

ENSAYO

Joseph Campbell's functions of myth in Galway Kinnell's *The book of nightmares*

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Abstract

This research paper analyzes the functions of myth in Galway Kinnell's *The book of nightmares* mainly utilizing the scholarly contributions of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell. In this analysis, 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. Kinnell's use of imagery and unpretentious motifs of everyday living are enthralling; the "dead shoes, in the new light" allow readers to lose their way to find out who they are and what they want. XXI-century Western society has rendered the rites of passage it had previously upheld primitive. In a post-globalized era and a civilization that tends to favor capitalism and consumerism, although individuals encounter rites of passage and myth on a daily basis, they may be perceived as primeval and senseless. *The book of nightmares* discloses rites, rites of passage, and myths for the reader to discover opportunities of learning to mature in the world

Resumen

Las funciones del mito de Joseph Campbell en *El libro de las pesadillas* de Galway Kinnell

Este trabajo de investigación analiza, desde un enfoque mítico, las funciones del mito en *El libro de las pesadillas* de Galway Kinnell. Por tanto, serán utilizadas, principalmente, las contribuciones teóricas de Carl Jung y Joseph Campbell. En este trabajo, el yo lírico ahonda en las diferentes funciones del mito en el desarrollo de los individuos; así también, reflexiona sobre la necesidad de completar ciclos en la vida para alcanzar un mayor crecimiento emocional y psicológico. Por su parte, Kinnell es un experimentado poeta en el uso de imágenes y situaciones cotidianas de la vida, y permite al lector utilizar sus "zapatos muertos, bajo una nueva luz" para llevarlos a descubrir quiénes son y qué desean en la vida. No es un secreto que la sociedad occidental, en este siglo XXI, ha llegado a considerar primitivos los ritos de transición en la vida, así como los rituales de iniciación que antes eran asumidos naturalmente. En una era postglobalizada y en una sociedad que privilegia el capitalismo y consumismo, estos ritos y rituales pueden ser percibidos como acciones sin sentido y rudimentarios; a pesar de que, diariamente, las personas participan colectiva e individualmente en ellos. *El libro de las pesadillas* revela rituales, ritos de transición y mitos, con los cuales ofrece al lector la oportunidad de descubrirlos y apoyar su proceso de vida en la sociedad.

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INTRODUCTION

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). Kinnell succeeds in making poetry a work of everyday life: objects, animals, feelings, and diverse situations that make individuals participate in the action of living.

Some critics have designated Kinnell’s poetry as an example of postmodernist² poetry³, as it embodies two conspicuous traits of this movement: the poem appears to be personal and it also resembles spontaneous speech. Mills (1970), 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 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.

The book of nightmares is a *vers libre* poem 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

2 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.”

3 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).

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 entails Supporting this thesis, Denise Levertov declares 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), as does this poem.

METHODOLOGY

This study examines the field of myth and archetypal criticism in the book-poem by Galway Kinnell, *The book of nightmares*. To achieve this purpose, positions by Carl G. Jung and Joseph Campbell, Octavio Paz, and Roland Barthes will be provided to demonstrate the relevance of each in relation to reading myth and archetype in this work. Considering the complexity and the limitations that a single definition of the word *myth* may present, a categorization of its purposes will be discussed. Hence, 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 that 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 study will search for a better understanding of each in the book-length poem, *The book of nightmares*. For the literary analysis of this poem, this study 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.

MYTH AND ITS FUNCTIONS IN KINSELL'S *THE BOOK OF NIGHTMARES*

Other than 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. In this poetic collection, *The book of nightmares*, 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" (p. 8). There is no unique addressee, but an idea that Paz portrays in many of his texts: that of an atemporal temporality.

A. Myth

Defining myth—be it denotatively or connotatively—and acquiescing with such explanation has usually proved difficult for humankind. When trying to understand the term, Henderson (1995) 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 fail to be thought-provoking to consider that the mind, still not fully understood, preserves hints from earlier eras of development overlooked at a conscious level; however, at an unconscious level, most people latently respond to them. 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 with 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, spoken language 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, archetypes represent elemental psychic patterns that all humans have in common and through and into which people organize their personal experiences.

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, attempted to apply this knowledge to the lives of contemporary individuals. Hence, for him, mythology offers a guiding rod to understanding the place of 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, which may explain 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 of life and the universe comprise those that connect to the existence of divinities and human experience. One example is what Campbell identifies as “The Great Reversal.” This myth recounts humankind's fall from the grace of the gods (depending on the culture being analyzed) and its search for a sort of reconciliation in an effort to understand why life presents difficulties, such as death, and to instill 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). Since this is the main 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 to understand the preconditions of its own existence.

Remarkably, *The book of nightmares* is 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 discovery of his self-identity 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, by the act of living, death is also experienced. Nevertheless, be-

fore 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 point out 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 who 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 (p. 6).

As the baby is born, the professionals in charge of the delivery have to hold her head out of the womb until she is born; it is at this moment when, as the baby experiences life, it 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 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 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 given society, individuals *think* they "seek a meaning for life;" however, he states that what individuals 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). Furthermore, Campbell (2004a) affirms that the sense of wonder towards the inscrutability of existence must be experienced for a person to understand the first function of myth, just as ancient world traditions 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.

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.

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 where he confronts his fears and accepts his death, earlier than her. Furthermore, 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 where "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) that lasts only for a while. Kinnell's reference to this empty or torn embrace is present throughout *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, their deeds, sorrows, joys, loves, hopes, and fears. Sooner or later everyone will have to transit "...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 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 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 a "golden earth globe" symbolizing fertility, resurrection, and a potential bearer of life and creation. More importantly, its golden color can be considered a metaphor of the sun and light coming 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).

Paradoxical as it may seem, progression at this moment of the poem is moving backwards into the darkness to reach the 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 as well—envisions his daughter as an adult in Paris, at the end of the Pont Mirabeau⁴, enjoying time with the person she loves, 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
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 into understanding this inner dichotomy that lies at the heart of 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, and that, when there is bliss (laughter), there is also pain, that life is to be lived. Thus, 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 any deity is worshipped, and individuals attend it in their search for holiness. However, in Kinnell's poem, eternity and divinity lie 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 an undanced "cadence of vanishing" that one day will come to be met, is Kinnell's advice to experience all that is fundamentally human. It is through oppositions, laughter-cry, temple-bones, sor-

4 A French monument.

row-love, that life is comprehensible, but individuals must be aware of this veiled contradictory truth.

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[s] 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, although science has transformed and built on knowledge and reason, there is still mystical awe when new questions arise from scientific erudition. To summarize, one may say that the cosmological function offers an image of the concrete world that will act as the means for metaphysical thought. As such, Campbell’s cosmological function serves to present a cosmos in which the sense of awe is fostered in the individual.

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 both 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 depicts 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, as in the image of the speaker as/he sits 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 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 that his daughter is not there makes him comprehend what it means to be with her.

As the persona advances in his quest, the scene morphs from an enigmatic and lightless beginning to a glowing one as the persona ignites a fire in the rain. Fire and rain, which are opposites, become one and unite: “I light / a small fire in the rain” (p.4). This paradoxical image offers the speaker the possibility of experiencing that through these elements, thus accomplishing the metaphysical. Suddenly, the experience becomes personal and, as in an alchemical dream, the four elements of 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 end and beginning, like the totem hen. The latter emblematic animal directs him to realize that life is an endless cycle and that death is its cohort. 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, but are rather 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 an endless, incessantly sworn cycle where 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 understood better in little children, for they live within the primitive, in terms of the co-existence of the life-death experience in terms of binary opposites. Infants display no knowledge of what has

been culturally 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, while 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 to the fullest. 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
rib<s 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 it is not feasible, as portrayed in the poem through the syntax in this verse and the use of a conditional phrase; moreover, the imagery in these 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 wish 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, as 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 variation of *carpe diem*, while the persona wonders and grieves life and its demise. In the poem, the quester is afflicted by all the thoughts and uncertainties that individuals consciously face when they are aware of the mystery of perishing. The persona, upon 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, so he concedes that washerwomen will never stop "feel[ing] the clothes" as they wash them. The imagery domestic animals, such as hens, as a source of nourishment by humankind and the fact that they will never be able to "scratch their spell across hatchet blades" to avoid their death further drives this point. 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 neither will iron "twist weapons toward the true north" nor grease "refuse 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, murmur "*O corpse to be*;" this short statement becomes his line of defeat against death.

Humankind lives through and in cycles, and living is a personal experience that, while communal, it has gained tints of worldwide experiences through social media. This fact, in light of 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). Kinnell's depiction of his love for the child clearly conveys that the speaker would resort to magic to keep the child alive, but life, as an element of a cycle, is not as basic as that; it is a uniquely 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 life reaches its purpose through death and reveal 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 the 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 aims at explaining why situations, ideas, or objects are the way they are.

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 and 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, Kinnell's *The book of nightmares* reveals a mythical experience that develops and evolves at present, 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). In the end, humanity walks the same shoes, feels similar experiences, and performs like tasks. People all wear "dead shoes in the new light," and the path down "vanished alphabets" will be there as long as individuals exist on earth. However, 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 persona 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." Indeed, finding as one loses 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 experience life 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 noteworthy element in this section of the poem is the personification of the feet as entities that talk and communicate directly with the speaker, this feature is signaled using italics, the same strategy used to highlight the old woman's declarations. In this process of inner learning, the hero encounters different people and the personification of various elements is an essential element in understanding his role in the community.

3. The sociological function

Campbell perceives the sociological function as the most adaptable due to the advancements of science. He asserts that it 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, which they accepted, since questioning them was discouraged, thus maintaining the status quo. In the twentieth and twentieth-first century, questioning and not blindly accepting what one was told formed part of the political, scientific and cultural agenda in many Western nations, even when this fact did not mirror reality. Hence, the individual and his/her decisions are emphasized over the communal, weakening the functions of myth. Furthermore, as community ties become less strong, individualism is emphasized. However, although in Kinnell's *The book of nightmares* the quest is undertaken by the hero (an individual action), the knowledge to be attained 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 life emanates from death, and will hopefully help society to approach element of the continuum as one. 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).

Contradictory as it may seem, the progression occur 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, as he reaches inside the hen's corpse, that the persona comprehends that life exists. Suddenly, death implies life and birth entails death, a fact that is experienced anew when the speaker encounters a second hen cadaver, which he realizes was 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. However, 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?

As the hero faces the cadaver of the hen and its entrails in a domestic setting, he undergoes the same experience, only 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," a 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 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 seeming contradiction of finding life in death. The quester further wonders if "the dead / wings creaked open as she soared / across the arms of the Bear?" and ponders on his understanding that, in death, life is experienced and one cannot exist without the other, 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 that culture has accepted as true. People become defenders of an ideology and compare and contrast themselves in terms of other myths reinforced by the canon, such as beauty, suffering, or joy.

Likewise, when myths are culturally analyzed, 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 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, Jews, and Muslims 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 seized economic, cultural, and political control are not to be questioned.

Thus, the persona questions and doubts the wrongs done unto 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 what the media presents; moreover, there are also “things taken for granted,” and there is an agreement with the dominant ideology⁵. Bové (in Lentricchia & McLaughlin 1990) in his article “Discourse,” states that “discourse produces knowledge about humans and their society” (p. 56); indeed, the analysis of the literary works of different eras and cultures can provide much information apart from the “official discourse” of the groups in power—political, economic, and religious. The writings and verbal manifestations of a given 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 be-

tween 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 where he questions the difference among people’s origin and skin color and how 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. 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 cannot use to her will that has been constructed by the powers that be.

Language as a sign system has presented humanity with the phenomenon of interpretation. If the sign is composed of a signifier and a signified, and if the reader’s understanding depends on their merging, this book-length poem offers different opportunities the interpreter to achieve meaning. *The book of nightmares* is a constant reminder on the motif of words and writing, the latter bringing forth the search for meaning. 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).

5 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).

There is nothing left on a will but words, as "writing" demands an interpretation. The "chromium testicles" that witness his oath represent a lingering sexuality with "no oxidation." An unpleasant dream in which there is anxiety in loving has led the persona to lose his sanity; 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 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 signs⁶, otherwise, how can the world and life on earth be understood? Moreover, one would be remiss not to mention that it is through signs that meaning is constructed—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 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)⁷. All decisions made in life and all positions taken respond to an ideological denomination. Ideology—the way society perceives itself—will embody the assumptions and frameworks that people employ to understand their surroundings, and also supply all the rules and beliefs that individuals hold so they can behave accordingly.

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. He uses sarcasm and verbal irony to display this feature in his work. This characteristic is displayed in the following stanza:

6 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 is something else 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).

7 "The science of ideology is in itself and ideology, since it works as so and has to affirm itself as so" (my translation).

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).

The word "tongue" criticizes the speech of politicians, embodied in the image of "the Secretary of the Dead;" it is not the "Secretary of Defense" or "War," but 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 persona affirms that all the deaths caused by war were "difficult to pre-visualize -- like a cow, / say, getting hit by lightning" (p. 43). This last statement 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 must be more classless and open to diversity, wars should not exist, and humankind should care for one another and be one with the natural world that everyone comes from. At war, people's lives could have been spared; however, there are other priorities in governments and nations that favor the killing and destruction of fellow human beings. The hero mocks political discourse by resorting 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 only 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 vida⁸” (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 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, a fact that makes him question his freedom, for it seems to be language what can make him free by giving him “wings.” However, although he can read history and see the mistakes he made, it is impossible to go back in time, since what humankind’s path is one 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 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.

Human suffering is an undeniable fact, much like the assumption that their lives will not always be perfect representations of peace and happiness; we all know that sooner or later death will reach our lives. However, many ignore that we are related to “everything that dies.” No matter what is done to look younger and attractive, death cannot “escape through 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, although the definition of beauty has changed somewhat through the world, what has not changed is social and professional exclusion when someone does not fit the cultural ideal of “beauty. Television, as a massive means of communication, has brought many benefits to society, but it has also brought unfavorable patterns that people follow to try to belong.

Hence, “[W]e shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed” (p. 42). It does not matter if individuals finally succeed trying to change the body’s corporal fluids into more accepted smells, or if they can buy new white and polish teeth, or whether they find it modern and practical to temporarily annihilate their hairy inheritance. As part of a demanding group, humankind will never “sleep” nor achieve peace, but everyone will in fact be changed. No sign makes sense on its own but in relation to the world in which it exists, for physical characteristics are not the only ones 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 guiding 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 need-

8 A civilization that is in denial of death, ends up in denial of life (my translation).

ed. Nevertheless, this task is hard to achieve. Learning to live life at its fullest, no matter the conditions, has become one of the hardest tasks for humanity; one reason to attempt to understand this phenomenon may be that, to achieve learning, there may be pain, either psychological, physical, or emotional, for grief and sorrow to bring growth. Moreover, learning is not a matter of youth or years, but 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 their own journey to learn their 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 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, be it physical, psychological, or emotional, there is a path to be walked; 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 common to each and every 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; as such, it 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 along this road that the persona pauses to think, making him speculate about others and how they may have felt 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 dual reality is acknowledged by the quester that s/he cannot "undance[d] 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 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 that history shares those errors with "the dust behind," an intertext to the creation of man in the Bible; he then ponders if that is "the last trace in us of wings?" referring to the possibility of a divine origin. Without this movement, he could not have unveiled his dichotomy of being and not being, of living and dying to live. Indeed, Kinnell's poetic work orbits around humanity and its simple everyday situations in life; he focuses on people's inability to acknowledge death as part of the life cycle. This mystical journey in time exposes the persona to accepting 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,” towards life; nonetheless, it also progresses 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 functions of *The book of nightmares* —that is to understand to live life. Humanity is bound to death and, someday, “a voice... from everything that dies” will address everyone. This is 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, 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 other individuals’ life experiences.

After wearing the shoes, the persona goes back to the “Xvarna Hotel” (a Zoroastrian word meaning hidden

light) where he becomes 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). The squeaking sound makes the persona realize he is growing older, confounded by the realization that past times cannot be re-lived and that time moves forward. Individuals age as “low-passing wing- / beats, or great, labored breath-takings” (p. 20). As people age, their wings cannot take them as high as when they were younger, bringing them 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 antithesis, 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”⁹ (p. 192). This thought is echoed in 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

9 “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).

got a laugh/ out of those clenched, corned feet" (p. 20). The metaphor of the drunk tramp in section III of the book-length poem allows the persona to endure the overwhelming intoxication of human experience, so much as to "shudder[s] down to his nightmare" (p. 21). This bad dream intensifies 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 feels disoriented and drifts on a path on which he ignores how to ask for nourishment, signaled by the use of the word "bread," a symbolic element in Christian Western thought for terrestrial and eternal life. 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 in these lines mirrors 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 reflects upon the metaphor of the lamp, humankind's spiritual leaders, who used to guide the way to achieve salvation. However, in 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" expected in ancient Greek festivals. 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 donde pasado y futuro al fin se reconcilian¹⁰" (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 where the past will coexist in harmony with the present and the memories acquired will help contemplate the decisions made. These experiences are depicted as 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," symbolizing life and longevity as well as immortality and fertility. Somehow, the premise in this poem is learning both from what has been lived by others and from mistakes made, as well as learning to live. It is in "Lastness" where the persona completes his journey of learning in a cycle of renewal as "The skinny waterfalls, foot-paths/ 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

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,

10 "Time 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).

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 through anybody’s “little ribs.” Kinnell’s poetry is inspired by the depths of humanity so profoundly that he looks for spiritual answers in the objective world and accomplishes his aspiration. For some scholars, the poet’s gift to the world is the acknowledgment that life must be guarded no matter what, appreciating every single moment lived—be it happy or sad—, helping humanity, and understanding that death affirms life. In the end, all lives will go full circle and Kinnell reminds his readers that life needs to be lived fully without forgetting the individuals’ capacity for awe.

CONCLUSION(S)

One of the major poets in North American literary movements of the 20th century, Galway Kinnell’s book *The book of nightmares* is considered a poetic masterpiece. Kinnell’s poetry began as relatively formal and structurally intricate, but he later moved to a simpler diction and an overall freer structure. Diction and structure in his poems mirror life as an uncomplicated moment of transcendence into the universe.

His innocent yet common images, sounds, colors, and happenings that occur to many—but are ignored by most—are re-written for anybody who wants 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, and his own 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.

The analysis of the poet’s work, in *The book of nightmares*, in which the concept of myth and its different functions were examined revealed that 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. Although human suffering is a given and life is not the constant perfect representation of peace and happiness; 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 must 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 cobblestones the journey of the hero.

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