and the relationship between the two can be fascinating. In fact, much of the pleasure of poetry lies just here: in the dance between sound and meaning” (pp. 157-158).

<sup>22</sup> “The science of ideology is in itself and ideology, since it works as so and has to affirm itself as so” (my translation).



particularly different from other poets of his milieu for Kinnell insists in bringing back to life words that have are on the brink of death as:

carrion

caput mortum,

orts,

pelf,

fenks,

sordes,

gurry dumped from hospital trashcans (p. 41).

Kinnell resuscitates these words, in this verse, in a scenario of death. But not only is the sign relevant in these resurrected words but the sound that seems to curl into meaning. Somehow, the almost dead words arise from the ashes blurring any border between the dead and the living for as the persona faces the fact of death there is a voice from afar crying and signaled with italics that says: "*Lieutenant! / This corpse will not stop burning!*" (p. 45); from the ashes, there comes rebirth. It is important to acknowledge that Kinnell is a poet who discusses politics in his work as a means to make people understand that individuals are always positioned politically, even when they are not consciously aware. As a poet he uses sarcasm and verbal irony to display this feature in his work; and this characteristic is displayed in the following stanza:

My tongue goes to the Secretary of the Dead

to tell the corpses, "I'm sorry, fellows,  
the killing was just one of those things  
difficult to pre-visualize (p. 43).

Using the word "tongue" he criticizes the speech of politicians, embodied in the image of "the Secretary of the Dead;" it is not the "Secretary of Defense" or "War." It is the head of those who are taken to die and to whom an excuse is given; however, the speaker doubts and ridicules this apology as the hero affirms that all the deaths caused by war were "difficult to pre-visualize -- like a cow, / say, getting hit by lightning" (p. 43). With this last statement, the persona satirizes the simulated good wishes of politicians, for the people who died in war could have been spared the pain and grief of the experience. For the quester, the world had to be more classless and open to diversity, wars should not exist, and humankind should care for one another, being one with the natural world from which everyone comes from. At war, the lives of people could have been saved; however, there are other priorities in governments and nations that favor the killing and destruction of fellow human beings. The hero mocks political discourse when he resorts to an example of how a cow could be saved only if people would have cared. To support these ideas, the persona questions the deaths of "heathens, / heretics, Jews, Moslems, witches, mystical seekers, / black men, Asians, and Christian brothers" (p. 42) and affirms ironically that according to what is believed "every one of them" was killed "for his own good" (p.42). Likewise, he acknowledges that humankind lives in distress as

he states in the following hyperbole: “[t]o the last man surviving on earth / I give my eyelids worn out by fear” (p. 43).

Furthermore, this exercise of speaking and writing, as in his “last will,” is echoed in “The dead shall be raised incorruptible,” the sixth poem in the book. Selden & Widdowson (1993) assert that “[i]n the beginning was the Word. Being the origin of all things, the ‘Word’ underwrites the full presence of the world; everything is the effect of this one cause” (p. 145). Hence, when the persona appraises his deeds and those of his fellow humans to discover that *civilization* has only brought agony and hopelessness to society, he “groan[s] out this testament of [his] last will” to remind the reader of the historical madness in the modern world but that at the end, the only end possible, takes you to the assertion that “the wages / of dying is love.” This last statement is the final declaration that there is no going deeper from what has been experienced in life and that being alive, understanding that “Una civilización que niega a la muerte, acaba por negar a la vida<sup>23</sup>” (Paz 1995, p. 195); and it is until then, when this fact is apprehended that life would make sense. Campbell (1991) declares that

The conquest of the fear of death is the recovery of life’s joy. One can experience an unconditional affirmation of life only when one has accepted death, not as contrary to life but as one aspect of life. Life in its becoming is

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<sup>23</sup> A civilization that is in denial of death, ends up in denial of life (my translation).

always shedding death, and on the point of death. The conquest of fear yields the courage of life (p. 188).

Additionally, Kinnell references language through the symbolic use of “these lowliest / of tongues, whose lick-track tell/ our history of errors to the dust behind/ which is the last trace in us/ of wings?” (p. 22). It is through the symbol of the “tongue” of the shoe and walking, a metaphor for living, that the persona realizes his incapacity to communicate and belong, fact that makes him question his freedom for it seems to be language what can make him free giving him “wings.” But he can read history and see the mistakes he made but it is impossible to take steps backwards in time for what there is for humankind is at the path of “vanished alphabets / the roadlessness / to the other side of the darkness” (p. 50). This oxymoron of “roadlessness” guides the speaker into comprehending that even when there is no road to death, there is a path that all individuals follow. This figure of speech is reinforced by the metaphor of “the other side of the darkness,” for the speaker, at this stage of his journey what has been given to humanity is grief, represented by “darkness” while living and after it. Succinctly, there is nothing but death, and the persona, like his daughter “only sooner / than [her], will go down” (p. 50) and she will be lost in “darkness” with her:

(...) arms

like the shoes left behind,

like the adjectives in the halting speech

of old men,  
which once could call up the lost nouns (p. 51).

The route to take is made up of “vanished alphabets” and the capacity to connect nouns to adjectives will be lost just as fluency when speaking, as people grow old language struggles to communicate; and as the shoes left behind the arms are empty, aging’s companion is loneliness, this broken embrace will haunt humanity in its eternal path.

Referring again to “The dead shall be raised incorruptible,” the sixth section in the book-length poem, the persona ironically states that our myths, social norms, and laws have collapsed and introduces death as an experience that has caused suffering and pain in the search for power and domination. But death is not an ignored fact for any person, any class or any gender; it is only “A piece of flesh” that “gives off / smoke in the field” (p. 41). The opening of the poem mirrors decay and death (carrion / caput mortuum), stages in life hardly wanted by people, but the last steps on earth each person could experience. In this sense, Campbell (2004a) affirms that the third function of myth is to give you “laws for living within your own society” (p. 107). In *The book of nightmares*, Kinnell queries the society that has conceded the law to commit acts against humankind, social norms, and nature. In the fourth part of the aforementioned section, the persona starts questioning the media as the new supplier of information when he affirms:

On the television screen:

Do you have a body that sweats?

Sweat that has odor?

False teeth clanging into your breakfast?

Case of the dread?

Headache so perpetual it may outlive you?

Armpits sprouting hair?

Piles so huge you don't need a chair to sit at a table?

*We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed . . . (p. 42).*

Through his interrogation he confronts himself and wonders about the consequences of the media's effect on individuals "on the television screen." The means of communication seem to remind people of their aging process and so does the hero acknowledge as he rhetorically asks: "False teeth clanging into your breakfast?" He also questions the "[s]weat that has odor" and "[A]rmpits sprouting hair" to finally affirm, emphasizing his statement through the use of italics that "[w]e shall not sleep, but we shall be changed." An element deemed relevant in Kinnell's work is his critical position towards society and its practices, especially those that confine humankind to objectification by others and themselves; and the use of the media as a "big brother" that besides telling people what to do seems to be omniscient. Nobody wants to grow older, have wrinkles, smell, and be hairy or bald. Nowadays, it seems that the standard of beauty has traveled a path contrary to nature itself; for, we all age and wrinkle and for many, grow aesthetically displeasing

with time. However, it is time and experience the ones that reveal, to humanity, the beauty of nature and the simplicity of life, characteristics that Kinnell portrays in his work. According to Zeledón & Pérez (1995) “en cada sociedad hay una ideología dominante, la ideología del grupo que posee el poder económico y político, el grupo que controla los medios de producción y de transmisión de prácticas significativas. Esta ideología dominante está a cargo de respaldar al sistema”<sup>24</sup> (p. 5).

Furthermore, in ancient cultures, aging and death were part of the continuation of life and the corpses were buried with their belongings because their life would continue after this; nevertheless, it seems that this reading of the world has changed for contemporary society and former ones. The hero wants to teach the stranger (the reader) that life should be lived, and to live circumscribes death. Kinnell gives his daughter Maud a present with this poem book, telling her that she belongs to life, but that life is part of death when the persona of the poem says:

And in the days  
 when you find yourself orphaned,  
 emptied  
 of all wind-singing, of light  
 the pieces of cursed bread on your tongue,

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<sup>24</sup> “In every society there is a dominant ideology, the ideology of the group that has the economic and political power; group that controls the means of production and the broadcasting of signifying practices. This dominant ideology is in charge of the support of the system” (p. 5) (my translation).

may there come back to you

a voice,

spectral, calling you

*sister!*

from everything that dies (p. 8).

It is a fact that all human beings suffer and that their lives will not remain as perfect representations of peace and happiness; moreover, we all know that sooner or later death will reach our lives. But what is ignored by many is that we are related to “everything that dies.” No matter what is done to look younger and good-looking, death cannot “escape though the little ribs of [our] body” (p. 49). The concepts of aesthetic beauty and youth have become major signs in today’s world. Most people want to be physically beautiful and young as long as possible. However, the definition of beauty has changed somehow through the world but what has not changed is that if a person does not fit the cultural idea of “beauty” the chances to improve a social and professional life narrow. Television, as a massive means of communication, has brought many benefits to society but has also brought unfavorable patterns that people follow in order to try to fit in.

Hence “[W]e shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed” (p. 42). It does not matter if we finally succeed trying to change the body’s corporal fluids into more accepted smells, or we can buy new white and polish teeth, or we find it modern



and practical to temporarily annihilate our hairy inheritance. As part of a demanding group, we will never “sleep” nor achieve peace, but it is a fact that we will be changed. We must remember that no sign makes sense on its own but in relation to the world in which it exists, for there are not only physical characteristics that want to be attained but also psychological, emotional and spiritual ones.

#### **4. The pedagogical function**

Campbell’s last function is characterized as “carry[ing] the individual through the stages of his life, from birth through maturity through senility to death” (Campbell 2004a, p. 9). Myth becomes a leading principle in the different stages that humankind goes through; this function should guide the individual to make sense of the three previous functions since some reflection on the universe and on the person as a part of a community are needed. But this task is hard to achieve. Learning to live life at its fullest, no matter the conditions, has become one of the hardest tasks of humanity; and one reason to attempt to understand this phenomenon may be that for learning there may be pain, either psychological, physical, or emotional, in such a way that grief and sorrowful moments may bring growth. Moreover, learning is not a matter of youth or years, it is a matter of experience; Campbell declares that life should not be lived in a rush but experienced: “don’t try to live your life too soon ... This thing, wisdom, has to come gradually” (p. 108).

Hence, individuals, like the persona in the poem, should take “the path of vanished alphabets” and start his/her own journey to learn his/her own lessons for

“there’s nothing you can do that’s more important than being fulfilled. You become a sign, you become a signal, transparent to transcendence; in this way, you will find, live and become a realization of your own personal myth” (Campbell 2004a, p. 108). What it is true is that, often, to comprehend life and its moments, individuals may need a guide to relate to, in such a way that there is a teaching on “how to live a human lifetime under any circumstance” (Campbell 1991, p. 39). When starting a voyage, physical, psychological or emotional, there is a path to be walked in; sometimes, the quester does not know s/he is following a path, but there is always one to walk on. The path is one of those ancient archetypes, these identical psychic structures that are common to all and each person and that, in different directions, will influence the way life is experienced. In *The book of nightmares*, the persona in the poem wears the “eldershoes” of his feet to start his life-death journey; hence is positioned “[o]n the path, / by this wet site / of old fires – /black ashes, black stones, where tramps / must have squatted down, / gnawing on stream water, / unhousing themselves on cursed bread, / failing to get warm at a twigfire” (p. 3) and it is then when, even before taking his first step, he “stops” to “light / a small fire in the rain” (p. 3). It is on this direction that the persona pauses to think; and it that makes him speculate about others and how they may have felt or been when failing to get warm, to feel alive.

This path will symbolize the route human beings follow as they live and learn that “*here / here is the world. This laughter. These temple bones. / The still undanced*

cadence of vanishing” (p. 52). These last paradoxical binary oppositions, “temple bones” and “undanced cadence,” clarify the persona’s search when starting his marching, for humankind is a temple, signifying her/his spiritual realm, but s/he is also bones, the mortal realm, and it is not until this is acknowledge by the quester that s/he cannot “undanced the still cadence of vanishing”. Life becomes a repetition of what others have done and there must be a looking back to think about what has been done for “[he] walk[s] out now / in dead shoes, in the new light /on the stepping stones / of someone else’s wandering” (p. 19), and then the quester wonders:

Is it the foot  
 which rubs the cobblestones  
 and snakestones all its days, this lowliest  
 of tongues, whose lick-tracks tell  
 our history of errors to the dust behind,  
 which is the last trace in us  
 of wings? (pp. 21-22)

In this free verse poem, some of the recurring symbols are the foot, the path, and the wings; they mirror the quester’s reminders of his mortality and immortality. Through the metaphor of “the lowliest of tongues,” the shoes, striding on “cobblestones / and snakestones,” the quester achieves his of self-discovery. Walking allows the persona to face his fears, to question his life and the world to then encounter self-knowledge. Moreover, it is through this movement that he

admits that humanity has made mistakes and history shares those errors with “the dust behind,” an intertext to the creation of man in the Bible; and then, he ponders if that is “the last trace in us of wings?” making reference to the possibility of a divine origin. Without this movement, he could not have unveiled his dichotomy of being and not being, living and dying to live. Indeed, Kinnell’s poetic work orbits around humanity and its simple everyday situations in life; moreover, he focuses on the problem people have of acknowledging death as part of the life cycle. This mystical journey in time exposes the persona to accept his/her death, along with the death and rebirth of different forms of life on Earth.

In *The book of nightmares*, the persona evokes his experiences as a means to help others confront life since

I had crept down  
to riverbanks, their long rustle  
of being and perishing, down to marshes  
where the earth oozes up  
in cold streaks, touching the world  
with the underglimmer  
of the beginning,  
and there learned my only song (pp. 7-8).

The persona in the poem has advanced slowly to watersides as he has “crept down to riverbanks” his movement is towards life; nonetheless, it is also towards

death, for even when is positioned towards the water he is crawling “down” transitioning from earth to water “down to marshes / where the earth oozes up / in cold streaks.” Immediately after this incident, there is contact with humanity, as when being born, where his “only song” was learned, cutting the tie “to the darkness” and dying a moment to experience life “[a]nd then / you shall open / this book, even if it is the book of nightmares” (p. 8).

An intuitive grasp of reality is then celebrated, one day, “when you find yourself orphaned, / emptied / of all wind-singing, of light,” alone again, facing tough times with “the pieces of cursed bread on your tongue... you shall open this book, even if it is the book of nightmares” (p. 8) The persona wants to guide an individual trying “to connect the inner psychological world to the external world of phenomena... the pedagogy of our inherited traditions does not work for all of us, so you have to work out your own pedagogy” (Campbell 2004a, p. 107). This promising bond between what is thought and/or experienced by the individual and the external reality of his/her life remains one of *The book of nightmares* functions that is to understand to live life. Humanity is bound to death and there will be one day when “a voice... from everything that dies” will address everyone. Moreover, this is the reason why the persona in the poem “... walk[s] out now, / in dead shoes, in the new light/ on the steppingstones/ of someone else’s wandering” (p. 19) for the persona, her/himself, is wearing the shoes of human experience in a new moment of life; consequently, his walking will also become in the future, dead shoes. In other

words, his experiences will also become part of the conglomerate of individuals' life experiences.

It is after wearing the shoes that the persona goes back to the "Xvarna Hotel" (a Zoroastrian word meaning hidden light) where he is aware of his inadequacy and hopelessness on a path where even the most unpretentious enquiry is mystery. The persona falls asleep "back/ into darkness" when he perceives "[a] faint, / creaking noise" that "starts up in the room" (p. 20). It is in this moment when the persona experiences that he is growing older as he listens that sound image of squeaking; moreover, he realizes that past times do not come back but that time moves forward and individuals age as "low-passing wing- / beats, or great, labored breath-takings" (p. 20). As people age, their wings cannot take them high as when they were younger; hence, they fly closer to earth as their end approaches.

Calhoun (1992) declares that "Kinnell comprehends death as well as other matters in his poetry often in terms of what poststructuralist criticism identifies as 'binary oppositions,' with pain and fear as strongly felt as any compensating faith can be... He is concerned with physicality, and he envisions a death that would impart 'greater desire, not less'" (pp. 12-13). As has been affirmed, he patterns language and images in such a style that living implies its polarity dying. Paz (1995) discusses these convergent oppositions when he asserts that: "la vida, colectiva o individual, está abierta a la perspectiva de una muerte que es, a su modo, una

nueva vida. La vida solo se justifica y trasciende cuando se realiza en la muerte<sup>25</sup>” (p. 192). And so, does Kinnell, as can be appreciated in the following stanza:

... the old/ footsmells in the shoes, touched  
 back to life by my footsweats, as by  
 a child’s kisses rise  
 drift up where I lie  
 self-hugged on the bedclothes, slide  
 down the flues  
 of dozed, beating hairs, and I can groan  
 or wheeze, it will be  
 the groan or wheeze of another – the elderfoot  
 of these shoes (p. 20).

It seems that the “spirit” (the “footsmells”) of the shoes rises and enters the persona’s body to make him understand that he is one with humanity; for his cry is “the elderfoot/ of these shoes, the drunk / who died in this room, whose dream-child/ might have got a laugh/ out of those clenched, corned feet”(p. 20). Through this metaphor of the drunk, the tramp in section III of the book-length poem, the persona can experience how intoxicated human experience has been so much as to

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<sup>25</sup> “Life, collective or individual, is open to the perspective of death, that is, in its own way, a new life. Life can only justify itself and transcend when it fulfills itself in death” (my translation).

“shudder[s] down to his nightmare” (p. 21). Moreover, this bad dream increases as he feels lost and exclaims:

On this road  
on which I do not know how to ask for bread,  
on which I do not know how to ask for water,  
this path  
inventing itself  
through jungles of burnt flesh, ground of ground  
bones, crossing itself  
at the odor of blood (p. 22).

The speaker is feels disoriented and drifts on a path on which he ignores how to ask for nourishment, signaled by the use of the word “bread,” that is a symbolic element in Christian Western thought for terrestrial and eternal life. Moreover, he cannot appease his thirst for he cannot find water, an essential element for the survival of humankind on a path that acquires human characteristics as it “invent[s] itself / through jungles of burnt flesh” and “ground of ground / bones.” For the speaker, the imagery presented in these lines of the poem mirror the perceived nature of pain in life and the inability to attain redemption. He is suffering and “long[ing] for the mantle / of the great wanderers, who lighted / their steps by the lamp / of pure hunger and pure thirst, / and whichever way they lurched was the way” (p. 22). He meditates upon the metaphor of the lamp, humankind’s spiritual leaders,



who used to guide the way to achieve salvation. However, on this phase of his journey, he cannot find redemption because “over the holy waters [he] will never drink” (p. 23).

In section seven of the book-length poem, “The call across the valley of not-knowing,” the persona affirms that “And yet I think / it must be the wound, the wound itself,” this laceration that makes people mortal “which lets us know and love,” also allows moments of physical pleasure

which forces us to reach out to our misfit  
and by a kind  
of poetry of the soul, accomplish,  
for a moment, the wholeness the drunk Greek  
extrapolated from his high  
or flagellated out of an empty heart,  
that purest,  
most tragic concubence, strangers  
clasped into one, a moment, of their moment on earth (p. 58).

To experience a “moment, of [our] moment on earth”, even when we may be a “torn half / whose lost other we keep seeking across time / until we die, or give up – or actually find her” (p. 58) becomes a wholesome and yet unfortunate instant in life, just like the “drunk Greek” had expected in the different festivals held in ancient Greece. Then, as Paz (1995) affirms, “[e]l tiempo deja de ser sucesión y vuelve a

ser lo que fue, y es, originariamente: un presente en dónde pasado y futuro al fin se reconcilian<sup>26</sup> (p. 183); afterwards, the persona perceives that:

She who lies halved  
 beside me – she and I once  
 watched the bees, dreamers not yet  
 dipped into the acids  
 of the craving for anything, not yet burned down into flies, sucking  
 the blossom-dust  
 from the pear-tree in spring (p. 58).

There will be moments of communion in which the past will coexist in harmony with the present and the memories acquired will help consider the decisions made. These experiences are taken as being seized by “the acids / of the craving for anything,” for a “halved” other, for a capitalist life and consumerism; and yet, there is still hope for a more fulfilling life “from the pear-tree in spring” that symbolizes life and longevity as well as immortality and fertility. Somehow, the premise in this poem is learning, learning from what has been lived by others, learning from mistakes made, learning to live. It is in “Lastness,” where the persona completes his journey of learning in a cycle of renewal as “The skinny waterfalls, footpaths/ wandering out of heaven, strike/ the cliffside, leap, and shudder off;” and where the next tramp in “dead shoes” will walk the path and see that

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<sup>26</sup> “Times stops being a succession of events and becomes what it was, and is, originally: a present where the past and the future reconcile” (my translation).

Somewhere behind me  
a small fire goes on flaring in the rain, in the desolate ashes.  
No matter, now, whom it was built for,  
it keeps its flames,  
it warms  
everyone who might wander into its radiance,  
a tree, a lost animal, the stones,  
because in the dying world it was set burning (p. 71).

Living is experiencing and, as Campbell (1991) asserts, what people look for is to feel alive “so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonances within our innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That’s what it’s all finally about, and that’s what these clues help us to find within ourselves” (pp. 4-5), guiding the individual to knowledge and wisdom. It may rain and the ashes may look “desolate” but the fire “keeps its flames” symbolizing life and awareness to all living and non-living beings for “in the dying world it was set burning” and will keep ablaze. It is this last thought the one that seizes readers when encountering the text and never let go. It is a fact that most human beings suffer and that their lives will not remain as perfect representations of peace and happiness. Besides, individuals know that sooner or later death will reach their lives. But what is ignored by many is that we are siblings of “everything that dies” (p. 8). No matter what is done to look younger and good looking, death

cannot escape though anybody's "little ribs." Kinnell's poetry is inspired from the depths of humanity in such a way that he looks for spiritual answers in the objective world and he accomplishes his aspiration. For some scholars, the poet's gift to the world is the acknowledgement that life must be guarded no matter what, appreciating every single moment lived, being it happy or sad, helping humanity and understanding that death affirms life. At the end, all lives will go full circle and there is Kinnell reminding his readers that life needs to be lived fully without forgetting the individuals' capacity of awe.

As if cursed with a nightmare, understanding and experiencing life and death as the persona in the poem (and the poem itself) does has become the reader's aim. Kinnell's use of imagery and unpretentious motifs of everyday living is enthralling, the "dead shoes, in the new light" to take readers to lose their way to find out who they are and what they want. It is this paradox that has led me to read and analyze *The book of nightmares* and humanity's perpetual rotation of learning to unlearn who we are and who we might become, fulfilling the last function of myth.

Western society, in the XXI century, has come to make humanity deem primitive the rites of passage it had previously maintained. In a post-globalized era and a civilization that tends to favor capitalism and consumerism, rites of passage and myths may be perceived as primitive and senseless as Campbell (2004a) appraises when he states "The rational attitude has said, 'Oh, these old myths, they are nonsense' (p.19); even though, on a daily basis, people bump into rites of

passage and myth. *The book of nightmares* discloses rites, rites of passage, and myths for the eye of the reader uncovering opportunities of learning to mature in the world. Kinnell, in his book-length poem, does discuss the different rites human beings may encounter in their path on life; accordingly, the following chapter will concentrate on the analysis of how this free verse poem reveals Campbell's archetype of the hero's journey: the monomyth.

## CHAPTER III

### STEPPING INTO THE JOURNEY: THE HERO IN *THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES*

#### A. Introduction

Every time a baby is born, or a person dies, or weds, or turns older, or faces any ordeal in life, there is a tendency to feel at a threshold to either bliss or despair without considering that these circumstances represent disregarded rites of passage. Hence, it is primordial to remember that they indicate crucial happenings in the lives of individuals and that out of life comes death and from death life comes as Campbell (2004a) affirms “life is something that eats itself” (p. 104). In the latter case, death not being limited to signify the permanent termination of functions in an organism but the cessation of a cycle to start a different one with the purpose of improving. Consequently, rites that will sum up in the process of maturity of a person. Moreover, there must not be overlooked the fact that

It has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back... We remain fixated to the unexercised images of our infancy, and hence disinclined to the necessary passages of our adulthood... the goal is not to grow old, but to remain young; not to mature away from Mother, but to cleave to her (Campbell 2004b, p. 7).

Rites and myth, within their symbolic nature, have permeated human life for ages; however, reasoning has displaced their significance. It has become easier to belittle significant moments of life so that life may seem less complex to live; nevertheless, it becomes more unintelligible for time cannot be stopped and aging is the inherited path of humanity. Consequently, people cannot avoid experiencing rites but acknowledging them; Kinnell, on the contrary, discusses these rituals and the wisdom they may bring to the reader in his book-length poem. This poetic text presents an awakening of the need of going back to a more ritualistic life experience in which symbols may guide the individual to achieve plenitude in life and in death for “si nuestra muerte carece de sentido, tampoco lo tuvo nuestra vida<sup>27</sup>” (Paz 1995, p. 189), both moments in life are vital in the cycles of the world. Moreover, concerning myth, Campbell (1991) states that

Mythologies teaches you what's behind literature and the arts, it teaches you about your own life... Mythology has a great deal to do with the stages of life, the initiation ceremonies as you move from childhood to adult responsibilities ... all those rituals are mythological rites. They have to do with your recognition of the new role that you're in, the process of throwing off the old one and coming out in the new (p. 14).

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<sup>27</sup> If our death is senseless so was our life (my translation).

Taking into consideration Campbell's statement, human beings experience myth and ritual every day of their lives; and it is through the "personal or communal mythology" that they undergo, that people ascribe meaning to their existence. Life becomes more than an act of being alive but of making sense of what is lived. Regarding the function of ritual, Campbell (1972) affirms that:

As I understand it, is to give form to human life, not in the way a mere surface arrangement, but in depth. In ancient times, most social occasions were ritually structured, and the sense of depth was rendered through the maintenance of a religious tone. Today, on the other hand, the religious tone is reserved for exceptional, very special, "sacred" occasions. And yet even in the patterns of our secular life, ritual survives. It can be recognized, for example, not only in the decorum of courts and regulations of military life, but also in the manners of people sitting down to table together (p. 44).

As Barthes (1999) also asserts, myth abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, and it disregards all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible and it organizes a world which is without contradictions. Things appear to mean something by themselves (*Mythologies*, p. 124). Thus, as this research focuses on the how ritual is still part of humankind, this chapter will concentrate on how the hero of the poem moves forward in his journey for learning to finally acquire knowledge that will best serve



him in life. As Campbell (2004b) affirms, “the hero has died as a modern man; but as eternal man – perfected, unspecific, universal man – he has been reborn” (p. 15).

## B. The archetype of the hero’s journey

When a person decides on deciding, s/he is usually positioned at an active role, to choose from more than one option, and when picking there will be a trail to follow and consequences are hard to avoid. The routes that a person may opt for in life can reflect specific situations and emotions that guide them into the selection made. Many times, these same situations have been undergone by others and it is these previous experiences the ones that could enrich life as the persona who will commence his journey in “Under the Maud moon” on the path where he lights “a small fire in the rain.” According to Campbell (2004b) “The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth” (p. 23):

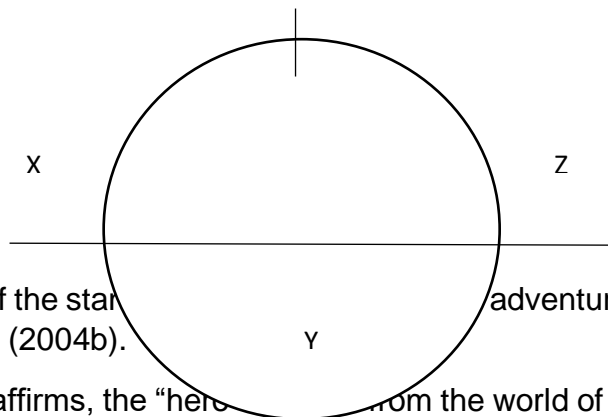


Figure 4. Description of the start and end of the adventure of the hero according to Campbell (2004b).

As this scholar affirms, the “hero” is drawn from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder (X): fabulous forces are there encountered and a

decisive victory is won (Y): the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (Z)” (p. 23). Hence, *The book of nightmares* is a poem that offers its readers the possibility to study as the archetypal journey of the hero: the quest. Within this universal pattern, three main stages are established:

1. Separation or departure: Campbell (2004b) affirms that the “Typical circumstances of the call are the dark forest, the great tree, the babbling stream, and the loathly, underestimated appearance of the carrier of the power of destiny” (p. 43). In Kinnell’s poems I, II, and III, “Under the Maud moon,” “The hen flower,” and “The shoes of wandering” respectively, the persona encounters the path to an old and dark forest: On the path/by this wet site/ of old fires – /black ashes, black stones;” moreover, the carrier, that is present throughout the poem is introduced: *the tramp* who “must have squatted down,/ gnawing on stream water” (the babbling stream) (Kinnell 1971a, p. 3). From the first line, the reader encounters elements of separation and departure that respond to Campbell’s monomyth.
2. Trials and victories of initiation: Campbell (2004b) describes this movement in time (chronological or psychological) as he declares that “if anyone – in whatever society – undertakes for himself the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth, he soon finds himself in a

landscape of symbolical figures” (p. 84). And so, it happens in *The book of nightmares*. Poems IV to VIII lead the persona into an unknown world where he listens and sees symbolic elements of life and death and when he feels trapped in the face of life as a fly may feel trapped in a spider’s web, feeling alone for he “has no one to turn to because God is my enemy. He gave me lust and joy and cut off my hands” (Kinnell 1971a, p. 30).

3. Return and reintegration with society: “The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community” (Campbell 2004b, p. 167). It is in poems IX and X that the hero returns. Again, he is positioned “On the path winding/ upward, toward the high valley” (Kinnell 1971a, p. 65). But as Campbell states, “the responsibility has been frequently refused” (p. 167) hence “I close my eyes:/ on the heat-rippled beaches/ here the hills came down to the sea” (p. 65) until the persona is able to unite his split being so that “at the last/ that one/ and zero/ walk off together/ walk off the end of these pages together,/ one creature/ walking away side by side with the emptiness” (Kinnell 1971a, p. 73). It is in this tenth poem that the hero finally realizes that life-death are part of one single entity that belongs to a cycle for when it is “over” and “the dead lie,/ empty, filled,

at the beginning,/ and the first voice comes craving again out of their mouths”  
(Kinnell 1971a, p. 74).

### **A. Separation or departure**

The moment of separation for the hero, in Campbell’s motif, represents the moment of releasing the unknown within himself and, as the scholar affirms “A blunder – apparently the merest chance – reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (Campbell 2004b, p. 42) but that awakens a strong fascination in the hero. In the first poem of *The book of nightmares*, “Under the Maud moon,” the persona faces the path where people have failed to get warm and be saved as they have “unhousel[ed] themselves on cursed bread, / failing to get warm at a twigfire.” It is then when, unexpectedly, the persona realizes that “the deathwatches inside /begin running out of time;” he must start his journey for

The raindrops trying  
to put the fire out  
fall into it and are  
changed: the oath broken,  
the oath sworn between earth and water, flesh and spirit, broken,  
to be sworn again,  
over and over, in the clouds, and to be broken again

over and over, on earth (p. 4).

It is in this moment when the persona receives the call of the tramp to start the journey seeking to give “you a line to connect with that mystery which you are; and all of these wonderful poetic images of mythology are referring to something in you” (Campbell 1991, p. 91). The speaker is waiting to commence his walk on the path with the challenge of a chaotic moment that can only offer a feeble promise of harmony. The imagery of rain falling on fire reveals a common binary opposition; in this case, rain and fire become one. Moreover, it is in this instant when the hero sits

a moment

by the fire, in the rain, speak

a few words into its warmth –

stone saint smooth stone – and sing

one of the songs I used to croak

for my daughter, in her nightmares (p. 4).

It is this “moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand” (Campbell 2004b, p. 43). This is the beginning of the symbolic death, that moment when individuals realize that a cycle is over and it needs to restart. Nevertheless, it is mandatory to “croak” and to “howl” when “the one / held note / remains – a love note / twisting under my tongue, like a coyote’s bark / curving off,

into a / howl” (p. 4), a cry of desperation that cannot be understood. It is this moment of departure the one that unlocks the mystery of life with the prenatal existence of each human being and the subsequent birth of a baby:

It is all over,  
 little one, the flipping  
 and overleaping, the watery  
 somersaulting alone in the oneness  
 under the hill, under  
 the old, lonely bellybutton  
 pushing forth again  
 in remembrance,  
 the drifting there furled in the dark,  
 pressing a knee or elbow  
 along a slippery wall, sculpting  
 the world with each thrash – the stream  
 of omphalos blood humming all about you (p. 5).

Prenatal life is a struggle just as life is, the fetus is alone and “under / the old, lonely bellybutton” until the moment of birth when “the grip of departure, the slow / agonized clenches making / the last molds of her life in the dark,” until “she dies / a moment, turns blue as coal” (p. 6); or as Paz (1995) asserts that “vida y muerte son

inseparables<sup>28</sup>” (p. 194). However, the persona in the poem is not aware of this fact and he is suffering and afraid that even nature is involved in a never-ending cycle that embraces death and it is then when he is summoned:

Listen, Kinnell,  
dumped alive  
and dying into the old sway bed,  
layer of crushed feathers all that there is  
between you  
and the long shaft of darkness shaped as you,  
let go.

Even this haunted room  
all its materials photographed with tragedy,  
even the tiny crucifix drifting face down at the center of the earth,  
even these feathers freed from their wings forever  
are afraid (pp. 14-15).

The persona feels lost and terrified when facing the reality of dying for without knowing he has been discarded; therefore, “the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved” (Campbell 2004b, p. 49). However, it is then in “The shoes of wandering” that the persona encounters

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<sup>28</sup> Life and death are inseparable (my translation).

the tramp's shoes and he discovers "the eldershoes of [his] feet / as their first feet, clinging down to the least knuckle and corn" and he "walk[s] out in dead shoes, in the new light" to understand that "the first step, the Crone / who scried the crystal said, *shall be / to lose the way*" (p. 19). In this sense the hero meets an individual who "provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (Campbell 2004b, p. 57). Hence, the charm given to the persona is humanity's knowledge and the shoes for "the old / footsmells in the shoes, touched / back to life by my footsweats, as by / a child's kisses, rise" to start the crossing of the first threshold as the path opens completely and a road witnessed by trees that burn "a last time" (p. 21), an allusion to the Bible's burning trees as bearers of a truth, open his way to "the road," his path to knowledge, but "the road / trembles as it starts across swampland streaked with shined water" (p. 21). However, this "water" will be accompanied by "a lethe- / wind of chill air" (p. 21) that will stroke him "all over [his] body" (p. 21), trying to make him cast his memories to oblivion as he crosses his own *Hades*<sup>29</sup>. In this abstraction, the persona's symbolic journey to death

certain brain cells crackle like softwood in a great fire  
 or die,  
 each step a shock,  
 a shattering underfoot mirrors sick of the itch  
 of our face-bones under their skins,

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<sup>29</sup> Hades is one of the rivers of the underworld in Greek mythology.



as memory reaches out

and lays bloody hands on the future (p. 21).

As the hero enters this path, his rational being loses as much strength as he gains experience, it becomes a give-take promenade that leads him into anxiety and fear as the relentless memories on which he strolls makes him see that beyond flesh there is nothing but bones. The trail quivers and as he walks, he is confronted with a reflection in which the face echoes life and the bones death, an unresolved binary that troubles him. Subsequently, these recollections taint his walk as “the haunted / shoes rising and falling / through the dust, wings of dust / lifting around them, as they flap / down the brainwaves of the temporal road” (p. 21). He realizes that the shoes, the symbolic element that represents him, his walking and humankind, as they are haunted, cannot fly and take him away of pain and grief. The shoes are “haunted” because in each shoe there is a little of every individual on earth, and all human beings will one day wander “the temporal road” (p. 21) of the life-death continuum. As Campbell (2004b) asserts “The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died” (p. 74). Indeed, it is in this moment when the persona feels that there is no escape from death and pain; moreover, he may ponder about his demise.

Consequently, the persona will start his journey, deliberately, into the darkness, to start learning about who he is and who he may become. After taking off the shoes and started descending into his path, in his dream, the path opens as the route becomes darker. He is now in *the belly of the whale*<sup>30</sup> as he wanders

On this road  
 on which I do not know how to ask for bread,  
 on which I do not know how to ask for water,  
 this path  
 inventing itself  
 through jungles of burnt flesh, ground of ground  
 bones, crossing itself  
 at the odor of blood, and stumbling on (p. 22).

As Campbell (2004b) affirms, for those who start the quest and find themselves in the belly of the whale “emphasis is to the lesson that that passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation. The disappearance corresponds to the passing of a worshiper into the temple – where he is to be quickened by the recollection of who and what he is, namely dust and ashes unless immortal” (p. 77). So does the quester feels this agony of walking on this graveyard that seems to take

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<sup>30</sup> According to Campbell (2004b), “The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died” (p. 74).

him nowhere as it “cross[es] itself,” humankind’s path is never straight as it opposes “itself / at the odor of blood” (p. 22). However, it is in this moment when he, as in a shrine, “long[s] for the mantle / of the great wanderers, who lighted / their steps by the lamp of pure hunger and pure thirst,” (p. 22), knowing that “whichever way they lurched was the way” (p. 22), for the metaphor of the way is open to the different people that walk the path. For example, for each person, there may be a different path to walk because humanity seems to long for redemption and which is only accomplished individually. It would be unrealistic to believe that the trail the hero walks will be the same for other people; indeed, everyone must walk his/her path in order to acquire that knowledge that s/he lacks.

The persona seems to be desolate and adrift looking for the cloak of those who have traveled this path before; the hero wants to feel protected with this symbolic mantle, a cloak that has been worn by those that already walked and lighted the path and like them know that “whichever way they lurched was the way” (p. 22). However, he feels lost and his feeling of despair is enhanced when “(...) the Crone / held up [his] crystal skull to the moon” (p. 22). It is then when the quester encounters “the Goddess,” the Crone; hence, as Campbell (2004b) affirms “the ‘bad’ mother too persists in the hidden land of the adult’s infant recollection and is sometimes even the greater form” (p. 92). This woman grabbed his “crystal skull” and as she hold it to the moon, the hero was positioned “across the Aquarian stars,” symbolic element that denotes the union of two opposing forces or of two halves, as

he is part of two realms, the spiritual and the mortal, as well as belonging to the contrasting realms: life and death. The Crone then declares

*poor fool,*

*poor forked branch*

*of Applewood, you will feel all your bones*

*break*

*over the holy waters you will never drink (p. 23).*

She makes reference to the Christian symbol of the apple: temptation and knowledge simultaneously. He is a “forked branch,” he has walked away from humanity’s path, and that is the reason why he will grieve as his “bones / break” while looking for wisdom. His encounter with his *anima* did not become what was expected and his experience makes him see that the nature of existence is grieving and that there is only longing for redemption. It is at this stage in the journey that he comes to meet Virginia, a female presence. Indeed, Campbell (2004b) states that “not even the remoteness of the desert, can defend against the female presences; for as long as the hermit’s flesh clings to his bones and pulses warm, the images of life are alert to storm his mind” (p. 104). The quester receives two letters from Virginia (his Dear stranger) that takes him to different places, from a church to Virginia’s room, to the countryside, to a kitchen, and to a riverbank. At this point, the

quest moves towards the stage of the “trials and victories of initiation” (Campbell 2004b, p. 28).

## **2. Trials and victories of initiation**

After the hero survives this test, he is faced with a series of challenges that will comprise the major weight of the journey. The first task is presented when “[o]nce having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials” (Campbell 2004b, p. 81). It is also, at this point when the quester “can hear the chime/ of the Old Tower, tinny sacring-bell drifting out / over the city” (p. 27). It is the town’s church bells resonating announcing a new day’s beginning; however, they may also signal death as they toll. The quester is still astray, and he is looking for guidance in this uncertain journey in which life and death are part of one continuum. Furthermore, the persona experiences a transformative experience as the chime becomes the “chyme / of our loves / the peristalsis of the will to love forever / drives down, grain / after grain, into the last / coldest room, which is memory” (p. 27). The chime has morphed into the chyme, semidigested food; in this transformation, the eternal, depicted in the metaphor of the temple and its bells is contrasted with the chyme, a physical reality that gives room to “the maggots/ inhabiting beds old men have died in/ to crawl out” (p. 27).

Subsequently, from this image of the city and the metamorphosis of the “sacring-bell” the hero seems to be taken towards big steps from one place to another,

wandering the path; and the first site to visit is Virginia's room where she is found in fear. She seems to have been possessed by a supernatural being that forces her to draw symbolic elements of wholeness and infinity; however, the horror emerges from understanding that in a road of trials, the persona must recognize that "he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh" (Campbell 2004b, p. 89). Furthermore, it is fundamental to consider Campbell's insight when he affirms that

Generally we refuse to admit within ourselves, or within our friends, the fullness of what is pushing, self-protective, malodorous, carnivorous, lecherous fever which is the very nature of the organic cell. Rather, we tend to perfume, whitewash, and reinterpret; meanwhile imagining that all the flies in the ointment, all the hairs in the soup, are the fault of some unpleasant someone else (p. 102).

Virginia cannot accept that what pushes outwards from the inside is part of her nature; perhaps, this is what horrifies her, not accepting her shadow to be able to attain her own self. It is then, when she tells the quester:

Dear Galway,

It began late one April night when I couldn't sleep. It was the dark of the moon. My hand felt numb, the pencil went over the page drawn on its way by I don't know what. It drew circles and figure-eights and mandalas. I cried. I had to drop the pencil. I was shaking. I went to bed and tried to pray. At last I relaxed. Then I felt

my mouth open. My tongue moved, my breath wasn't my own. The whisper which forced itself through my teeth said, *Virginia, your eyes shine back to me from my own world.* O God, I thought. My breath came short, my heart opened. O God I thought, now I have a demon lover.

Yours, faithless to this life,

Virginia (p. 28).

Virginia is scared of her own solitude and eternity. Symbolically, she draws “circles and figure eights and mandalas” (pp. 28-29), illustrations that represent the cycle, the infinite<sup>31</sup>. According to Edinger (1992), the

Self is the ordering and unifying center of the total psyche (conscious and unconscious) ... Jung has demonstrated that the Self has a characteristic phenomenology. It is expressed by certain typical symbolic images called mandalas. All images emphasize a circle with a center and usually with the additional feature of a square, a cross, or some other representation of quaternity, fall into this category. There are also a number of other associated themes and images that refer to the Self. Such themes as wholeness, totality,

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<sup>31</sup> According to von Franz (in Jung 1964), the mandala is a “symbolic representation of the nuclear atom of the human psyche;” moreover, for him, “The contemplation of the mandala is meant to bring an inner peace, a feeling that life has again found its meaning and order. The mandala also conveys this feeling when it appears spontaneously in the dreams of modern men who are not influenced by any religious tradition of this sort and know nothing about it” (p. 230). Furthermore, this scholar also asserts that “Jung stressed that the only real adventure remaining for each individual is the exploration of his own unconscious. The ultimate goal of such a search is the forming of a harmonious and balanced relationship with the Self. The circular mandala images this perfect balance” (p. 231).

the union of opposites, the central generative point where God and man meet, the point where transpersonal energies flow into personal life, eternity as opposed to the temporal flux, incorruptibility, the inorganic united paradoxically with the organic, protective structures capable of bringing order out of chaos, the transformation of energy, the elixir of life – all refer to the Self, the central source of life energy, the fountain of our being which is most simply described as God. Indeed, the richest sources for the phenomenological study of the Self are in the innumerable representations that man has made of the deity (pp. 3-4).

Regarding Edinger's words, it is fundamental to mention that Jung (2006), in *The undiscovered self*, asserts that

this is certainly not to say that what we call the unconscious is identical with God or is set up in his place. It is the medium from which the religious experience seems to flow. As to what the further cause of such an experience may be, the answer to this lies beyond the range of human knowledge. Knowledge of God is a transcendental problem (pp. 89-90).

Jung considers that the various representation of deities, from the different religions or beliefs, from past and present cultures, were symbolic manifestations of the Self archetype.

This cycle that Virginia envisions unequivocally denotes the cosmic and psychic order that concerns the hero and that may serve as a guide to the journey



ahead. However, Virginia seems anguished as many individuals who face moments of solitude for it is not until she “relaxed” and her “heart opened” that she understood that there is a veiled self in every person that needs to be acknowledged to live life at its fullest. Consequently, the hero continues with his path, and after this encounter, he is taken along a river, descending to a place “At dusk, by the blue Juniata” where he is faced with the reality of the destruction of nature and once again his feelings of grief emerge for “a rural America,” the magazine said, / “now vanished, but extant in memory, / a primal garden lost forever...” (p. 28). The natural world as he knew it is gone. It has disappeared. He is confronted with a massive alteration of what he expected; as a result, more difficulties for him to deal with materialize on his path to self-knowledge. As Campbell stresses (2004b) “The specific psychological difficulties of the dreamer [in this case the quester] frequently are revealed with touching simplicity and force” (p. 85). Hence, for the persona, the integrity of nature, has been violated as

the root-hunters  
 go out into the woods, pull up  
 love-roots from the virginal glades, bend  
 the stalks over shovel-handles  
 and lever them up, the huge,  
 bass, final  
*thrum*

as each root unclutches from its spot.

The roots that live within the soil have been pulled so hard that there is a rumbling sound, like artillery, that echoes in the woods. This is a grieving image of how humanity, in this case the persona, witnesses the devastation of what has given life to him; moreover, it becomes a foreshadowing of his own death unless it is stopped. After experiencing this desolate former paradise in the evening, the persona resumes his journey and he is taken to a room where a concoction is being prepared and the recipe for remaking humankind is being given. Throughout this section, the persona asks for guidance on the uncertainty of his journey and finds the recipe of a potion, by a mystic, that may restore him and humanity to a more primitive state; nevertheless, the only door that seems to unlock for the quester is unconsciousness as this diviner states:

*Take kettle*

*of blue water.*

*Boil over twigfire*

*of ash wood. Grind root.*

*Throw in. Let macerate. Reheat*

*over ash ashes. Bottle.*

*Stopper with thumb*

*of dead man. Ripen*

*forty days in horse dung*

*in the wilderness. Drink.*

*Sleep.*

In this section of the poem, the hero is given a recipe for a potion to gain strength. The water should be blue, imagery that is associated with the ocean and consequently with eternity; moreover, the metonymy of the wood, as a representation of the ash tree that has been associated to strength, power and rebirth empowers the image as the water boils. Consequently, the water, while boiling, will morph as it will later alter again as it macerates and becomes softer. The stopper of the bottle will be a thumb, image that represents humankind's characteristic that makes him/her different from other species; however, this finger is part of a corpse. Additionally, the recipe makes an allusion to the Bible, the forty days spent by Jesus Christ in the desert; however, in this case, this liquid will ripe for these forty days in excrement, that of a horse. And as bizarre as it may seem, this concoction might look like the last opportunity to gain knowledge, the fragments of intuition that as the quester affirms "(...) mortality/ could not grind down into his meal of blood and laughter" (p. 29). Regarding this moment the persona spends with the sibyl, Campbell (2004b) asserts that "It is in this ordeal that the hero may derive hope and assurance from the helpful female figure, by whose magic (pollen charms or power of intercession) he is protected through all the frightening experiences of the father's ego-shattering initiation" (110). However, the last instruction: "sleep" (p. 29) guides the quester into a state of oblivion, for there seems

to be no hope for humankind. Likewise, as he journeys forward his path, the persona is also cautioned and conditioned for

... when you rise –  
 if you do rise — it will be in the Sothic year  
 made of the raised salvages  
 of the fragments all unaccomplished  
 of years past, scraps  
 and jettisons of time mortality  
 could not grind down into his meal of blood and laughter (p. 29).

The persona is notified that after the sleep originated by the potion and only if he rises, it will be when the “fragments” of life lived come to signify a unity and “mortality” would not engulf them in its celebration for these “scraps” would have become a whole. Therefore, “if there is one more love / to be known, one more poem / to be opened into life / [he] will find it here / or nowhere” (p. 29). This is the quester’s time to learn and to gain experience. He will realize the route to follow as he is guided for his “hand will move / on its own / down the curving path” (p. 29) until

a face materializes into your hands,  
 on the absolute whiteness of the pages  
 a poem writes itself out: its title – the dream  
 of all poems and the text

of all loves – “Tenderness toward Existence” (p. 29).

Suddenly, the persona’s object is a poem whose title is “Tenderness toward Existence;” the hero is then provoked to understand life as kindheartedness stirring of the imagination and emotions where he “too, [has] eaten / the meals of the dark shore. In time’s / own mattress” (pp. 29-30). He has experienced grief and loneliness; however, he then wonders if “it can be true – / all bodies, one body, one light / made of everyone’s darkness together? (p. 30). His final enquiry circumscribes each individual on earth. Would it be true that people face different journeys with the same objective? Learning about who they are? Can all these experiences come together and become one? Can persons understand the transmutation of the darkness into the metaphor of light?

As the book-length poem develops, the quester will find answers to these and other questions; for example, when wondering about the possibility of others taking this archetypical journey, he hero addresses the future older self of the daughter, because he knows she will be in need of counseling:

And in the days  
 when you find yourself orphaned  
 emptied  
 of all wind singing, of light,  
 the pieces of cursed bread on your tongue,  
 may there come back to you

a voice,  
spectral, calling you  
*sister!*  
from everything that dies (p. 8)

And as he moves forward, he tells her to “learn no reach deeper / into the sorrows / to come” (p. 52). Moreover, in the last section of the book-length poem, he acknowledges the fact that all experiences in life are represented in the symbolism of numbers one and zero: “walk off together/ walk off the end of these pages together, / one creature / walking away side by side with the emptiness” (p. 73), with death. Because humankind should admit that death is part of life, they are one. Since “Lastness / is brightness. It is the brightness / gathered up of all that went before. It lasts” (pp. 73-74).

And then, the quester receives a new missive from Virginia in which she affirms to have been deceived by God as she “[has] no one to turn to because God is my enemy. He gave me / lust and joy and cut off [her] hands” (p. 39). Moreover, she complains about the paradoxes faced in life as she has been endowed with a body but she cannot enjoy it; she should love it but she dreads it; it is alive but also dead, it is a casket; it is spirit and vipers. She abruptly realizes that she is made up of binary oppositions. However, she has not been able to take her journey of self-discovery. Her body has been given to her but somehow, it seems, she has not been able to enjoy it “naturally,” but that is has been conditioned by the institution of

religion. This is the reason why she considers a foe her deity. And even when she can communicate her frustration, she cannot understand her reality and requests understanding, for which she would have to embark on her own future journey of self-discovery.

But before answering those former questions, the hero of the poem focuses on himself and answers and replies to the “stranger,” himself, and her reader:

Dear stranger  
extant in memory by the blue Juniata  
these letters  
across space I guess  
will be all we will know of one another.

Experience is summarized in the moments lived and gathered in Jung’s concept of humanity’s collective unconscious. And after this epiphany, the quester faces a personal confrontation between the tramp and himself (for he wears the shoes of the tramp) when “the fly / ceases to struggle, his wings / flutter out the music blooming with failure / of one who gets ready to die” (p. 35). In this realm of his world, brightness is absent and there is no struggle when facing death.

For the quester, there will be no more letters between Virginia (the virgin) and him. Virginia’s darkness becomes one with his (the stranger’s); he has been descending through this path and she accompanies him as he wonders if all

people's darkness could conform one light. As the persona proceeds on his passage, there seems to be no movement forward, no solution; and as "the fly / ceases to struggle, his wings / flutter out the music blooming with failure / of one who gets ready to die" (p. 35). Likewise, for him, humankind is trapped in the capitalist fantasy of contemporary life. For the hero, there are individuals who lack caring feelings for others and what people tend to find is "an empty embrace." Consequently, his experience is desolate and

In the light  
 left behind by the little  
 spiders of blood who garbled  
 their memoirs across his shoulders  
 and chest, the room  
 echoes with the tiny thrumps  
 of crotch hairs plucking themselves  
 from their spots; on the stripped skin  
 the love-sick crab lice  
 struggle to unstick themselves and sprint from the doomed  
 position –  
 and stop,  
 heads buried  
 for one last taste of the love-flesh (pp. 35-36).



The quester enters a scenario where diseased sexuality is staged and where “love” has no dwelling. The light has been “left behind” and the uncaring sexual encounters are depicted in the verses in the metaphors of the “spiders” and the metonymy of the “crotch hair” the reference to the “love-sick crab lice.” The spiders may very well stand for the veins and arteries system as they resemble these arthropods; the “crotch hair” may represent the unhappy sexual relations women might have experienced in that hotel of “lost light;” while the “crab lice” emphasizes a diseased sexuality that damages individuals. In sum, these images assembled through the metaphors of very little light, the insects that promenade through the scene, the spiders and lice that reflect decay and hence, death, generate in him more anguish on his journey. The room is infested with beings that feed on other beings “for one last taste” (p. 36), and this act transmutes into the bite of decay. It is then when the speaker, addressing the tramp, “write[s] out / for him in this languished alphabet / of worms, these last words / of himself, post[s] for him / his final postcard to posterity” (p. 36), in which desolation is all there is as he reminisces previous actions when the tramp reveals the nightmares he has experienced. At this point in the journey, the quester becomes the chronicler of the Tramp as he illustrates his life of contradictions in which he “sat out by twigfires flaring in grease” that has been “strewn from the pimpled limbs / of her” (p. 36). He can be warm and alive only if another living being has died. Pain and grief are the feelings that arouse from such an experience for they have made him evoke the need to kill a living being

to survive, as the hen. He “blacked out into oblivion by the crack in the curb where the forget- / me blooms” (p. 36). The vagrant has been set into forgetfulness, ironically where the forget-me flowers bloom.

Moreover, he “saw the ferris wheel writing its huge, desolate zeroes in neon on the / evening skies” (p. 36). This amusement park machine, full of light and laughter draws “desolate zeros,” an empty number that simultaneously and contrastingly imply infinity. In the emptiness, the lights seem to draw zeros that echo his personal void at the end of the day. Additionally, the tramp continues his narrative as he “painted [his] footsoles purple for the day when the beautiful color would show” (p. 36); the pun of the “footsoles” referring to his “soul” and the day he dies, represented symbolically by the color purple, a color that shows in the body after death. Moreover, this image is emphasized when the persona, experiencing his transformation into the tramp, at the moment of death, when the color of blood, “beautiful color would show,” affirms:

Violet bruises come out  
all over his flesh, as invisible  
fists start beating him a last time; the whine  
of omphalos blood starts up again, the puffed  
bellybutton explodes, the carnal  
nightmare soars back to the beginning (p. 37).

This image of the decomposition of a corpse, as it turns “violet” and the central point in the body, the navel, which gave the body life, “explodes.” Thus, the bodily occurrence of life ends to start again. It is death what will bring him back “to the beginning” and as Paz (1995) asserts, death is “para los aztecas, la manera más honda de participar en la continua regeneración de las fuerzas creadoras, siempre en peligro de extinguirse si no se les provee de sangre, alimento sagrado<sup>32</sup>” (p. 192). Furthermore, he affirms that “vida y muerte carecen de autonomía; son las dos caras de una misma realidad<sup>33</sup>” (p. 192). As the verses develop, the persona maintains his death-like word choice when he unable to speak appropriately verbalizes “staggered death-sentences down empty streets, the cobblestones assured me, *it shall be so*” (p. 36). He spoke his “death-sentences” in empty roads that will guide him to his finale; moreover, he “heard [his] own cries already howled inside bottles the waves washed up on beaches” (p. 37). His cries instead of being screamed are trapped in bottles that lead him into “ghostwrit[ing] [his] prayers” (p. 37).

The Tramp’s paradoxes are reinforced in the choice of setting, *Hotel of Lost Light* and when the persona is addressed to take action “If the deskman knocks, griping again / about the sweet, excremental / odor of opened cadaver creeping out / from under the door” (p.37). At this moment of the journey, the hero starts

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<sup>32</sup> Death is “for the Aztecs, the deepest path to participate of the continuous regeneration of the creating forces, always in danger of vanishing if blood, the sacred sustenance, is not provided” (my translation).

<sup>33</sup> “Life and death lack autonomy; they are both the counterpart of the same reality” (my translation).

understanding that death is part of two different realities that paradoxically become one. And this awareness is strengthened with the choice of two words that present the same letter but different phonemes: leave, a symbol for dying; and live. Hence, the action requested to be taken is to “tell him, 'Friend, *To Live* / has a poor cousin, / who calls tonight, who pronounces the family name / *To Leave*, she / changes each visit the flesh-rags on her bones” (p.37). This double-faced truth, that life and death are intertwined, is explicitly paraded as with life that may come any moment so does death.

At this point of the journey, the persona acknowledges death to be an ever-present reality that seems to mock humanity for when attained it urges to a commencement, just as “the sweet, excremental / odor of opened cadaver” so “Violet bruises come out / all over his flesh, as invisible / fists start beating him a last time; the whine / of omphalos blood starts up again” (p. 37). Death, in the “violet bruises” is echoed at Maud’s birth when “she skids out on her face into light ...glowing / with the astral violet / of the underlife” (p. 6); and as in the moment of coming into the world “the stream of omphalos blood humming all about you” (p. 5), it is in the last moment of the person who died that blood stirs and “starts up again” (p. 37). Afterward, “the puffed / bellybutton explodes, the carnal / nightmare soars back to the beginning” (p. 37). The description of the corpse as a distressing image is presented as the blood has stopped circulating through the body; consequently, the latter decomposes and circles to “the beginning:” the “darkness” experienced at

the moment of being born. The same sense of loss when coming into the world is undergone when dying for as “they cut / her tie to the darkness / she dies a moment / turns blue as coal / the limbs shaking /as the memories rush out of them” (p. 6).

It is in this gloomy and execrable tone in the poem that the persona encounters a last memory of humanity: the act of speaking and writing. As he asserts, “these words scattered into the future – / *posterity* / is one invented too deep in its past / to hear them” (p. 37). The hero decides to ponder on the word in which the past and the future are inscribed: “posterity.” Once more, in his quest, two realms mirror life and death so, in this last moment, before leaving the hotel, the speaker affirms to have suffered from “war and madness” in a decaying world without light but has also seen how after death, the bones “tossed into the aceldama” will “re-arise / in the pear tree, in spring” (p. 37) . However, he has found no harmony in the paradox of life and death; and “The foregoing scribed down / in March, of the year Seventy, / on my sixteen-thousandth night of war and madness,/ in the Hotel of Lost Light, under the freeway / which roams out into the dark / of the moon, in the absolute spell / of departure” (p. 37), exactly as he is, facing an oxymoron “and by the light / from the joined hemispheres of the spider’s eyes” (p. 37). The reference to the eyes of the latter insect are a clue to understand his state of being as the spider’s eyes are an example of transparent hemispheres behind which there is a dark hole without end, exactly as the hero may perceive his life on earth. The persona’s quest for finding meaning in the dichotomy life-death is the perceived

contradiction that hunts him. As a result, this becomes the hero's rationale to continue his descent into the abyss until he finds that "A piece of flesh give[ing] off/ smoke in the field" (p. 41) where "*This corpse will not stop burning!*" (p. 41). The quester is confronted with his past and humanity's former pugnacious acts. His recollections of an excruciating past come back as the flashback of a combat episode becomes real as he recollects:

I'd already started, burst  
 after burst, little black pajamas jumping  
 and falling... and remember that pilot  
 who'd bailed out over the North  
 how I shredded him down to catgut on his strings?  
 one of his slant eyes, a piece  
 of his smile, sail past me  
 every night right after the sleeping pill ... (p. 41).

In this flashback, the persona cannot hide the consequences that the experience of war has had on him. The metaphor of "the little black pajamas jumping and falling" echoes the dead of Asians during the Vietnam war; and the horror of memories is discovered when the synecdoche of "his slant eye" and "a piece of his smile" represents the life of thousands of dead soldiers and civilians. As the persona acknowledges, he needs to take pills to sleep, for he continuously remembers the deaths he caused and how he grew accustomed to killing, how he cherished the

sound of the firearms and the feeling of power he had as “It was only / that I loved the *sound* / of them, I guess I just loved / the *feel* of them sparkin’ off my hands...” (p. 42). The industry of war is presented as a mechanical action that makes people ill. Capitalist society has seen in war a manufacturing business that besides creating jobs for people increases economic growth of nations without considering the destruction and pain it can produce in the world. As a matter of fact, in this section of the poem, human beings are depicted as merciless individuals who end up cherishing the execution of others and the annihilation of themselves.

From these disturbing images of the horror of war, the hero moves forward, as in a dream, to a more intimate setting in which an individual addresses several questions to an audience that is in front of a “television screen.” At this moment of the journey, the persona rephrases the screen’s messages questioning social media and the impact they have on the individuals’ perception of the self and of the other. This subsection of the poem commences with the statement “On the television screen:” and as it develops, it poses questions on humankind proof of aging as:

Do you have a body that sweats?

Sweat that has odors?

False teeth clanging into your breakfast?

Case of the dread?

Headache so perpetual it may outlive you?

Armpits sprouting hair?

Piles so huge you don't need a chair to sit at a table?

Media has changed the way people see themselves, the body is not accepted as it is, and it must be changed. Appearance seems to move a world in which peace and tranquility have been surpassed by the desire of being who one is not, so much as to try to change who the individual is in order to fit in society's expectation because "*We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed...*" (p. 42). This is Kinnell's intertext (1 Corinthians 15:51) to remind the persona that in contemporary life, this mystery is not one anymore, for every person, with access to the media, will be changed. Actually, the media's organized course of action to sell a product, being it concrete like a car or as abstract as beauty, has triggered in humankind the need to "be better," "be more beautiful," "be younger," among other possibilities, and these needs are the ones that prompt individuals to change. The Bible's prophecy is attained in this century through marketing and self-loathing. The hero, with this knowledge, will continue his path; but, before returning he is confronted with a world of corruption and human depravity in which he questions humankind's greed, pride, wars, and the deaths these conflicts have caused "In the Twentieth Century of my trespass on earth" (p. 42). The somber tone in the poem turns then to irony and sarcasm as the persona meditates upon human decadence, bloodthirst, greed, and madness. In this specific case, the persona ponders on the power of destruction humankind has achieved for people are killed for their "own good," "one billion



heathens, / heretics, Jews, Moslems, witches, mystical seekers,/ black men, Asians, and Christian brothers,/ every one of them for his own good” (p. 42).

Moreover, humanity has also slaughter others for loving nature and living in accordance to nature’s laws like the “whole continent of red men for living in unnatural community / and at the same time having relations with the land” (p. 42). And the bloodshed does not stop but continues with “one billion species of animals for being sub-human” (p. 42); animals are killed for they are not considered human and serve as sources for food and raw materials in the fashion industry of a capitalist society. So, instead of considering all that has been done to the Earth and its inhabitants, human beings are prepared and prompt to continue their butchery beyond this planet as they are “ready to take on bloodthirsty creatures from the other planets” (p. 42). This insanity faced by the quester, as a product of the war industry and fear promoted by the media and governments, is highlighted when the persona growls as he swears on his “last will,” for he cannot speak anymore. He has descended to the primitive and in a symbolically ironic offering discusses centuries of horror and deceitfulness in these verses as he declares:

My tongue goes to the Secretary of the Dead  
 to tell the corpses, “I’m sorry, fellows,  
 the killing was just one of those things  
 difficult to pre-visualize – like a cow  
 say, getting hit by lightning” (p. 43).

For him, war could have always been avoided, that is why he utilizes the analogy of a cow in a field. Cows, as totem animals, are usually interpreted as generous and selfless creatures that provide sustenance; and being in a field, under no shelter, they would be easy targets for lightning. Thus, the persona in the poem, uses verbal irony to assert that just as a cow could have been protected from lightning and death so the world could have been shielded from war. It must be easy to see the cow in the fields as it is effortless to visualize the deaths and pain of war. Consequently, the verses "(...) this lowliest / of tongues, whose lick-tracks tell / our history of errors to the dust behind" (pp. 21-22) become an offering to the political leaders who guide men to die a senseless death, a death that could have been avoided, like war. For the quester, the tongue, that may represent language, has generated conflicts that affect civilians, average citizens of a nation, but not the ones in power positions. The persona mocks humankind's understanding of conflict for they have not learned from historical errors as societies repeat similar cycles of unhappiness and misery through time. As a matter of fact, besides being politically critical towards the aforementioned topic, the persona employs the metaphor of his body parts to criticize the corruption of governmental systems to justify the killings in war.

As the hero continues discussing his will, he doubts Caucasians' *acts of kindness* towards those individuals that they have previously decimated and degraded during colonial times and so he gives his

(...) stomach, which has digested  
 four hundred treaties giving the Indians  
 eternal right to their land, I give to the Indians  
 I throw in my lungs which have spent four hundred years  
 sucking in good faith on peace pipes (p. 43).

The discussion presented in this section of the poem must take into consideration that within “ideology<sup>34</sup>” there are not neutral signs and skin color, ethnicity and indigenous people are terms that must be considered. Sign systems help to reinforce different framings of what has to be, should be or must (not) be. Signs not only reflect the “reality” of the group but also control the system of signs that construct meaning and as a result, “reality.” In this case, the persona mocks and questions how the first nations were granted rights over what rightfully belonged to them. It must also be considered that as users of signs, people become subjects of the system for they do not have them under control; they are used instrumentally. Ethnicity is one of those “language” signs to which a meaning and a response has been assigned and which cannot change so easily and has become a term for

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<sup>34</sup> According to Eagleton (1996), “The largely concealed structure of values which informs and underlies our actual statements is part of what is meant by ideology. By ideology I mean, roughly, the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power-structure and power-relations of the society we live in. It follows from such a rough definition of ideology that not all of our underlying judgements and categories can usefully be said to be ideological. It is deeply ingrained in us to imagine ourselves moving forwards into the future (at least one other society sees itself as moving backwards into it), but though this way of seeing *may* connect significantly with the power-structure of our society, it need not always and everywhere do so. I do not mean by ‘ideology’ simply the deeply entrenched, often unconscious beliefs which people hold; I mean more particularly those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power” (p. 13).

surviving and helping others survive. The Greek terms *ethos* has a great variety of usages that, depending on the intentions of the speaker and the life experience of the listeners, the meaning ascribed will be different for every person.

R. Adams (2008) states that there are two definitions of ethnicity. According to him, the first is an “internally-defined ethnicity” and the latter is the “externally-defined” one. For him an internally defined ethnicity is “a population whose members self-defined their collective survival by replicating a shared identity through cultural and biological self-reproduction” and an externally-defined ethnicity is a human group to which certain characteristics are ascribed by an external agent (p. 8). Somehow, in the poem, the quester acknowledges the good will and perhaps ingenuousness of native people in contrast with the greed and fraudulence of the conquerors. Moreover, as the hero continues sharing his will, he offers his “... crooked backbone / to the dice maker, to chop up into dice, / for casting lots as to who shall see his own blood / on his shirt front and who his brother’s / for the race isn’t to the swift but to the crooked” (p. 43). The persona is absolutely disappointed with how life appears to be inequitable with those that are fair and rewards those that are questionable. It must be taken into consideration that semiotics makes people aware that the cultural values with which they make sense of the world are a tissue of customs and agreements that have been handed down from generation to generation by the members of the culture to which they belong. But these social constructed meanings may vary and can be radically different from culture to culture.

For the quester, life is unfair, he continues his route descending to his outmost fear, his dread towards death and oblivion. It is then when he lastly decides to give an offering to “the last man surviving on earth” because, for him, this last man will also live in fear. So, he presents his “eyelids worn out by fear, to wear / in his long nights of radiation and silence, / so that his eyes can’t close, for regret / is like tears seeping through closed eyelids” (p. 43). His eyelids have lost their ability to care for his eyes, they have been destroyed by fear, and they can no longer allow the persona to sleep and rest. Consequently, this last person, outliving other human fellows, will sense the destruction and desolation humankind has supported through the centuries. Kinnell’s text depicts a hopeless world where remorse – for what greed and power have been done to people, to animals, to nature, to the world – is nonexistent. Accordingly, Campbell (2004b) affirms that

The world is full of the resultant mutually contending bands: totem-, flag, and party-worshippers. Even the so-called Christian nations – which are supposed to be following a “World” Redeemer – are better known to history for their colonial barbarity and internecine strife than for any practical display of that unconditioned love, synonymous with the effective conquest of the ego, ego’s world, and ego’s tribal god (p. 134).

Considering Campbell’s statement, due to this human’s inheritable factor, the hero realizes that what has been done to the world and its inhabitant, regardless of the kind of living being, will continue. This constant movement of sorrow and misery

is projected when the hero's fingers gain consciousness and personify different actions as he "give[s] the emptiness [his] hand" (p. 43). It is in this moment when his "pinkie picks no more noses" (p. 43) so that there will be no more embarrassing situations in his life; and a "slag clings to the black stick of the ring finger" (p. 43) since the commitments taken were not fulfilling. Moreover, "a bit of flame jets from the tip of the fuck-you finger" (p. 44), the rage felt when using the finger in a difficult situation has faded away. And "the first finger accuses the heart, which has vanished" (p. 44); the metaphor of what is dear in humanity, the heart, has also disappeared and there is no faith in the future whereas "on the thumb stump wisps of smoke ask a ride into the emptiness" (p. 44), into nothing.

As the persona moves forward, the imagery of an uncanny graveyard track is unveiled for the quester as he sees

In the ditch  
snakes crawl cool paths  
over the rotted thigh, the toe bones  
twitch in the smell of burnt rubber,  
the belly  
opens like a poison nightflower,  
the tongue has evaporated,  
the nostril  
hairs sprinkle themselves with yellowish-white dust,

the five flames at the end  
of each hand have gone out (p. 44).

In his path, he finds a desolate metaphor for the end of life: absolute anguish and decay. As he experiences, corpses have been put together to let the pass of time and deterioration take over. Serpents slither through humans' remains just as toes tremble and the stomach releases its fluids through scent. The cadaver has no tongue, and the nose cannot sense exactly as the hands have become fingerless. Conclusively, as he witnesses on this path, death brings nothing but putrefaction and stillness as "a mosquito / sips a last meal from this plate of serenity. / And the fly, / the last nightmare, hatches himself" (p. 44). His physique and mind are in pieces, metaphorical and literally, as he "*ran / [his] neck broken*" and "*hold[s] [his] head up with both hands*" (p. 44). It is after these last steps that the quester realizes that there is absolute desolation as well as personal and cosmic disorder in his sphere. Madness reigns. Hence, after acknowledging this fact, the hero attains the necessary wisdom to complete his inner journey of transformation; however, at this moment of his passage, "this godlike being is a pattern of the divine state to which the human hero attains who has gone beyond the last terrors of ignorance. 'When the envelopment of consciousness has been annihilated, then he becomes free of all fear, beyond the reach of change'" (Campbell 2004b, p. 127); consequently, the quester is now equipped to continue his voyage.

But before leaving this vision in a rush, he “ran / thinking the flames / the flames may burn the oboe / but listen buddy boy they can’t touch the notes!” (p. 44), the symbol of fire as an element that represents either knowledge or destruction is beyond the experience of the persona as it is unable to reach the melody and change them. Suddenly, the fire even as when perceived as an element of destruction it may not destroy but make the hero understand that it is also a power of creation. Consequently, though fire is an element of destruction, it may also stand for warmth, comfort, and life, a binary opposition. Therefore, he now understands better his position in the development of the journey. He keeps strolling to cross the threshold as scenario starts changing, the path of bones has morphed into “A few bones” that “lie about in the smoke of bones” (p. 45) and what he comes to find is “memories left in mirrors on whorehouse ceilings” and “angel’s wings / flagged down into the snows of yesteryear” (p. 45).

But the metaphor of the wings of the cherub, trapped in the past, “kneel[s] on the scorched earth / in the shapes of men and animals: / *do not let this last hour pass / do not remove this last, poison cup from our lips*” (p. 45). The wings as a symbol of freedom and virtue are confined on earth due to the grief caused to others and to the self as the memory of a cadaver burning in the war becomes an ever-present memory as this last section of the poem ends as the first: “Lieutenant! / This corpse will not stop burning” (p. 45), a haunting image that roams his path. Nevertheless, it is only after being confronted with his innermost fear, that the



quester can open up to the world he inhabits, physically and psychologically. He realizes that he belongs to a continuum that presents the life-death dichotomy and that this binary opposition governs peoples' time on earth, young or old.

To continue on his journey, the quester is directed to an old memory with his daughter in her room. It is then when he recalls his visits to her room when she "scream[s], waking from a nightmare" and he "sleepwalk[s] / into [her] room, and pick[s] [her] up" to voice what he believes she thinks:

you cling to me  
 hard,  
 as if clinging could save us. I think  
 you think  
 I will never die (p. 49).

Children, as his daughter, live with death as it were one with life; they do not yet understand, as many old adults, that life encompasses death and death life. But he knows and affirms that he thinks he "exude[s] / to [her] the permanence of smoke or stars" (p. 49), only for a little time "even as / [his] broken arms heal themselves around [her]" (p. 49). His embrace has been torn but his daughter's presence and life build him stronger. Yet, concern regarding how his daughter may face life and all it represents is depicted in the following verses:

I have heard you tell

the sun, *don't go down*, I have stood by  
 as you told the flower, *don't grow old*,  
*don't die*. Little Maud (p. 49).

The transmutation of the little girl towards different elements of nature, the sun and the flower, worries the persona for he would do anything to keep her alive. It is then when he realizes the origin of this distress: "being forever / in the pre-trembling of a house that falls" (p. 50). The house is a metaphor of the human body and the "pre-trembling" is the life-death continuum that all individuals experience. Life is ephemeral, people can die any moment, at any age, in any place; however, even when a life is terminated, it seems to be restored in the new generations exactly as the persona "can see in [her] eyes / the hand that waved once / in [his] father's eyes, a tiny kite / wobbling far up in the twilight of his last look: / and the angel / of all mortal things lets go the string" (p. 52). In her eyes the quester can gaze at his father's life, his, and his daughters; the past, the present, and future together in one final look. And as he places the child, he held up "in the moonlight" (p. 49), "into [her] crib" (p. 52), he now knows that as his father came back in her gaze so will he:

Little sleep's-head sprouting hair in the moonlight,  
 when I come back  
 we will go out together,  
 we will walk out together among

the then thousand things,  
 each scratched too late with such knowledge, *the wages  
 of dying is love* (p. 53).

For the quester, his perception of the life-death cycle has changed, and it becomes much more than the moment of being born or of dying. His understanding of being on earth has turned into a more optimistic view that will allow him to continue his journey to learn to live a more substantial life and die a more cognizant death for as he states at the end of poem VII from *The book of nightmares* what an individual gains with death is love not oblivion or decay.

### **3. Return or reintegration with (to) society**

For this last stage, it is not until the hero has returned to his kin that he will have achieved the challenge and his cycle will have been completed, making him ready to start a new journey. Campbell (2004b) affirms that “When the hero-quest has been accomplished...the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom...back into the kingdom of community...But the responsibility has been frequently refused” (p. 167). The quester has to be willing to share his knowledge with his community; in the case of the poem, with the readers who have experienced his journey. Thus, to continue with his course and reach his ultimate purpose, the persona moves on and, in the poem “The Call across the Valley of Not-Knowing” is given assistance

when “In the red house sinking down / into ground rot, a lamp / at one window, the smoldered ashes letting / a single flame go free / a shoe of dreaming iron nailed to the wall” (p. 57). The hero finds a dwelling that seems to be in decay; however, there is light coming out from one window; even if the house may be “sinking down” there is a flame that is released, mirroring a hopeful return.

Moreover, the quester is presented with a setting with “two mismatched halfnesses lying side by side in the darkness” (p. 57). He is resting next to that “mismatched” other who contradictorily matches him and offers him a new being that as the flame in the window provides a promise; as Paz (1995) asserts that “[e]l hombre es el único ser que se siente solo y el único que es búsqueda de otro... el hombre es nostalgia y búsqueda de comunión. Por eso cada vez que se siente a sí mismo se siente como carencia de otro, como soledad<sup>35</sup>” (p. 341). Paz’s depiction of the hero’s stage is enhanced as the latter caresses his partner, both “in the darkness,” as well as the new being that is coming to help him return and he “can feel with [his] hand / the foetus rouse himself / with a huge, fishy thrash, and re-settle in his darkness” (p. 57). Besides the light at the window there is a new life coming into the world, and the mother figure, an archetype, in the poem takes a leading role in his understanding of the binary opposition life-death.

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<sup>35</sup> “man is the only being that feels lonely and the only one that is the search of the other ... man is nostalgia and search in communion. Every time he senses who he is, he senses himself as the lack of the other, as loneliness” (my translation).

According to Jung (1970) this psychic pattern is often “associated with things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness: cornucopia, a ploughed field, a garden... Hollow objects such as ovens and cooking vessels are associated with the mother archetype, and, of course, the uterus, yoni, and anything of a like shape” (p. 15). Fundamentally, this model will exalt growth and fertility; moreover, Jung emphasizes that the qualities associated with it are maternal kindness and understanding, warmth, tenderness, and peace as the hero’s “mismatched halfness” as

Her hair glowing in the firelight,  
her breasts full,  
her belly swollen,  
a sunset of firelight  
wavering all down one side, my wife sleeps on,  
happy,  
far away, in some other,  
newly opened room of the world (p. 57).

The blissful image of the woman offers the “mismatched” persona hope in his journey. The moments of fear and despair have morphed into “harmony.” The woman is “happy” and fully aware of the transformations on her body as it gets ready for a fresh commencement in a “newly opened room of the world” (p. 57). However, the route to his return is not deployed of more obstacles for, in order to succeed and

achieve his objective, as Campbell (2004b) affirms, he has “to pass back and forth across the world division...not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other – is the result of the master. The Cosmic Dancer...does not rest heavily in one spot, but...lightly turns and leaps from one position to another” (p. 196). Unexpectedly, the delight previously experienced with the persona’s “mismatched halfness” is juxtaposed to the irony of life as “Sweat breaking from his temples, / Aristophanes ran off” (p. 57) and made him evoke “that each of us / is a torn half / whose lost other we keep seeking across time / until we die, or give up – or actually find her / as I myself” (pp. 57 - 58). As he continues reminiscing, one day he came across that idealized other, that person that individuals may have dreamed about: the one with the “perfect” smile, or body, or hair, or attitude; but, “for reasons – cowardice, / loyalties, all which goes by the name ‘necessity’ – / left her ...” (p. 58).

However, as the persona ponders on this past instant, he realizes that in life there are moments in which time stops to ironically experience it at its fullest. For the quester, the answer to this paradox “must be the wound, the wound itself, / which lets us know and love, / which forces us to reach out to our misfit” (p. 58); it is sorrow that forces individuals into meeting others “and by a kind of poetry of the soul, accomplish / for a moment, the wholeness the drunk Greek / extrapolated from his high / or flagellated out of an empty heart” (p. 59). At his moment of his journey, wholeness is briefly experienced either from the ecstasy of pleasure or through pain

until the *misfits* attain “that purest,/ most tragic concubence, strangers / clasped into one, a moment of their moment on earth” (p. 58). For the persona, it is after sexual intercourse that an intimate relation may mature. It is not until the sexual act has been completed through penetration, when the two individuals are “clasped into one, a moment of their moment on earth” (p. 58); thus, momentarily, they become one. Afterwards, this transient instant that may have been experienced with the “torn half,” the quester witnesses his “mismatched halfness” as

She who lies halved  
 beside me – she and I once  
 watched the bees, dreamers not yet  
 dipped into the acids  
 of the craving for anything, not yet burned down into flies, sucking  
 the blossom-dust  
 from the pear-tree in spring (p. 58).

There was a moment in the lives of these two individuals when, together, they experienced life and love at its purest form (dreamers) without interacting in a capitalist economy of the Western world: they did not crave for anything material nor did they want to take advantage of others. Experiencing life became their ultimate aim. At this memory, his “mismatched halfness” becomes a beacon as they “lay out together / under the tree, on earth, beside our empty clothes, / our bodies opened to the sky, / and the blossoms glittering in the sky / floated down” (p. 59). They are

in communion with nature with nothing to hide for now he knows who they truly are “and the bees glittered in the blossoms / and the bodies of our hearts / opened / under the knowledge / of tree, on the grass of the knowledge / of graves, and among the flowers of the flowers” (p. 59). Being at this setting, under the shadow of this tree, “the mythological world axis, at the point where time and eternity, movement and rest, are one” (Campbell 1991, p. 172), and with this understanding, he is now “explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron” (Campbell 2004b, p. 170).

However, before continuing his journey, the persona discusses his understanding of sexuality as a fundamental feature in life. As the nature blooms in spring, sexuality makes “the brain kept blossoming / all through the body, until the bones themselves could think / and the genitals sent out wave after wave of holy desire / until even the dead brain cells / surged and fell god-like” (p. 59). For him, intercourse becomes for humankind “a moment”, of their moment on earth” (p. 58) because there will come a time when death will call and “We who live out our plain lives, who put / our hand into the hand of whatever we love / as it vanishes, as we vanish, and stumble toward what will be, simply by arriving” (p. 61). One day, as he ages, the persona will comprehend that what is usually known as life will intersect with death, “a kind of fate” (p. 61) and “might we not hear, even then, / the bear call / from his hillside – a call like ours, needing / to be answered” (p. 61). The



personification of the male bear expecting for a response mirrors humanity's need to ask about the unknown, due to fear and misunderstanding, and unable to hear "the dam-bear / call[ing] back across the darkness / of the valley of not-knowing / the only word tongues shape without intercession, / yes ... yes...?" (p. 61). The quester conjectures if he has erroneously approached life with a more materialistic approach as "the craving for anything" (p. 58) in a society that favors consumerism.

Indeed, it is after this inner realization that the persona retakes his steps back in the poem "The path among the stones" to encounter his chalice and share the knowledge on how life and death belong not to a cycle that repeats itself but to a never ending continuum. Consequently, he will be "On the path winding / upward, toward the high valley / of waterfalls and flooded, hoof-shattered / meadows of spring, / where fish-roots boil / in the last grails of light on the water" (p. 65). He is moving upwards to an idyllic place; however, there are also "vipers pimpled with urges to fly / drape the black stones hissing *pheet! pheet!* – land / of quills / and inkwells of skulls filled with black water" (p. 65). In a general sense, the quester is confronted with a symbolic answer to his enquiry as he finds hope in this scenario even when the asps cover the stones and display impulses to move on, as they susurrate "pheet" (a word's homophone for *feet*). In other words, this natural scenario, tranquility and danger coexist so does life and death coexist in living creatures. Definitely, at this moment, the persona finds himself in a natural environment that mirrors the paradox of humanity and so he affirms:

I come to a field  
 glittering with the thousand sloughed skins  
 of arrowheads, stones  
 which shuddered and leapt forth  
 to give themselves into the broken hearts  
 of the living,  
 who gave themselves back, broken, to the stone (p. 65).

In this section of the poem, he finds himself in a setting that shimmers with dead peels, a place where “arrowheads” have cast off their skins, dying to the past but simultaneously living in their descendants who are also broken. As the persona moves forward, he “close[s] [his] eyes” (p. 65) and is situated, as in a dream, “on the heat-rippled beaches / where the hills came down to the sea / the luminous / beach dust pounded out of funeral shells” (p. 65). He is positioned in the boundary of two symbolic realms, the land and the sea where he can see the “funeral shells / them living without me, dying, / without me, the wing / and egg / shaped stones” (pp. 65-66). Stones, inanimate objects representing the sublime and the terrestrial, that belong to the sphere of “that wafer stone / which skipped ten times across / the water, suddenly starting to run as it went under” (p. 66). Particularly significant is the cyclical movement of the water and its representation of “zeroes,” where you find the beginning and the end of the infinite, the life and death continuum as “the zeroes it left, / that met / and passed into each other, they themselves / smoothing

themselves from the water..." (p. 66). It is then, when the persona confirms the knowledge acquired when he affirms

I walk out from myself  
among the stones of the field,  
each sending up its ghost-bloom  
into the starlight, to float out  
over the trees, seeking to be one  
with the unearthly fires kindling and dying  
in space – and falling back, knowing  
the sadness of the wish  
to alight  
back among the glitter of bruised ground,  
the stones holding between pasture and field,  
the great, granite nuclei,  
glimmering, even they, with ancient inklings of madness and war (pp. 66-67).

In this passage of the poem the hero seems to leave his body and become a spirit because he "walk[s] out from [him]self" encountering the "ghost-bloom" that the stones project. As he keeps walking to reach his destination, the stones cast shadows of death that intersect with the action of blossoming in the sky and touching the earth through the trees. In this moment of the journey, he wishes to vanish with the lights in the sky; however, the quester realizes that he must not evade the path

to be taken even when humanity has not evolved regarding “madness and war.” The scenario may have not been what he expected but it is what it must be. The persona needs to complete his journey and for this he must enter hell, action that is taken when the ground that is sore offers a path that “opens / at [his] feet” (p. 67), and not being confused anymore, he “go[es] down / the night-lighted mule-steps into the earth. The persona continues his descend to be able to, later, reach higher to complete his learning. However, this dive into the trail seems not to be done in complete darkness or solitude as “the night-lighted mule-steps into the earth/ the footprints behind me / filling already with pre-sacrificial trills / of canaries” (p. 67). Remarkably, he is led into the path that is dark and concurrently lighted and mule steps precede him while the tracks left behind are filled with the song of birds that “go down / into the unbreathable goaf / of everything [he] ever craved and lost” (p. 67). The hero realizes that the tracks he leaves behind are immediately filled with warbles; as he states, he is now aware of his advancement and there are moments when he feels unable to breathe when thinking about his desire for acquiring material objects. This same motif has been felt in a previous section of the book-poem when he ponders on his former desire for consuming goods, deed that caused him more grief than joy as they (he and his spouse) were “dipped into the acids / of the craving for anything.” Kinnell, in this section, meditates on how society and its machinery of progress have made humankind believe that acquiring goods will make them happy; however, there will be a moment of awareness when the poem’s

hero realizes that what these material objects are impractical in the quest for self-knowledge.

Moreover, the image of decomposition succeeds in letting the persona and the reader reconsider and reflect on the futility of mass consumption. This idea is also examined when ironizing many of the social conventions accepted to inflict pain on others through the machinery of war and consumerism in section VI of the poem. In section IX, he encounters “An old man, a stone / lamp at his forehead” (p. 67) who “stirs into his pot” and “salts / it all down with sand / stolen from the upper bells of hourglasses” (p. 67). At this moment, when he acknowledges that as he has moved on, there seems to be “Nothing. / Always nothing. Ordinary blood / boiling away in the glare of the brow lamp” (p. 67); nevertheless, as he ponders on his experience, he asserts: “And yet, no, / perhaps not nothing. Perhaps / not ever nothing” (p. 67). He confirms that even when an individual may experience loneliness, it may not be so because that instant may transform into an gate to “find myself alive / in the whorled / archway of the fingerprint of all things, / skeleton groaning, / blood-strings wailing the wail of all things” (p. 68). The metaphor of the “whorled archway” to indicate the axis of movement, towards death or life, prompts the speaker to consider his inner structure as “The witness trees” that “blaze themselves a last time” (p. 21) are transmuted into those that “heal / their scars at the flesh fire” (p. 68) and

the flame

rises off the bones,  
the hunger  
to be new lifts off  
my soul, an eerie blue light blooms  
on all the ridges of the world. somewhere  
in the legends of blood sacrifice  
the fatted calf  
takes the bonfire into his arms, and *he*  
burns *it* (p. 68).

The persona in the poem has conquered his weaknesses and learned throughout his journey. In this moment, the fire that has been present as a consuming element “rises off the bones” and an uncanny light shines around the world. This blue light is reminiscent of “the blue / flower opens” (p. 4) when baby Maud is born and once “she dies / a moment” (p. 6) as she is being delivered; moreover, it is reminiscent of the blue water of the Juniata that has witnessed life as well as death and of the blue spittle from which he regains strength to “crawl up” (p. 68). Likewise, it foreshadows the “blued flesh,” in the last poem, that reminds the hero of the juxtaposition of the life-death opposites and their beauty and horror. Regarding the attainment of this insight, Paz (1995) affirms that “[r]egresar a la

muerte original será volver a la vida de antes de la vida, a la vida de antes de la muerte: al limbo, a la entraña materna<sup>36</sup> (p. 199).

Unquestionably, it is after this moment when the persona completes the journey as he finds the bear scratching “the four-footed / circle into the earth” (p.71): being born, growing up, reproducing, and dying. Unexpectedly, the persona recognizes that he is a creature, like any other in the world but in a different position, “He sniffs the sweat / in the breeze, he understands / a creature, a death-creature / watches from the fringe of the trees” (p. 71). The bear then “get[s] up, eat[s] a few flowers, trudge[s] away, /all his fur glistening / in the rain,” (p. 72) giving the hero room to embrace the birth of Fergus as “he came wholly forth / I took him up in my hands and bent / over and smelled / the black, glistening fur / of his head” (p. 72). Unequivocally, Kinnell’s use of natural imagery enriches the hero’s path as the reflection of the son on the bear and the metaphor on how the “empty space / must have bent / over the newborn planet / and smelled the grasslands and the ferns” (p. 72) leads him into a fresh beginning of a new life on earth. The quester seems to move backwards to the birth of his daughter Maud but if this movement were to be real, there is a distinction: now he is aware that “[L]iving brings you to death, there

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<sup>36</sup> “To go back to the original death will be to go back to life before life: to limbo, the maternal womb” (my translation).

is no other road” (p. 73) and viceversa; or as Paz (1995) declares “La muerte es intransferible, como la vida<sup>37</sup>” (p. 189). Moreover, this same scholar asserts that

Para los antiguos mexicanos la oposición entre muerte y vida no era tan absoluta como para nosotros. La vida se prolonga en la muerte. Y a la inversa. La muerte no era el fin natural de la vida, sino fase de un ciclo infinito. Vida, muerte y resurrección eran estadios de un proceso cósmico, que se repetía insaciable. La vida no tenía función más alta que desembocar en la muerte, su contrario y complemento; y la muerte, a su vez, no era un fin en sí; el hombre alimentaba con su muerte la voracidad de la vida, siempre insatisfecha<sup>38</sup> (Paz, 1995, p. 190).

As Paz discusses, the quester understands that for life to be, there has to be death; paradoxically, even when being opposites, they are also shares of a whole. He recognizes that this journey has been his own and that its purpose has been to learn to live in a seemingly paradoxical world that is not. Individuals are often perplexed at the discovery that one ends leads to a beginning or as T.S. Eliot, in his poem “East Coker<sup>39</sup>” said “[i]n my end is my beginning” (p. 14). This endless continuum is present in people’s lives and when the polarities are both accepted as

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<sup>37</sup> “Like life, death is non-transferable” (my translation).

<sup>38</sup> “For the ancient Mexicans, the opposition between death and life was not as conclusive as it is for us. Life extends in death. And vice versa. Death is not the natural end of life, but a stage in an infinite cycle. Life, death and resurrection were phases in a cosmic process that repeated itself insatiably. Life had no highest function but lead to death; and death was not an end in itself; man fed with his death the voraciousness of life, always unsatisfied” (my translation).

<sup>39</sup> East Coker is T.S. Eliot’s second poem of the book-length poem *Four quartets*.



one, as the hero realizes, the experience on earth changes positively. After this realization, the quester understands that this journey of self-discovery has made him embrace the *emptiness* that scared him when starting it. Furthermore, he realizes that “Lastness / is brightness. It is the brightness / gathered up of all that went before,” and this dichotomy in which humankind dwells (as Sancho the classical fool and Fergus an Irish heroic mythical figure) has to be accepted to live a more fulfilling life so “Sancho Fergus! Don’t cry! / Or else, cry” (p. 75).

Campbell (2004b) asserts that “The effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world” (p. 32), act that is achieved in the poem with the release of new force represented in the birth of a baby. This new being is a new “flow of life” that becomes part of this world to keep life’s continuum and with it a new individual who will, one day, start his own quest. Regarding this archetypical task that most people go through literally or metaphorically, Jung (1956) affirms that

The finest of all symbols of the libido is the human figure, conceived as a demon or hero. Here the symbolism leaves the objective, material realm of astral and meteorological images and takes on human form, changing into a figure who passes from joy to sorrow, from sorrow to joy, and, like the sun, now stands high at the zenith and now is plunged into the darkest night, only to rise again in a new splendor (p. 171).

In these words, Jung describes the fluctuating essence of humankind, and the quester in the poem is no different. He moves from pain to bliss and spends dark moments in hell to finally encounter a pleasing “skinny waterfalls, footpaths / wandering out of heaven” (p. 71). In sum, in this chapter we have witnessed how the persona completed the mythological voyage of the hero and for this task he faced its three macro stages: separation, initiation and return. Consequently, at the end of the journey he is among his peers a “different” man for he has accomplished his task. It would be fundamental to discuss that within this quest, the hero has, besides experiencing change, encountered nature. Thus, the following chapter will analyze how the use of natural imagery guides the quester and reader into comprehending the binary oppositions life and death.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE USE OF NATURAL IMAGERY IN *THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES* TO UNDERSTAND THE LIFE-DEATH BINARY OPPOSITION

#### A. Introduction

*The book of nightmares* has been provided with a remarkable use of natural imagery that facilitates the understanding of the life-death binary opposition. These two apparently contradictory realms, life and death, are challenging to understand as elements of a unity, since for many individuals, especially in Western society, have been taught to appreciate life and disregard death as a real and vital component of this duality. Nevertheless, in this book-length poem, Kinnell succeeds in revealing their ancestral relationship through natural imagery; hence, the persona makes use of natural imagery like the rain, the stones of the path, as well as different kind of animals to craft a poetic world to which individuals can relate. Jung (in Sabini 2001) affirms that “[m]an feels himself isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events, which hitherto had a symbolic meaning for him” (p. 79). Kinnell’s reflection on Jung’s statement seems to be at the core of *The book of the nightmares* as its first poem opens with rain drops falling on earth and trying “to put the fire out” (p. 4) but this fire “keeps its flames / it warms / everyone who might wander into its radiance, / a tree, a lost animal, the stones / because in the dying world it was set burning” (p. 71). For Calhoun (1992), Kinnell is basically a “nature poet who has written some of

the finest contemporary poems about animals – among them a porcupine, a crow, various bears, a sow or two – producing a kind of minor bestiary<sup>40</sup>. Animals are, he makes it clear, important in his poetry for revealing an unsuspected kinship, suggestive, if not proposing, a mythology of the common fate of living things” (p. 18). These images are recurrent throughout the text with the aim of guiding the reader into acknowledging that human beings belong to the realms of life and death simultaneously and even if the latter may be overlooked “la intrascendencia de la muerte no nos lleva a eliminarla de nuestra vida diaria... la muerte es la palabra que jamás se pronuncia porque quema los labios<sup>41</sup>” (Paz 1995, p. 193); nonetheless, death as well as life are intrinsically and extrinsically united in humankind. Intrinsically, as it is a condition of all living beings that as they live, they will die; and extrinsically as many times the memories kept of a person makes him/her subsist through time.

### **B. Symbols and their context in *The book of nightmares***

As heirs of a given culture, human beings have been bestowed upon former knowledge and wisdom to understand the world not only denotatively but also connotatively, and the access to this information is through symbols. A symbol is

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<sup>40</sup> According to *A dictionary of literary terms* by J.A. Cuddon (1979), a bestiary is a “medieval didactic genre or verse in which the behavior of animals (used as symbolic types) points a moral... The period of greatest popularity for bestiaries in Europe was from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> c. especially in French. Literary sleuths have surmised that stores like George’s Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1941) and Richard Adam’s *Watership’s Down* (1971) are modern developments of the bestiary” (p.77).

<sup>41</sup> The irrelevance of death does not make us remove it from our daily life... death is the word that is never spoken because it burns the lips (my translation).

commonly defined as using an object to imply something else. To ascribe meaning to an item is a task that positions the individuals in a specific time and space; consequently, the culture of the time and the place where the action materializes will attribute its connotational meaning to the text being analyzed. According to Jung (in Sabini 2001), humankind

has always lived with a myth and we think we are able to be born today and to live in no myth, without history. That is disease. That's absolutely abnormal, because man is not born every day. He is born once in a specific historical setting, with specific historical qualities, and therefore he is only complete when he has a relation to these things. It is as if you were born without eyes and ears when you are growing up with no connection with the past (p. 98).

As Jung affirms, individuals belong to a moment and time that will have an impact on their upbringing and consequently, on their behavior. Moreover, they should not disregard myth as a magic thought for symbols are part of the human psyche. As Jung (1964) acknowledges, “[w]hat we call a symbol is a term, a name, or even a picture that may be familiar in daily life, yet that possesses specific connotations in addition to its conventional and obvious ‘meaning’... As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason” (pp. 3-4). Even when people are not aware of the effect symbols have in their lives, they are part of a collective heritage that should not be overlooked.

According to Jung, there are symbols that may be personal; nevertheless, there are others that tend to be communal, shared by many. Additionally, when discussing a literary work, it can be asserted that there are objects, situations, or actions that besides having a denotative meaning in the text, they suggest and represent other meanings for the text and the reader, as in the case of *The book of nightmares*. There are different items that could be considered symbols in this book-length poem; nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, the symbols that will be analyzed will also be arranged in terms of natural imagery and classical elements of nature. Thus, these images will be comprised in the categories of natural imagery and the resolution of binary oppositions and the classical philosophical elements of nature and the resolution of binary oppositions. The former classification will include the stones as a natural image that resembles, the trees as symbolic elements of guidance and knowledge and animals and insects that will metaphorically aid into the understanding of the text. In the case of the latter, the four elements to discuss will be fire, water, air, and the earth.

The decision of categorizing these nature metaphors was made so that the most relevant were taken into consideration for the discussion of this chapter. At this respect, Campbell (2004a) affirms that "The way that mythologies work their magic is through symbols. The symbol works as an automatic button that releases energy and channels it" (p. 47); moreover, he also asserts that mythology represents the "stories about the wisdom of life" (Campbell 1991, p. 11).

Accordingly, if myths are learned through symbols to offer humankind the possibility of being more knowledgeable, *The book of nightmares* is a poem that offers this opportunity for the persona and its readers, by means of developing a private “bestiary,” a collection of stories of mythical animals within the text as well as discussing in his metaphors humankind relationship with the classical elements of the world. Moreover, Lévi-Strauss (1978) affirms that “images borrowed from experience can be put to use. This is the originality of mythical thinking – to play the part of conceptual thinking: an animal which can be used as what I would call a binary operator can have, from a logical point of view, a relationship with a problem which is also a binary problem” (p.8). Thus, through images of the primitive or basic acts of humanity, the poet recognizes individuals’ personal struggles in a realm where binaries help to acquire understanding that human beings are one and the other simultaneously.

### **C. Natural imagery and the resolution of binary oppositions**

As a distinctive characteristic of Kinnell’s poetry, nature and its elements are ever present in *The book of nightmares*. All of these earthly components are symbolic in the journey of discovery that the persona undertakes; moreover, they are all meaningful for the quester and his inner desire to learn and grow. To start the analysis of the different natural elements, rocks will guide the way as they represent a solid object that does not change easily and that symbolizes strength. Hence, as the hero moves forward on his journey of self-discovery, the path taken

is led by stones. Furthermore, this seemingly “dead” natural element will help him discover how the binary opposition life-death becomes one and as Paz (1995) declares: “Nuestra muerte ilumina nuestra vida<sup>42</sup>” (p. 189).

### 1. The stones

Frequently, stones are related as objects that symbolize permanence and strength; moreover, as they are typically grounded, somehow, they seem to be connected to the earth. They may teach the quester, in this specific case, lessons on enduring as well as appreciating life’s paths. It is essential to recall that symbols are primordial images through which archetypes may be experienced, and most fundamentally, the unconscious is made visible. Jung (1959) asserts, regarding the term archetype, that “it designates only those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience” (p. 5). Thus, through these symbolic elements, the persona’s inner psychic processes will be portrayed. In the case of stones, these are objects present in the route that the persona, as the poem starts, encounters “black stones;” moreover, as his moves forward in his journey, he wears the “eldershoes of [his] feet” he “walk[s] out now, / in dead shoe, in the new light, / on the steppingstones” (Kinnell 1971, p. 19). Rocks have been symbolic since primitive times while Jung (1964) affirms that

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<sup>42</sup> “Our death lights our life” (my translation).



Rough natural stones were often believed to be the dwelling places of spirits or gods, and were used in primitive cultures as tombstones, boundary stones, or objects of religious veneration. Their use may be regarded as a primeval form of sculpture – a first attempt to invest the stone with more expressive power than chance and nature could give it” (p. 258).

In *The book of nightmares*, even when the stones are not present as simple sculptures, they transmute into a ceremonial path on which the quester examines his track and the decisions he has made, not just by him but by all humanity. On the other hand, stones might also be considered elements of cohesion and reconciliation with the self<sup>43</sup>. Their physical characteristics of strength may evoke the antithesis to natural elements that are ruled by the laws of alteration, deterioration and death. But for the quester, the paces taken are not strong but frail as the foot “rubs” the perilous track he needs to cross; and this trail is also occupied by “snakestones”, stones that resemble vipers dangerous but knowledgeable. Are these latter stones a reminder of human nature and the desire to know? For

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<sup>43</sup> According to Cirlot (1962) stones may represent the following: “Stone is a symbol of being, of cohesion and harmonious reconciliation with self. The hardness and durability of stone have always impressed men, suggesting to them the antithesis to biological things subject to the laws of change, decay and death, as well as the antithesis to dust, sand and stone splinters, as aspects of disintegration. The stone when whole symbolized unity and strength; when shattered it signified dismemberment, psychic disintegration, infirmity, death and annihilation. Stones fallen from heaven served to explain the origin of life. In volcanic eruptions, air turned to fire, fire became ‘water’ and ‘water’ changed to stone; hence stone constitutes the first solid form of the creative rhythm (p. 51)—the sculpture of essential movement, and the petrified music of creation (p. 50). The mythic and religious significance is only one step removed from this basic symbolic sense, a step which was taken by the immense majority of peoples during the animistic era” (pp. 313-314).

... the foot,  
 which rubs the cobblestones  
 and snakestones all its days, this lowliest  
 of tongues, whose lick-tracks tell  
 our history of errors to the dust behind,  
 which is the last trace in us of wings? (pp. 21-22)

And it is in this path where the persona questions and wonders about the “history of errors” of humankind and ponders on the possibility of reaching “higher” from the stones. In this historical account, he refers to the killings, robberies, and grief inflicted on others and on ourselves and those mistakes humankind makes by giving room to envy, greed, pride, and hatred. The quester keeps on with his journey as he “walk[s] out from [himself] / among the stones of the field” (p. 66) to find, later on, that “in the graveyard / the lamps start lighting up, one for each of us / in all the windows / of stone” (p. 68). The mortal end of every person will be death but as part of an expected higher universe in the Judeo-Christian tradition, death will transform into life, fulfilling the infinite cycle of the cosmos. Indeed, death will come for each person, and everybody will have to face it, sooner or later, this fact is reflected in the stones that signal the boundary between what is considered life and death.

As the quester moves forward to the last stage of his journey, he keeps  
 Walking toward the cliff overhanging  
 the river, I call out to the stone,

and the stone  
calls back, its voice hunting among the rubble  
for my ears (p. 72).

He is suddenly startled, as his own voice resembles the stones'; and this voice he hears fights against the debris of what once was. It is as if the echo, at the cliff, reminds him that all the actions taken will go back to him, exactly as his voice. The endurance and stability that the stones symbolize will make them become witness of this certainty he experiences. And the replica of his voice hounds him for it may be something he would have liked to acknowledge; however, the findings in his journey have allowed him to grow and understand that all his experiences are part of his life. Besides, as he approaches the precipice, facing both, death and life, another truth is exposed, and it is in this moment when the speaker declares:

Stop.  
As you approach an echoing  
cliffside, you sense the line  
where the voice calling from stone  
no longer answers,  
turns into stone, and nothing comes back (pp. 72-73).

In this moment, he realizes that life and death walk hand in hand. The symbol of the "cliffside" he encounters is the end of his journey, he is now ready to share with the others the knowledge acquired. Additionally, if it is a cliff, it may be the point of

reunion of the sea/river and the earth. The persona undergoes an experience in the cliff with the sea; in fact Cirlot (1962) states that “waters in flux, the transitional and mediating agent between the nonformal (air and gases) and the formal (earth and solids) and, by analogy, between life and death” (p. 281). Likewise, according to Ferber (1999), “the sea has symbolized chaos and the bridge among orderly lands, life and death, time and timelessness, menace and lure, boredom and the sublime” (p. 179). Consequently, there is no error in the persona when experiencing, at this moment, the conjunction of the opposites life and death. Definitely, these binary oppositions in life’s continuum could have been experienced by the quester before just as he is facing this moment; for example, when he met the bear in section I or when he morphed into the tramp in section III. Nevertheless, he was not ready to understand the image. Hence, the speaker knows that even when one day there may be no utterance from within but to know that

Here, between answer  
and nothing, I stand, in the old shoes  
flowed over by rainbows of hen-oil,  
each shoe holding the bones  
which ripple together in the communion  
of the step,  
and which open out  
in front into toes, the whole foot trying

to dissolve into the future (p. 73).

The hero has gathered enough understanding to appreciate that the new self "stands" in the "old shoes" and that, like the hen, "could let go." Furthermore, his "bones," a reference to a skeleton symbolizing death, become into toes, humankind's necessary members to walk, and that figuratively may represent life; for they have morphed from carcasses to flesh. However, this transition will not last as the "whole foot tr[ies] / to dissolve into the future;" in other words, as time passes, they will also vanish. His life is part of his death as well as his present is part of his past and future. Unexpectedly, the persona comprehends, as Paz (1995) affirms, that "[e]l tiempo deja de ser sucesión y vuelve a ser lo que fue, y es, originariamente: un presente en donde pasado y futuro al fin se reconcilian<sup>44</sup> (p. 183); in other words, for Paz, the division of phases in a person's life (past, present, future) is but a unity that mirrors the life-death binary opposition. Hence, the reconciliation of these two polarities is met through the symbolic elements of the stones and the encounter with the water, imagery of life and death as Cirlot (1962, p. 281) and Ferber (1999, p. 179) affirm.

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<sup>44</sup> "Time stops being a succession and goes back to being what it was, and is, originally: a present in which past and future reconcile" (my translation).

## 2. The trees

Culturally, the collective imagination has ascribed trees properties of immortality, knowledge, strength, and mystic connections, among others<sup>45</sup>. However, the symbolic element of trees may also represent fear of the unknown, especially the one the individual ignores about him/herself. Trees have owned a position in the Christian religious tradition for they are at its heart: the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” and the “Tree of life.” Later, these trees remained as the “Tree of life” and the “Tree of death” as the latter caused Adam and Eve to flee Paradise. On its part, in *The book of nightmares*, the trees throughout the journey of the hero, represent, like the stones, a metaphorical image that guides the hero into understanding the binary opposition life-death. When the persona starts his descend into the unknown, he is confronted with “[t]he witness trees” that “blaze themselves a last time” and “the road / trembles as it starts across / swampland

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<sup>45</sup> According to Cirlot (1962) “In its most general sense, the symbolism of the tree denotes the life of the cosmos: its consistence, growth, proliferation, generative and regenerative processes. It stands for inexhaustible life, and is therefore equivalent to a symbol of immortality. According to Eliade, the concept of ‘life without death’ stands, ontologically speaking, for ‘absolute reality’ and, consequently, the tree becomes a symbol of this absolute reality, that is, of the centre of the world. Because a tree has a long, vertical shape, the centre-of-the-world symbolism is expressed in terms of a world-axis. The tree, with its roots underground and its branches rising to the sky, symbolizes an upward trend and is therefore related to other symbols, such as the ladder and the mountain, which stand for the general relationship between the ‘three worlds’ (the lower world: the underworld, hell; the middle world: earth; the upper world: heaven). Christian symbolism— and especially Romanesque art—is fully aware of the primary significance of the tree as an axis linking different worlds ... Within the general significance of the tree as worldaxis and as a symbol of the inexhaustible life-process (growth and development), different mythologies and folklores distinguish three or four different shades of meaning. Some of these are merely aspects of the basic symbolism, but others are of a subtlety which gives further enrichment to the symbol. At the most primitive level, there are the ‘Tree of Life’ and the ‘Tree of Death’, rather than, as in later stages, the cosmic tree and the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil; but the two trees are merely two different representations of the same idea. The *arbor vitae* is found frequently, in a variety of forms” (p. 347).

streaked with shined water” (p. 21). His path has been lit by burning shrubs that will ignite his first steps into his deepest fears with the promise of acquiring the knowledge needed to grow. Moreover, the flames of the trees are mirrored into the water as he takes his first steps of pain and grief and confronts “jungles of burnt flesh, ground of ground /bones” (p. 22). He starts his passage witnessing two of what may be considered allegories of a terrifying human calamity the horrors of war and the ultimate stage of humankind: devastation and oblivion. Slowly, while he advances, he finds “the Crone” who reveals to him:

You live  
 under the Sign  
 of the Bear, who flounders through chaos  
 in his starry blubber:  
 poor fool  
 poor forked branch  
 of applewood, you will feel all your bones  
 break (p. 23).

According to the seer, the persona belongs to the “sign of the Bear,” creature that is symbolically characterized by being strong and confident even when he struggles through turmoil; likewise, the Crone cautions the quester of his immanent painful experience as he “will feel all [his] bones / break” (p. 23). For the former, there seems to be no salvation or redemption, neither in the world nor in the people

for the hero represents a divided branch of “applewood,” symbol that makes reference to the Christian myth of the “Tree of knowledge” from which, according to this religious tradition, Eve offered Adam an apple, a symbol of “discord” or “dissension.” Hence, according to this social convention, humankind is destined to die and suffer, exactly as what the Crone envisages for to the hero.

Indeed, the metaphorical image of the trees is observed in the poetic text again when the persona, as he moves forward in his journey, encounters those skeletons mentioned previously. Furthermore, in this image, the tree embodies characteristics of rebirth and eternity as when the bones are “tossed / into de aceldama back of the potting shop, among / shards and lumps / which caught vertigo and sagged away / into mud, or crawled out of fire / crazed or exploded” (p. 37), they will not remain the same. On the contrary, “they shall re-arise / in the pear tree, in spring, to shine down / on two clasping what they dream is one another” (p. 37). The persona beholds how those pieces of bones that resemble death are put into the aceldama, that portion of land that has, in the Christian tradition, been connected to Judas’s bribery and the purchase of a plot. Consequently, he is faced with human remains that are placed in a location that symbolizes the worst acts of dishonesty; however, these bones, after undergoing difficult moments, illustrated by the phrases “caught vertigo,” “sagged away into mud,” and “crawled out of fire” will regain life “in the pear tree, in spring” (p. 37). The quester realizes that even when there can be difficult moments in life that may lead to death experiences: life is always part of



this continuum's equation. An essential element in this section of the poem is the pear tree, a possible version of Christianity's Tree of life as the bone pieces will "re-arise" from their "second" death as the first one is the moment of birth when individuals "die a moment" (p. 6). As Achtemeier (1985) asserts trees in general "had sacred associations in both Israelite and Canaanite religion, serving as memorial objects (Gen. 21:33) and as symbols of the Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah" (p. 1174) who was possibly "the mother goddess of Canaan" (p. 65). Thus, the trees seemed to have offered people fruits that might have ranged from shade to fruits.

Regarding the Tree of life, Achtemeier (1985) states that

Although the verbal designation "tree of life" has an understandably restricted place in biblical tradition, a plastic representation of the lifetree, in the form of the sacred lampstand (*menorah*) described in the tabernacle texts, played a central role in the repertoire of ritual appurtenances of ancient Israel. Its stylized tree shape and the vocabulary of botanical terms that describe it suggest that the cultic lampstand symbolized the fructifying powers of the eternal, unseen (p. 1173).

The fact that trees symbolized life and the bettering capacities of experiencing the divine is extrapolated as the quester recalls his communion with his spouse under the pear tree. Considering the fact that the shape of the fruit is evocative of the feminine sphere; its presence could be interpreted as the woman's

capacity for reproduction and a promise for birth, development and permanence. Indeed, in the section of the book-length poem, where the couple is depicted enjoying the bounty of nature, the hero's "mismatched halfness lying side by side in the darkness" (p. 57) is expecting their second baby as he affirms that

I can feel with my hand  
 the foetus rouse himself  
 with a huge, fishy thrash, and re-settle in his darkness.  
 Her hair glowing in the firelight  
 her breasts full,  
 her belly swollen  
 a sunset of firelight  
 wavering all down on one side, my wife sleeps on  
 happy (p. 57).

This final promise of rebirth and eternity is displayed in this intimate moment of the couple as they share into the creation of life. Moreover, the hero recollects having his spouse next to him, in spring, a season of rebirth; likewise, he suggests that after having intercourse and being together, they are aware that they lie next to the earth knowing that one day they will die. Even when this metaphor may be considered "negative," it is positive as they are among "flowers of the flowers" (p. 59) enjoying that moment in which life and death intersect as "the bodies of our hearts / opened / under the knowledge / of tree, on the grass of the knowledge / of

graves” (p. 59). This image is reinforced when the bees become part of the image for these insects besides representing hard work and life in community, they pollinate plants; hence, they participate in life-death cycle of floras; thus, permanence is exhibited in the poem as the hero describes that:

She who lies halved  
 beside me – she and I once  
 watched the bees, dreamers not yet  
 dipped into de acids  
 of the craving for anything, not yet burned down into flies, sucking  
 the blossom-dust  
 from the pear tree in spring (p. 58).

Likewise, at the closing of this book-length poem, the hero finds that the trees that have stood for eternity, have cured the wounds of humanity; and this mending on their bodies comes from fire that “rises off the bones” (p. 68). In this section, Kinnell portrays the premise that life has to be honored no matter what pole of the dichotomy people are facing. The embrace he proclaims is a torn one that in its defectiveness achieves perfection, exactly as his poetry, through language, it holds life; these aforementioned images take form in the following verses:

The witness trees heal  
 their scars at the flesh fire,

the flame  
rises off the bones,  
the hunger  
to be new lifts off  
my soul, an eerie blue light blooms  
on all the ridges of the world. Somewhere  
in the legends of blood sacrifice  
the fatted calf  
takes the bonfire into his arms, and *he*  
burns it (p. 68).

After encountering these silent observers, “the witness trees,” and realizing of this unity of opposites, the persona moves forward with the purpose of finding other elements that have been traditionally considered opposites but that will end up being one unit. The first of these is “Death” as the great devourer who “lifts off” his essence until it blossoms in a “blue light” all around the globe. Ferber (1999) in his *Dictionary of literary symbols* when analyzing the color blue affirms that “[b]ecause it is the color of the sky (and perhaps because the sea is blue only on sunny days), blue is traditionally the color of heaven, of hope, of constancy, of purity, of truth, of the ideal” (p. 31). Consequently, the ideal is matched with the material represented by the “fatted calf” that instead of being consumed by the fire, he exhausts it with an embrace. It is in this moment when the torn embrace

encountered at the beginning of the quester's journey takes form and the ideal and the material converge as the calf, "an appropriate sacrifice (Lev. 9:2, 8) as a sin offering" (Achtemeier 1985, p. 164), "takes the bonfire into his arms" to burn it. This oxymoron redeems the calf and consequently, the hero. The latter is no longer part of a line of "blood sacrifices" but lives.

Indeed, this intersection of opposites and their resolution, depicted previously through the symbol of the stones and the trees, is also present in other figurative elements of nature displayed in the poem through other living creatures: animals and insects. Kinnell's poetry has been characterized by the use of these elements and this book-length poem is no exception. There are several creatures that inhabit the reality of the poem; however, for the sake of this analysis, the emphasis will be on some of them due to their recurrence and significance as symbolic images for the quester. Thus, the animals that will be discussed in the following section are the bear and the hen as well as two insects: the fly and the flea.

### **3. Insects and other animals**

Historically, the use of animal figures and insects has accompanied humankind from early ages; in ancient cultures<sup>46</sup>, these creatures of nature were

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<sup>46</sup> According to Ferber (1999) beasts "The animal kingdom has been a lavish source of metaphors, similes, and symbols from the earliest literature to the present. Since beasts come in such great variety, their literary uses are usually specific to the species: lions mean certain things, wolves other things, dogs still others. Even where "beast" or "brute" is used as a general term, there is often an implicit distinction between wild (dangerous) and domestic (tame), a beast of prey or beast of burden. If the human being is the rational animal, as Aristotle and other ancients defined it, then beasts are "lacking in reason" (pp. 20-21).

considered, in some cases, messengers of the gods, or demigods. In the American continent, as part of their cosmology, indigenous people believed in gods that were part animal or who displayed elements of different beasts. As Malamud (2000) declares “Mesoamerican animal beliefs embody metaphysical representations of human ties to the earth, nature, and fate, as mediated by animals” (p. 3). Hence, for these cultures, the creatures of nature became essential channels for communicating and understanding the life-death cycle all living beings undergo; however, through time and with the advent of colonization and science, their worldview was replaced. This substitution, some may argue, obliterated humankind’s capacity of understanding the life-death continuum as part of a natural cycle. Considering this fact, Jung (in Sabini 2001), affirms that the contemporary individual

feels himself isolated in the cosmos. He is no longer involved in nature and has lost his emotional participation in natural events, which hitherto had a symbolic meaning for him... No river contains a spirit, no tree means a man’s life, no snake is the embodiment of wisdom, and no mountain still harbors a great demon. Neither do things speak to him nor can he speak to things, like stones, springs, plants and animals. He no longer has a bush-soul identifying him with a wild animal. His immediate communication with nature is gone forever, and the emotional energy it generated has sunk into the unconscious (pp. 79-80).

According to Jung and as Kinnell displays in his poetic work, individuals have lost their sense of belonging and their communion with nature; consequently, they feel misplaced and lonely for they have detached from the natural elements that gave them life. However, these elements have been considered by many members of contemporary society as elements over which power is exerted and relations should be limited to human exploitation and “scientific purposes.” In *The book of nightmares*, Kinnell, going back to this ancient human tradition, understands animals as elements of a wider scheme in nature. Throughout his journey, the hero finds different representation of creatures that inhabit the physical world as well as individuals’ collective images as Jung (1964) asserts:

There are many symbols, however (among them the most important), that are not individual in their nature and origin... they are in fact “collective representations,” emanating from primeval dreams and creative fantasies. As such, these images are involuntary spontaneous manifestations and by no means intentional inventions (pp. 41-42).

Hence, this section will discuss the representation of creatures that populate Kinnell’s poem. The first creature to be discussed is: the bear. This creature is one of the elements that make the poem achieve a full circle; the persona finds it at the beginning of his journey as well as at the end. These two appearances connect to the birth of Kinnell’s two children: Maud and Fergus. Besides this being, the other animal to be discussed is the hen. This animal, that does not fly but that has wings,

becomes a metaphor for the life-death cycle as his corpse entails life within in the production of eggs as the quester has

... glimpsed  
 corpse-light, in the opened cadaver  
 of hen, the mass of tiny,  
 unborn eggs, each getting  
 tinier and yellower as it reaches back toward  
 the icy pulp  
 of what is (p. 13).

Moreover, there are two insects that have continually been related to bothering moments: the fly and the flea; however, these two almost imperceptible insects become also a symbol of experiencing life and death.

### **The bear**

Nature and the primitive seem to be some of Kinnell's favored topics to examine in poetry, and *The book of nightmares* is no exception. According to Jung (1959), "The primitive cannot assert that he thinks; it is rather that 'something thinks in him.' The spontaneity of the act of thinking does not lie, causally, in his conscious mind, but in his unconscious" (p. 153). Hence, the world of nature and the primeval world reigned through the senses and somehow, it is through the senses, that poetry is experienced. By the same token, Lévi-Strauss (1978) argues that today "we use



considerably less our sensory perceptions” (p. 6); however, Kinnell uses them to awaken the world of nature. In his poem “The bear,” there is a direct identification of the persona and this wild animal starting in the moment that he lives in the beast; definitely, the persona in the poem is reborn in the carcass of the bear, he becomes one with it. For instance, John Logan (Nelson 1987) in “The bear in the poet in the bear” asserts that in his poem, there is a direct identification of the persona and this wild animal starting the moment he becomes the beast:

His bear poem, the identification of the poet and the bear I made extraordinarily close – in the first place, through the starving speakers subsistence on the blood-soaked turds of the bear he hunts, so that that which has passed through the bear passes also through the poet, and in the second place, through the fact that the poet cuts open the warm carcass of the bear and takes shelter there against the vicious wind and cold... He is born out of the body of the bear again, having thought in his dream that he “must rise up and dance” – and he writes his poem (p. 78).

Molesworth (in Nelson 1987) discusses “The bear” in terms of a symbiotic process in which “once the hunter is inside, his empathetic identification with the bear becomes literal, and the poet recapitulates by dreaming the bear’s death” (p. 56). For Molesworth, it is only

By digesting blood that leaked into his stomach, that is, only by destroying himself, could the bear have lived; and such self-transcendence, Kinnell

seems to be saying, can only be achieved by someone tracking down and recording the experience. Such evidence as becomes available for this act may only be a carcass, a remnant of what has “just occurred;” but, through empathetic dream-work, through poetry, such exploration and attentiveness can be the source of new life (p. 57).

The persona's first meeting is with a bear that “sits alone/ on the hillside, nodding from side/ to side” (p. 4); as if protecting a new life to come. And this is the same bear that appears in the last poem “[A] black bear sits alone / in the twilight, nodding from side/ to side, turning slowly around and around/ on himself” (p. 71). The bear has stayed with him throughout his journey and he signals the quester that in poem X he has achieved his aim as the bear is “scuffing the four-footed / circle into earth (p. 71). Completeness has been accomplished. The bear that appears in the first poem is the same that goes full circle and is found in the last poem. This bear does move back to the primitive not as a threatening element but as a witness of natural life. The poet juxtaposes this creature to the moment of birth of his children because, for him, both beings belong to the same realm: the concrete world. One characteristic of Kinnell's poetry is that he discusses concrete experiences and beings to be able to attain deeper understanding of life, and in the case of the poem being discussed in this study of the binary oppositions of life and death. In fact, in his poetry, all living creatures deserve to be acknowledged. Hence, this comparison

between what may be considered beastly and what is humane can be evidenced when referring to the bear the persona depicts:

He sniffs the blossom-smells, the rained earth,  
 finally he gets up,  
 eats a few flowers, trudges away,  
 his fur glistening  
 in the rain (p. 4).

The creature is alone sitting on a hillside but also turning, there is movement in its stillness, until it decides to march in the rain; meanwhile, the baby, Maud, on her part, is waiting for “the flipping / and overleaping” (p. 5) to finish, as she is still in her mother’s womb, living a life that also belongs to the parent. Moreover, as the baby moves inside this protective sphere, she starts experiencing her own life and at the same time her death to the darkness (her only reality known at the moment) and

... the watery  
 somersaulting alone in the oneness  
 under the hill, under  
 the old, lonely bellybutton  
 pushing forth again  
 in remembrance,  
 the drifting there furred in the dark,

pressing a knee or elbow  
 along a slippery wall, sculpting  
 the world with each thrash-the stream  
 of omphalos blood humming all about you (p. 5).

The baby is not “on” the hill but “under the hill, under / the old, lonely bellybutton” (p. 5). This image is the most primitive to humankind: the birth of a baby, “in the dark,” a previous death or previous life that mix to be “alive” in this world. Just like the bear, the baby moves, but it is also expectant to come out until “[T]he black eye / opens, the pupil / droozed with black hairs” (p. 6). The imagery presented in these verses reflect the bear whose hair glistens (p. 4), “who flounders through chaos / in his starry blubber” (p. 23), reflecting the baby’s movements as she is being delivered. According to Jung (1959):

The child motif represents not only something that existed in the distant past but also something that exists *now*; that is to say, it is not just a vestige but a system functioning in the present whose purpose is to compensate or correct, in a meaningful manner, the inevitable one-sidedness and extravagances of the conscious mind to concentrate on relatively few contents and to raise them to the highest pitch of clarity (p.162).

. Thus, in Kinnell’s poem, this first child becomes that primeval cornerstone to amend for what he was not able to understand before departing in his journey. Furthermore, when his second son is being delivered, the bear beast “eat[s] a few

flowers, trudge[s] away / all his fur glistening / in the rain” (p. 72) while “Sancho Fergus” (p. 72), becomes a metaphor for the future of humankind while “One of the essential features of the child motif is its futurity. The child is potential future... Life is a flux, a flowing into the future and not a stoppage or backwash. It is therefore not surprising that so many of the mythological saviours are child gods” (Jung 1959, p. 164). As the mother gave birth, the child “came wholly forth” and the “took him up in [his] hands and bent / over and smelled / the black, glistening fur / of his head” (p. 72).

Furthermore, as the bear walks alone with “his fur glistening,” the baby is also “glowing / with the astral violet / of the underlife,” her hair is black, and she is “alone in the oneness;” both creatures are on their own expecting for life to happen and simultaneously they are also experiencing the face of death. Furthermore, this black bear materializes again with the birth of Fergus and as it moves with “all his fur glistening / in the rain,” the baby boy is being born and, in his delivery, the poet cannot refrain from exclaiming

And what glistening! Sancho Fergus,  
 my boychild, had such great shoulders,  
 when he was born his head  
 came out, the rest of him stuck. And he opened  
 his eyes: his head out there all alone  
 in the room, he squinted with pained,

barely unglued eyes at the ninth-month's  
blood splashing beneath him  
on the floor. And almost  
smiled, I thought, almost forgave it all in advance.

The bear's fur glistens as the baby's hair, both images are depicted as being granted light that comes from a source that is external. Moreover, as the baby is being delivered, the persona sees him as a big and strong baby that has "great shoulders" (p. 72) like the bear, a robust creature. Hence, the comparison of the birth of the babies, Maud's and Fergus's, to the bear is absolute. Like the creature, the babies glistened, "all alone" moving to enter life, the eyes were searching for a not-yet-existing question of being for, in the case of the bear, it lives on his instincts in which life and death are an interwoven duality; humanity, on the contrary, needs to come to this awareness, individually, in a process of learning and unlearning lessons. The primitive (the bear) and the civilized (the babies) are put together to remind the reader that humankind belongs to both realms of life and death: Eros and Thanatos.

### **The hen**

Besides the bear, the other fundamental totem animal in the poem is the hen, its feathers, and its produce. The hen and its death become symbolic elements in the poem as reminders that humankind should be aware that all beginnings imply a demise and that as humankind embraces life unquestionably, individuals must also

embrace death, for in the latter life is found and vice versa. However, if there is no awareness of this fact, humanity will live in fear and suffering “dying in to the old sway bed, / a layer of crushed feathers all that there is/ between you/ and the long shaft of darkness shaped as you/ let go” (p.14). The hen is a bird, but a bird that does not fly; consequently, it cannot be a messenger of the gods of heaven but of those on earth. In this poem, the hen is an unequivocal indication that as life comes into existence so does death and that is why the persona envisages his face in bed and “our faces in the spring / nights, teeth / biting down on hen feathers, bits of the hen / still stuck in the crevices” (p. 11):

... – if only  
 we could let go  
 like her, throw ourselves  
 on the mercy of darkness, like the hen,  
 tuck our head  
 under a wing, hold ourselves still  
 a few moments, as she  
 falls out into her little trance in the witchgrass (p.11).

The way to kill the hen is simple and fast as the poet seems to have a death wish for his moment of departure into the “mercy of darkness” (p. 11). Most likely, this animal, as any other living being, “feels” when death approaches; however, it knows that there is nothing to be done; consequently, as the hen, he wants to be

humble and accept death when it comes and at that moment “hold ourselves still /  
a few moments”

or turn over

and be stroked with a finger

down the throat feathers,

down the throat knuckles,

down over the hum

of the wishbone tuning its high D in thin blood,

down over

the breastbone risen up

out of breast flesh, until the fatted thing

woozes off, head

thrown back

on the chopping block, longing only

to die (p. 11).

And that is, according to Campbell (1991), “the power of the animal master, the willingness of the animals to participate in this game” (p. 94) of being offered as nourishment. In this moment, the persona sees “by corpse-light, in the opened cadaver / of hen, the mass of tiny, / unborn eggs, each getting / tinier and yellower as it reaches back toward /the icy pulp / of what is” (p. 13); at this instant, the persona experiences progression going back to the unknown, to a prenatal moment of lack



of awareness when he asserts to “have felt the zero / freeze itself around the finger dipped slowly in” (p. 13). At the end of “living,” that is all there is, a “cadaver / of hen” (p. 13) like there is one for each human being because when “la muerte nos venga de la vida, la desnuda de todas sus vanidades y pretensiones y la convierte en lo que es: unos huesos mundos y una mueca espantable<sup>47</sup>” (Paz 1995, p. 194). However, in the carcass lay the “unborn eggs, each getting/ tinier and yellower as it reaches back toward/ the icy pulp/ of what is” (p. 13).

Having the hen in mind, the quester, after carefully considering its behavior when scratching the ground, he wonders if this idea of living perpetually is a nightmare or its opposite, a dream; interestingly enough, both images respond to the unconscious, the possible latent desires of humanity. Thus, he states:

And is it  
 the hen’s nightmare, or her secret dream,  
 to scratch the ground forever  
 eating the minutes out of the grains of sand?

The image of the hen accompanies the hero in his journey and in section IV of the book-length poem its memory haunts him as he “lie[s] without sleeping, remembering / the ripped body / of hen, the warmth of hen flesh” (p. 30). This vivid image that he recollects, takes him back to an earlier stage; however, it is until this

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<sup>47</sup> Death avenges life, it strips it from all its vanities and makes it become what it is: skinned bones and a terrifying grimace (my translation).

instant when he acknowledges the fear felt towards death as he recollects that the hen's flesh "frighten[ed] [his] hand / all her desires, / all her deathsmells / blooming again in the starlight" (p. 30). Moreover, as the persona wears the shoes of the tramp, he also recognizes that the hen ignites his will through the metaphor of wood flickering as he "sat out by twigfires flaring in grease strewn from the pimpled limbs of the hen" (p. 36). Likewise, these drops of her being fall and become the combustion that keeps him moving forward; and while approaching his aim, the hero asserts:

Here, between answer  
and nothing, I stand, in the old shoes  
flowed over by rainbows of hen-oil,  
each shoe holding the bones  
which ripple together in the communion  
of the step,  
and which open out  
in front into toes, the whole foot trying  
to dissolve into the future (p. 73).

As the quester encountered his grail, "the eldershoes of [his] feet" (p. 19) emerge as new with the help of the essence of the hen that is not colorless but a rainbow, as the Christian covenant with humanity, full of hope; moreover, life and death become one "in the communion / of the step" as the hero's steps disappear

into a timeless moment. This resolution of the life-death binary opposition is also present in the poem through the representation of other living beings as the fly and flea.

### **The fly and the flea**

Flies are usually associated with loss of life for these insects are decomposers and they feed on the dead; however, the fly in this book-length poem is in a different position as the speaker watches it “tangled in mouth-glue, whining his wings, / concentrated wholly on / *time, time*, losing his way worse / down the downward-winding stairs, his wings / whining for life as he shrivels” (p. 35). Another reminder, for the quester, of how humankind may be trapped in the face of life is depicted when “the fly/ ceases to struggle, his wings/ flutter out the music blooming with failure/ of one who gets ready to die” (p. 30); until the reader meets the flea “[O]n the body/ on the blued flesh, when it is/ laid out, see if you can find/ the one flea which is laughing” (p. 75). This flea mirrors the juxtaposition of existence in which life and death, terror and beauty walk out together.

Indeed, the metaphor of flea in the book-length poem is present in two specific moments; one when the persona is speaking to his daughter, telling her that there is nothing he could do to make her avoid the passing of time for he has heard her “tell / the sun, *don't go down*, I have stood by / as you told the flower, *don't grow old, / don't die*” (p. 49). The second time, the flea is found at the end of the book-length poem when the persona realizes that this creature may know more than

humans: life and death belong together. Individuals seem to forget that the passage of time is certain, every day will bring a new night, every day individuals will grow older, and as they age, they may be facing the inherited dichotomy inscribed in each person: life is part of death and vice versa. Nevertheless, this fact is not recognized by the majority of individuals because contemporary society has lost contact with nature and its cycles of regeneration and demise. Thus, life and death are not approached as part of the same continuum and this may be the reason for humankind's unacknowledged despair that Kinnell depicts when the persona states that "[A]nd yet perhaps this is the reason you cry, / this the nightmare you wake screaming from: / being forever / in the pre-trembling of a house that falls (p. 50).

Interestingly enough, throughout the book-length poem, Kinnell discusses this animal exclusively in sections VII and X. In the former section, he uses it to depict the precarious situation of humankind when "owning" freedom. For him, individuals "feel free on earth as fleas on the bodies of men" (p. 50), through this ironical metaphor, the persona acknowledges that humankind is not free. Fleas are parasitic insects that present several stages of metamorphosis and they nourish on blood; consequently, they feed on life and so do social conventions. Society may feed on individuals fears, loves and dreams. Paradoxically, Kinnell, in section X, approaches this animal from a different perspective: a juxtaposition of opposites.

The fly, on the other hand, is one insect that is present in sections V and VI. In section V, the fly prepares to die as it "tangled in mouth-glue, whining his wings,

/ concentrated wholly on / *time*" (p. 35) because it senses that its end approaches and the fly "ceases to struggle, his wings flutter out of music blooming with failure / of one who gets ready to die" (p. 35). This animal stops resisting the spider's web and accepts its fate; furthermore, its wings make music which the persona compares to the mythical hero Roland<sup>48</sup> who is accompanied by his horn, an instrument that could be heard from afar. The music produced by the fly's wings is not a mourning melody but a triumphant one in which the "victim" is not so but a victor as it follows the life-death cycle. The fly's flapping becomes a ritualistic melody that "bloom[s] with failure" (p. 35) for the time to encounter death has come. Like the fly being trapped in the web, so is humanity which is confined to a life-death duality that needs to be acknowledged in order to live more harmoniously.

In section VI, the persona decides to give the fly his "brain" whose "back the hysterical green color of slime, / that he may suck on it and die" (p. 43). For the quester, there is no purpose in rational thinking as it has produced so much pain in humanity; however, the fly is not to blame for this flaw and before concluding this

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<sup>48</sup> The song of Roland is a poem, according to García (2010), that "celebrates King Charles of France (appearing old, decrepit, and ghost-like) and his best men (known as the Twelve Peers) in their fight against the people of the Saracen Empire (another name for the Muslim Caliphate). Roland, the group's leader, and his men seek to annihilate the heathen Saracen religion or convert its adherents. Charles and the Franks are also seeking to conquer Spain. As Roland and his soldiers make their way through the Pyrenees, they are attacked by the Saracens... both before and after the disagreement with Oliver. This key dramatic moment – the quarrel centering on Olivier's three requests and Roland's three refusals to blow his horn – even though an ambush looks likely, is a good starting point for performing a cost-benefit analysis of one who sacrifices himself and those in the rear-guard" (pp. 312-314).

section “the fly” living “the last nightmare, hatches himself” (p. 44). In other words, from its own destruction, there comes life again.

Unquestionably, in the book-length poem, nature is a central element; indeed, it is unbearable for the persona to detach from it because as a tree or a bird or an insect, he is connected to the elements, fire, water, air, and earth, and with them, to nature. For the speaker there is no more satisfying experience than the one attained through the natural world and its elements. Kinnell succeeds in juxtaposing polarities to recover meaning as he “sits[s] a moment/ by the fire, in the rain, speak/ a few words into its warmth” (p. 4); the rain falls and it is warm as the fire in the field, oppositions that guide the quester into understanding his duality. Additionally, it is essential to consider that the metaphors on nature that will be discussed belong to the sphere of the poet’s psychological journey to a more knowledgeable existence.

### **Classical elements of nature and the resolution of binary oppositions**

The idea of understanding how the Earth and humankind were created is a primeval curiosity in individuals’ minds. Hence, thousands of years ago, ancient scholars believed that there were four elements that constituted, in different combinations, that is known by humankind. These four elements are earth, air, fire, and water and they represent different characteristics that can be seen in what surrounds human civilization. Earth is the element that is the weightiest and it is commonly associated with fertility, stability and prosperity. According to Ferber (1999), “late ancient sources, the Orphics praised *Physis* as the mother of all, all-

wise, all-ruling, and immortal; if so, that was the first instance of “Mother Nature,” but the personification was not sustained. The more ancient myths about Gaia (Earth) must also have encouraged this personification” (p. 133). Air, on its part, is lighter and it is related to creativity and the intellect<sup>49</sup>. Fire is characterized by being the lightest of the four elements besides being connected to characteristics of transformation and strength. As Cirlot (1962) discusses:

For most primitives, fire was a demiurge emanating from the sun, whose earthly representative it was; hence it is related on the one hand with the ray of light and the lightning, and, on the other, with gold. Frazer lists many rites in which torches, bonfires, burning embers and even ashes are considered capable of stimulating the growth of the cornfields and the well-being of man and of animals (p. 106).

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<sup>49</sup> According to Cirlot (1962), “Of the four Elements, air and fire are regarded as active and male; water and earth as passive and female. In some elemental cosmogonies, fire is given pride of place and considered the origin of all things, but the more general belief is that air is the primary element. Compression or concentration of air creates heat or fire, from which all forms of life are then derived. Air is essentially related to three sets of ideas: the creative breath of life, and, hence, speech; the stormy wind, connected in many mythologies with the idea of creation; and, finally, space as a medium for movement and for the emergence of life-processes. Light, flight, lightness, as well as scent and smell, are all related to the general symbolism of air (p. 3). Gaston Bachelard says that for one of its eminent worshippers, Nietzsche, air was a kind of higher, subtler matter, the very stuff of human freedom. And he adds that the distinguishing characteristic of aerial nature is that it is based on the dynamics of dematerialization. Thoughts, feelings and memories concerning heat and cold, dryness and humidity and, in general, all aspects of climate and atmosphere, are also closely related to the concept of air. According to Nietzsche, air should be cold and aggressive like the air of mountain tops. Bachelard relates scent to memory, and by way of example points to Shelley’s characteristic lingering over reminiscences of smell” (p. 6).

Finally, water is conventionally linked to symbolic features of divination, intuition, and change. For Cirlot (1962), water “symbolize[s] the universal congress of potentialities, the *fons et origo*, which precedes all form and all creation. Immersion in water signifies a return to the preformal state, with a sense of death and annihilation on the one hand, but of rebirth and regeneration on the other, since immersion intensifies the life-force” (p. 365).

It was believed that these four elements of nature could combine harmoniously to perfect the philosopher’s stone; being this stone a reflection of the perfect self. Moreover, something worth noticing in the use of these elements in *The book of nightmares* and its analysis considering a Jungian approach, is that they are also present in the mandala. In relation to this symbolic representation and according to Jung (1964)

Among the mythological representations of the Self one finds much emphasis on the four corners of the world, and in many pictures the Great Man is represented in the center of a circle divided into four. Jung used the Hindu word mandala (magic circle) to designate a structure of this order, which is a symbolic representation of the “nuclear atom” of the human psyche whose essence we do not know. In this connection it is interesting that a Naskapi hunter pictorially represented his Great Man not as a human being but as a mandala (p. 210).



In this “magic circle,” surrounded by the four elements, the self is found through the reunion of the most basic dreams and visions basic to humankind; therefore, the individuation process searches for completeness. Likewise, in the book-length poem, the persona acknowledges the purpose of his journey through the encounter with these four elements through the completion of the cycle (roundness as the mandala). When the quester commenced his journey in the pursuit for inner realization, following indications from the outer world and a seemingly more objective reality, he is able to allow his own self to emerge, acquiring what he lacked and that is translated into the understanding of the binary oppositions of life and death. From the four elements, the first one to be discussed is fire that besides bringing pain can also illuminate; as the discussion continues, water, air, and earth will be analyzed in relation to the poetic images depicted in Kinnell’s *The book of nightmares*.

## **Fire**

As an element of the quartet being discussed, the element of fire is central in to understand the persona’s journey of self-discovery in the book-length poem. Fire has been ascribed a positive connotation when it is found in the tree of knowledge, the tongues of fire mentioned in the Bible or the visit and inspiration of the Holy Spirit at the Christian Pentecost; nevertheless, this element is also granted less positive symbolic meanings when found in the fires of Hell or the destruction of libraries or entire civilizations. But besides these fundamental characteristics of fire, there is

one that makes it essential when understanding the persona's journey and his learning progression: fire is the only element that humanity can produce; consequently, it may symbolize the similarity between humankind and a supreme being. Biedermann (1992), when analyzing the element of fire, affirms that even when fire may present seemingly opposing interpretations,

Still, the notion of fire as "the flame of life" dominates, especially with its progressive taming over the course of civilization: this is indicated by our preservation of ancient customs like torchlight processions and lighting midsummer's – night fires on mountaintops – or eating by candlelight in the era of electrification (p. 130).

As this author states, fire will also entail positive moments in the quester's journey. As the hero starts his journey, fire is made visible, when he "light[s] a small fire in the rain" (p. 3) and this image, accompanies him throughout his quest as he keeps moving and "sit[s] a moment / by the fire, in the rain" (p. 4). As the quester moves forward, he will understand that this simultaneity of the rain in the fire will make both elements morph but not extinguish one another. He sees the fire and feels its warmth as he commences his path; moreover, as he reaches the culminating phase of the last stage, he encounters the bonfire that "goes on flaring in the rain" one more time; and this glare

No matter, now, who it was built for,  
it keeps its flames,

it warms  
everyone who might wander into its radiance,  
a tree, a lost animal, the stones,  
because in the dying world it was set burning (p. 71).

This last verse symbolizes the hope for new life as with the image of a phoenix that is purified to death by the fire of the flame and rises as new from the ashes. Even when this emblematic element may seem contradictory, it depicts the understanding of the life-death continuum for in destruction renewal is found. Furthermore, another essential characteristic of the persona's maturity is his understanding that the flame that offers its warmth is there for all those that need it; and in some cases as Jung (in Sabini 2001), affirms within the person for "(...) the soul is a fire or flame, because warmth is likewise a sign of life" (p. 92). Kinnell, in his poetry, as Jung, in his studies of the psyche, offer humanity the opportunity of comprehending the existence and relevance of that inner life that everyone owns, but may not know, in a journey of self-discovery (the unconscious).

## **Water**

As fire, water is another element that guides the hero in his quest as it is part of different myths being an elemental fluid from which life emanates; nevertheless, as fire, water may depict positive as well as negative symbolic meanings. The ambivalence of the element can be identified in myths that display closing cycles of creation, like the Christian Flood, or the opportunity of growth that rain represents

for the crops and produce. Moreover, it can guide individuals' steps when looking for meaning or knowledge; for example, the river that needs to be sailed to reach Hades, or any other body of waters that guides the quester.

A constant metaphor of life as well as of death in the text is the imagery of water. This natural element is present in two forms: the rain and the river. The symbolic value of the rain has been established as a negative and ominous element but also as a symbol of life and rebirth. As the poem starts, the quester is faced with a soft rain that will accompany him and that will go full circle in the last poem. Likewise, the river is another essential emblematic element in the poem for it signals different stages in the development of the hero: his descend into "hell," his sadness as he discovers that the "Juniata" and its surroundings have been damaged, the happiness he projects on the future of his daughter as he envisions her next to the banks of the Seine river in France, and in the last section of the poem when he completes his journey. This subsection will discuss both natural elements and their possible interpretation.

In *The book of nightmares*, the first image in the poem is a rainy place where the persona "light[s] / a small fire," image that may look paradoxical but within the dichotomy life-death answers the riddle for one is part of the other, especially when

The raindrops trying

to put the fire out

fall into it and are

changed: the oath broken,  
 the oath sworn between earth and water, flesh and spirit, broken,  
 to be sworn again,  
 over and over, in the clouds, and to be broken again,  
 over and over, on earth (p. 4).

The rain falls to put the fire out but, when it falls into the fire, it changes and the promise breaks to “be sworn again” like “[t]he still undanced cadence of vanishing” (p. 52); this promise reflects a renewal in which death materializes not to complete a cycle but to regenerate it. As with other symbolic elements in the poem, this apparently broken oath water/rain emerges again eternally in the ceaseless life-death continuum. Moreover, this image of the rain in communion with the earth symbolizes the unity of the mortal and the eternal realms: water and earth; hence, the life-death dichotomy is resolved again as it did with the element of fire. The existence of this dichotomy is not foreign for humankind, as Paz (1995) affirms

Cada pueblo sostiene un diálogo con un interlocutor invisible que es, simultáneamente, el mismo y el otro, su doble... La dualidad no es algo pegado, postizo o exterior; es nuestra realidad constitutiva: sin otredad no hay unidad. Y más: la otredad es la manifestación de la unidad, la manera en que esta se despliega...La otredad nos constituye<sup>50</sup> (pp. 390-391).

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<sup>50</sup> “Each civilization maintains a dialogue with an invisible interlocutor that is at the same time himself and the other, its double. This duality is not something bonded, foreign or external; it is our

As this scholar declares, when a person realizes that there is always an “opposite,” even within, as a duality that resides in him/herself, his/her experience of life will be more fulfilling, for without one or the other there will be no unity, no individuation process. Likewise, life and death become elements of the same unity; in the poem being discussed, eternity and ephemerality become a unity when the zero, representing eternity, and number one, symbolizing mortality, promenade together:

... It is right  
 at the last, that one  
 and zero  
 walk off together,  
 walk off the end of these pages together,  
 one creature  
 walking away side by side with the emptiness (p. 73).

This moment of unity between life and death are subsequent to the unity of mortality and immortality when the persona sees “[o]n the river the world floats by holding one corpse” (p. 73); the waters of the river symbolizing eternity are presented to the hero as being tied to death, through the corpse, element that keeps the world and its inhabitants “afloat.” Through the use of the element of water and

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constitutive reality: without otherness there is no unity. Besides, otherness is the manifestation of the unity, the way in which it unfolds ... Otherness makes us who we are” (my translation).

its interaction with other natural components, *The book of nightmares* leads the hero to the understanding of the binary oppositions of life and death, emancipating him from previous attachments to the traditional concept of “living.” Likewise, the element of the air plays an essential role in the resolution of the aforementioned opposition; this third element has been characterized by its incorporeal form and its capacity to offer the breath of life. Furthermore, it symbolizes creativity and communication; however, as the previous elements discussed, it can also display features of destruction.

### **Air**

This third element to be discussed is featured as a masculine element that represents intelligence and beginnings. This fundamental archetypal pattern is experienced by the hero throughout his journey so that he can understand the life-death polarity. According to Jung (1959), in the wind, “the spirit is always an active, winged, swift moving being that vivifies and stimulates” (p. 210), phenomenon that the persona lives when he witnesses how a promise between elements is eternally made on it: “over and over, in the clouds” (p. 4); moreover, the hero then moves forward on earth to find the bear “(...) nodding from side / to side. He sniffs / the blossom-smells, the rained earth” (p. 4). After breathing air, the creature smells how the air becomes one with the water, the rain, and the earth; these three elements are made visible through their unification. Additionally, the air retakes its position as a life giver when baby Maud is born and

(...)

they hang her up

by the feet, she sucks

air, screams

her first song – and turns rose

the slow

beating, featherless arms

already clutching at the emptiness (pp. 6-7).

The air offers the baby the chance of a new beginning out of the darkness of the life experienced in the womb for, as she breathes her first breath, she cries. However, her “song” is not a melody but a “scream” that lets others, and herself, comprehend that she has taken her next step in the life-death cycle. Step that may not be comprehended at first but until individuals undergo change, in its broadest meaning. Furthermore, the last verse in which the persona describes the baby holding into the abyss, the air that is intangible, is resolved at the end of the poem when the persona with “this free floating of one / opening his arms into the attitude / of flight, as he obeys the necessity and falls ...” (p. 75). When accepting the existence of this contradiction, giving yourself to the void to live, the persona is ready to soar beyond what may be experienced in the ephemeral reality of humankind.



Likewise, as the persona persists in his journey, the element of air is found one more time to remind him that when moving forward, the pursuit of knowledge some concepts and judgements vanish as

(...) the road  
 trembles as it starts across  
 swampland streaked with shined water, a lethe-  
 wind of chill air touches  
 me all over my body ... (p. 21).

His passage is not easy and so he makes sure the observer knows this detail for, as he walks the path, it shakes making his steps hesitant; moreover, the trail takes him to a bayou guiding him to a potential "Hades." This reflection of the verses is extrapolated from the reference to "Lethe," the river in the Greek underworld that makes its drinkers forget their past; similarly, the wind, as the Greek god Hermes that serves as messenger of the gods, supplies this forget-the-past moment in an embrace that he does not see but feels. The element air then becomes the means through which the persona reaches a state necessary to comprehend what is to come in his journey.

## **Earth**

The wind is an element that propitiates moments of beginning in the quest of the hero; similarly, the element of earth, a feminine principle, is revealed in *The book of nightmares*. Earth provides humanity the opportunity of a place to dwell and to be

protected; thus, this nurturing element allows the hero to complete his cycle of discovering who he is. As Jung (in Sabini 2001), states: “[n]atural life is the nourishing soil of the soul. Anyone who fails to go along with life remains suspended, stiff and rigid in midair” (p. 67) characteristic to the persona; so is the encounter of this fourth element for the hero:

A black bear sits alone  
 in the twilight, nodding from side  
 to side, turning slowly around and around  
 on himself, scuffing the four-footed  
 circle into the earth (p. 71).

Here the bear materializes at a special time of the day “twilight” when the day meets the night; moreover, it moves from one side to the other achieving its personal mandala when rotating and drawing a “four-footed” circle on earth that represents the reunion of the four elements: water, fire, air, and earth. This last element provides the unifying constituent for the quester to acquire the knowledge needed to complete this journey and fulfill his goal of reintegration with society. The hero’s isolation throughout the journey harmonizes with Paz’s (1995) declarations when he affirms that

El doble significado de la soledad – ruptura con un mundo y tentativa por crear otro – se manifiesta en nuestra concepción de héroes, santos y redentores... La soledad es ruptura con un mundo caduco y preparación

para el regreso de la lucha final... Y todos, en nuestra propia vida y dentro de las limitaciones de nuestra pequeñez, también hemos vivido en soledad y apartamiento, para purificarnos y luego regresar entre los nuestros<sup>51</sup> (pp. 352-353).

This journey has asked from the hero strenuous and demanding requests to be able to return to his kind, humanity. Moreover, his effort for finding enlightenment through the encounter with natural elements to understand the death-life binary opposition is closing its cycle. Likewise, the consequence of acquiring this realization for his own life is reaching completeness when considering the element of earth, a feminine principle that guides him into *grounding* this knowledge.

In fact, earth is a symbolic element that is usually associated with being connected to the soil and consequently to nature; furthermore, it is related to the cycles of life for without the soil, there would be no crops, and without these there would be no nourishment for humankind; without the soil, there would be no trees, and without trees there would be no water and no fire. Most of the creatures in the poem live on earth or on elements rooted to earth; the rocks come from earth and the fire is set burning on it; it could be affirmed that earth symbolizes humankind's connection to their primitive past when even their dwellings were made with it.

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<sup>51</sup> "The double meaning of solitude – a rupture with one world and the attempt to create another – is manifested in our conception of heroes, saints, and redeemers... Solitude is the rupture with a caducous world and the preparation for the return and final contestation... Besides, in our own life experience and within the limitations of our own smallness, we have all lived in solitude and withdrawal, so that we can be purified and then be able to go back to our kind" (my translation).

Hence, the earth is a vital element for humanity. Jung (in Sabini 2001) states that “Nietzsche has expressed that very beautifully: you shall become friends of the immediate things. And the immediate things are this earth, this life” (p. 86). For Jung, this earth and the bond that exists between her and individuals is of foremost importance; moreover, he goes further in declaring that “[f]or quite a long time enough our ancestors, and ourselves, have been taught that this life is not the real thing, that it is provisional, and that we only live for Heaven... In the course of the centuries man has repeatedly experienced the fact that the life that is not lived here, or the life lived provisionally, is utterly unsatisfactory” (p. 86). In the book-length poem, Kinnell delves into these appreciations because in the completion of the quest, the hero is faced with the integration of the four basic elements that guides him to accept nature and its processes because “Living brings you to death, there is no other road” (p. 73). In fact, before the persona starts his physical journey, he

(...) sit[s] a moment  
 by the fire, in the rain, speak  
 a few words into its warmth –  
 stone saint smooth stone – and sing  
 one of the songs I used to croak  
 for my daughter, in her nightmares (p. 4).

The hero “feels” the earth as he rests on it and besides that fact, he experiences a moment of unity among the four elements: there is rain that falls but

that does not put out the fire and its flames; on the contrary, from them, warmth emanates. Moreover, as he witnesses this scene, he sings as his daughter when she was born; so, air inflates his lungs when he tries to communicate his message of the unity achieved. All these actions happen simultaneously while being rooted to earth.

Likewise, for discovering this verity, the persona, when starting his journey, finds that the bear, his animal-link to the discovering of his self, is “[s]omewhere out ahead of me,” sitting

(...) alone  
 on his hillside, nodding from side  
 to side. He sniffs  
 the blossom-smells, the rained earth,  
 finally he gets up,  
 eats a few flowers, trudges away (p. 4).

This strong creature is sitting on earth, on a protuberant section of the soil, so that he can be noticed by the hero; moreover, the bear moves from one side to the other, smelling the earth, the female principle being impregnated with another element, the water, and being able to smell both through the air. These actions are part of his preparatory involvement for the journey to come. As the hero moves forward in this first moment of the call, he is faced with a metaphor of earth representing the womb of a mother and the baby in it:

It is all over,  
little one, the flipping  
and overleaping, the watery  
somersaulting alone in the oneness  
under the hill, under  
the old, lonely bellybutton  
pushing forth again  
in remembrance (p. 5).

Contrary to the bear, this baby is not on the hill but “under the hill,” but alone like the bear and moving from one side to the other. The womb as the earth, in this case the hill, symbolize a life-giving principle that will accompany the hero as he progresses in his quest.

Even when these references to the element earth are positive not all the ones present in the poem are so. Perhaps, he could not understand his connection to the elements and how through the comprehension of their principles, he could achieve more knowledge on the task of being alive and living. The persona seems to have faced difficult moments of grief and pain in company of his daughter for

When it was cold  
on our hillside, and you cried  
in the crib rocking  
through the darkness, on wood

knifed down to the curve of the smile, a sadness  
stranger than ours, all of it  
flowing from the other world,  
I used to come to you  
and sit by you  
and sing to you. You did not know,  
and yet you will remember (p. 7).

Father and daughter developed an intimate connection that would last through time even when there were moments of struggle while alive on earth; however, even when these could have been harsh on them, they also felt protected as the baby was in a wooden crib that shielded her from darkness. And this encounter with a presence from “the other world” may have scared both: one for its ingenuity and the other for his lack of knowledge. Nevertheless, they possessed a connection: singing that brought, and will bring, comfort for both in moments of despair. However, indistinctly of a grieving moment, the earth will protect its inhabitants and inside her death will morph into life. This resolution of this binary opposition is declared at the end of the poem when the persona cries out loud:

This poem  
if we shall call it that,  
or concert of one  
divided among himself,

this earthward gesture  
of the sky-diver (p. 75).

This journey of self-discovery taken by the quester comes to an end when he comprehends that this passage was necessary for him to understand that life takes you to death but in death life is found. As Paz (1995) asserts, “[a]sí, frente a la muerte hay dos actitudes: una, hacia adelante, que la concibe como creación; otra, de regreso, que se expresa como fascinación ante la nada o como nostalgia del limbo<sup>52</sup> (p. 198); for Kinnell, in *The book of nightmares*, the movement is forward, as creation.

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<sup>52</sup> Thus, when facing death there are two attitudes: one forward, that envisages it as creation; another, backwards, that is expressed as a fascination in the face of the abyss or nostalgia of limbo” (my translation).



## CONCLUSION(S)

One of the major poets in North American literary movements of the 20th century is Galway Kinnell whose book *The book of nightmares* has been considered a poetic masterpiece. Kinnell's poetry began as relatively formal and structurally intricate poems, but he moved to a simpler diction and to an overall freer structure. Diction and structure in his poems mirror life as an uncomplicated moment of transcendence into the universe. His innocent and common images, sounds, colors and happenings that occur to many, and ignored by most, are re-written for all men and women who want to satisfy their need for life. He has had a constant involvement with the reality of death and the impermanence of all living things. Our death, most people's death and his own death are described in his book. For him, his poetry is a mirror of normal and common life, a vision of what life is and not what it could be.

In Kinnell's poetry, the reader can discover an attempt to get to know the unknown. His raw material of poetry is life; furthermore, his poetry may not only portray the conventional beauty of the sunset or the mystery of birth and the beginning of life but also "the drunk who died in [this] room" (p. 20) or "false teeth clanging to your breakfast" (p. 42) or "memories left in mirrors on whorehouse ceilings" (p. 45). Indeed, in *The book of nightmares* the persona journeys through all these experiences to achieve knowledge to learn how to enjoy life. Hence, in this

study, each chapter focused on the different aspects of the mythical journey of the hero.

To achieve this purpose, this thesis on Kinnell's poetic work *The book of nightmares* was structured in four phases, being the first the discussion of Kinnell's poetry as well as the reasons for choosing this text and the scope of the topic. Secondly, there was a chapter dedicated to examining the theoretical framework that sustained the analysis of this research. In this case, the work of Carl G. Jung, Joseph Campbell and Octavio Paz, mainly, were analyzed in order to comprehend the universal pattern of the hero and the journey alongside the concept of death. Jung's analytical psychological approximation to the archetype of the quester was cornerstone to discuss Campbell's monomyth and Paz's analysis of death in relation to life in the Western world. Furthermore, in this chapter there was also a section on structuralism and its main representatives in order to discuss the term binary oppositions, interpretation, ideology and semiotics.

Moreover, in Kinnell's text there is a subversion of meaning. People and social institutions work within what is "socially accepted," what the majority establishes as a convention, and what is "out of the social limits" accepted by the group. This hierarchical differentiation between what makes up human life in general and its production is what has been well defined by Derrida's deconstruction: the center, socially accepted, and the margin, the outer limits. It is then when the game of binary oppositions comes into play. There is always good/bad, man/woman,

white/black, speech/writing, true/false, etc., where the former belongs to a higher hierarchy than the latter. Most people dwell within a hierarchical paradigm in which they base their construction of life on a center and its meanings.

Undeniably, deconstruction tries to subvert this hierarchy by producing an exchange of properties showing the importance of the margin in the construction of meaning and unveiling the double nature of literary texts. Thus, the main subversion found in Kinnell's literary piece consists of the acceptance and experience of death through a life cycle, in which living involves death and death means living. Most human beings would rather have life as the center of the world and tend to set death aside. Though, for Kinnell death starts at the moment of birth, but people cannot accept that giving birth is presenting death as its companion, and both are part of a necessary cycle to become one with Nature.

Then, the second chapter introduced the analysis of the poet's work in which the concept of myth and its different functions were examined. In this case, the first function of myth, that is, the mystical, focuses on evoking a sense of gratitude before the "monstrous" mystery that life makes people experience. It is a fact that all human beings suffer and that their lives do not remain a perfect representation of peace and happiness; however, there is always some sort of beauty in life. The second function, the cosmological, offers humankind the possibility of witnessing the universe as an opportunity to experience the divine in everything that exists. The third function, the sociological, endows individuals with a universal order that has to

be followed to live harmoniously in society. Finally, the fourth function, gives everyone the chance to learn about themselves; however, this process is individual: this is what founds the journey of the hero.

The third chapter of this study analyzed the monomyth and its different phases. This quest took the persona from the first stage, the *separation or departure*, to that of trials and victories of initiation to the final stage of the *return and reintegration with society* which is of uttermost importance to achieve knowledge. As the quester moves forward in his journey, he doubts, fears, questions and learns that the binary oppositions life and death are part of the same continuum and that they walk hand in hand. For the persona, the journey was not an easy process because coming to this understanding involved the negation of what had been previously learned. Thus, accepting this fact produced, in the first stages, grief and fear in the quester. However, in the final stage, he learns that sooner or later death will reach his life and that he is a sibling of "everything that dies" (p. 8).

The last chapter of discussion focused on the analysis of some of the natural elements present in the book-length poem. One general characteristic of Kinnell's poetry is that it tends to use many images of nature like animals, trees, water and even rocks. This book of poems was not different. From section I, the persona faces different elements like water, fire, and a bear. Definitely, his poetry is concrete and looks for an organic answer from the reader because for him being alive on earth involves sharing life with all creatures.

After doing this study, it is important to mention that one of the main limitations found was the difficulty in finding information about the writer. There are different books on interviews made to him, but very few discuss his work. Moreover, some of the analysis on his scholarly work is based on very specific poems and not on his work as a whole. Even when this may be considered an advantage by some, it is also a limitation for a study.

On another note, there are two main topics that I was not able to discuss in this research: the concept of beauty and the main historical events, personal and universal, that shaped his literary work. The reasons for not choosing these topics respond to the fact that the text that I wanted to analyze was *The book of nightmares* and for focusing on these other topics, I would have had to work with a bigger corpus of poetry; moreover, the theoretical approach would have been different and I was also very interested in becoming more knowledgeable in the theoretical frame chosen. Nevertheless, these topics could be developed in further research on Kinnell's work.

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