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"JOURNEY THROUGH GORMENGHAST": A STUDY OF MERVYN PEAKE'S TRILOGY

by

Raymond William Thomas Miller

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English Language and Literature

Memorial University of Newfoundland

September 1974

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For my parents:

"I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me . . . I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world from that in which the reader is likely to see me."

Sterne: Tristram Shandy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No one can produce a thesis without the help of generous people, and it would be most ungrateful not to recognize and acknowledge them.

My thanks go to Maeve Gilmore, Peake's widow, for time spent with me in London and for her many letters, providing me with valuable information and encouragement. Moreover, Dr. Gordon Smith, a close friend of Mervyn Peake, who spent hours with me in Taunton, helping me to see the man behind the Gormenghast trilogy, deserves a note of thanks.

I should also like to thank Memorial University of Newfoundland for the fellowship which made this study possible.

To Dr. Gordon Jones, a special thanks for his patience and understanding, without whose constant help and encouragement this thesis might never have emerged from "the main massing of the original stone."

TEXTS

Since the original Eyre and Spottiswoode editions of Titus Groan (1946), Gormenghast (1950), and Titus Alone (1959), are not readily available in North America, the Penguin editions of Titus Groan (1968), Gormenghast (1969), and Titus Alone (1970) have been used for quotation and reference in this study.

Passages quoted in the course of this thesis have been carefully collated with passages in the volumes as originally published, and with the exception of Titus Alone (the textual problems of which will be dealt with in the Introductory Chapter of this study), there are no substantive variations.

It may be of interest to readers to know that the Gormenghast trilogy has also been published in the United States by Ballantine, and is, at present, being translated into both German and French.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The thirty-year period extending from 1930 to 1960 witnessed the publication of a number of unique prose works such as J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, C.S. Lewis's trilogy, Out of the Silent Planet, Perelandra, and That Hideous Strength, and Mervyn Peake's Titus Groan or Gormenghast trilogy. In a period when many writers were striving for realism in whatever sense they interpreted the word, the aforementioned writers tended to eschew realism and actuality, creating instead their own idiosyncratic world systems. Such world systems have been called "fantastic"[1] and the prose works which present such systems have been relegated to a class of literature invariably referred to as fantasy or science-fiction.[2]

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[1] Lin Carter, Imaginary Worlds (New York, 1973); Everett Bleiler, The Checklist of Fantastic Literature (Chicago, 1948); Kingsley Amis, New Maps of Hell (New York, 1960); C.S. Lewis, Of Other Worlds (London, 1966); J.R.R. Tolkien, Tree and Leaf (London, 1972). These critical works contain references to such world systems.

[2] For a detailed examination of these two terms the reader is directed to Chapter II of this thesis.

Although occasional reference will be made to the imaginary worlds created by Tolkien, Lewis, and others, it is Peake's microcosm which will be examined in this study, since his trilogy has not attracted the extensive critical analysis that has been lavished on the writing of his contemporaries.

There are, at present, only two books on Mervyn Peake, one being his wife's memoirs, entitled A World Away -- an understandably sentimental account of life with her husband: "The personal story underlying the creation of Peake's works in prose, verse and pictorial line is both heartbreaking and idyllic."[3] The other is John Batchelor's recently published work, Mervyn Peake: A Biographical and Critical Exploration.[4] While Batchelor's work attempts some

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[3]Anthony Burgess, "The Price of Gormenghast", Spectator, CCXXIV (June, 1970), 819.

[4]This work was published by Duckwork Publishing Company, 25 July 1974. It has, despite several attempts, been impossible for this writer to obtain Batchelor's work prior to the submission of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge Batchelor's work on Mervyn Peake is not duplicated in this study. Also, it should be noted that John Batchelor, a graduate student at Birmingham University, Birmingham, England, is not the official biographer of Mervyn Peake, and hence both Peake's personal correspondence and his manuscripts were not readily accessible to him. Peake's widow, Maeve Gilmore, has decided to leave her husband's personal papers and manuscripts to her daughter, Clare, to distribute at her discretion. It may be of interest to readers to know that the British Museum, London, refused to accept Peake's manuscripts on the basis that they were not sufficiently organized.

analysis of all facets of Peake's art (his novels, his poetry, his drawings, his drama, and his children's stories), this thesis concentrates on Peake's Gormenghast trilogy. Initial critical reaction to Batchelor's work on Mervyn Peake is not favourable. John Carey criticizes the book on the grounds of inadequate research and "crazy theorizing"[5] about metaphorical birth in the Gormenghast trilogy (Swelter is Steerpike's metaphorical mother).[6] Carey concludes that the major weakness in Batchelor's study, besides insufficient research into Peake's life and his peculiar views about the Gormenghast trilogy, is the absence of an in depth critical exploration about any of the art forms that Mervyn Peake worked with: "In that direction this study makes little headway."[7]

Articles on the Gormenghast trilogy are invariably of a prefatory nature, introducing the reader to the Peake canon with particular attention being devoted to summarising

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[5] John Carey, "Deadly Slapstick", New Statesman, LXXXVIII (July, 1974), 122.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

the trilogy, especially Titus Groan and Gormenghast.[8] The writers of these articles are generally diffident about Peake's role in twentieth-century literature, a diffidence which is understandable in view of the inherent difficulty of the trilogy and of the problems of accurately determining the literary significance of "the landscape of Gormenghast".[9] This diffidence manifests itself in continuous groping by the critics for a theoretical framework within which Peake's trilogy may be adequately discussed. There seems to be general critical consensus that the trilogy has something to do with fantasy, but from this common ground commentators depart in diverse directions. Some attempt to reconcile fantasy with realism: "these three novels are in fact commenting -- neither directly nor by strict allegory but by significant juxtaposition and mingling of the grotesque and the human -- upon society, upon the relation of the

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[8]There are basically three reasons for this: the third volume, Titus Alone, was published after many of the articles were written; it is apparently easier for the critics to discuss the two earlier novels as an artistic entity in essays in which brevity is important; the third volume is frequently dismissed as a product of Mervyn Peake's illness.

[9]Stefan Schimanski & Henry Treece, "Introduction: The Personalist View of Romance", in A New Romantic Anthology, eds., S. Schimanski & H. Treece (London, 1949), p. 20.

individual to traditional forms.[10] Some dismiss it as a whimsical artefact: "'a consistent and portentous world of his own' -- a tribute which might be equally well paid to every lunatic who fancies he is Napoleon Buonaparte."[11] Some praise the creation of the imaginary world of Gormenghast as an end in itself: "I love his work in the same way as a vampire loves his prey -- I feed off it, devour the stuff of it, delight in it."[12]

This sampling indicates the need for a fuller understanding of what is meant by fantasy as a literary form, of the relationship between the imaginary world of fantasy and the world as normally perceived, and of how the Gormenghast trilogy relates to this theoretical framework. This study attempts to address these issues. In this respect, Chapter II examines the salient characteristics of fantasy literature as perceived and expressed by certain fantasists contemporary with Peake, including Kingsley Amis, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien. This chapter attempts to define

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[10] Edwin Morgan, "The Walls of Gormenghast", Chicago Review (Autumn/Winter, 1960), p. 78.

[11] C. Day Lewis, "New Novels", Listener, XXXV (April, 1946), 552.

[12] Michael Moorcock, "Mervyn Peake: An Appreciation", Science Fantasy Review, XX (June, 1963), 53.

and analyse the principles by which a fantasy novel is constructed, relating Peake's Gormenghast trilogy to these principles where applicable. The imaginary worlds that Peake created, however, do not demonstrate all the characteristics of fantasy literature as described and applied by these writers. The fictive worlds that Peake has constructed do not, for instance, involve supernatural forces, as both Tolkien's and Lewis's imaginary worlds do. Therefore, in the third chapter, the study turns away from Peake's contemporaries, focusing instead on the unique substance of Peake's fictive worlds.

The third chapter attempts to come to some understanding of the major themes as expressed by Peake through his imaginary worlds. The fourth chapter examines the stylistic and narrative techniques with which Peake constructed his Gormenghast trilogy, in order to render the fictive worlds with verisimilitude. Moreover, chapter IV attempts to show the relationship between Gormenghast and the totalitarian technocracy and the world as normally perceived. Chapter V, in retrospect, points to the complexity of the Gormenghast trilogy and of its relationship to the 'real' world. To understand fully this complexity one must be familiar not only with the genre within which Peake is writing, but also with the nature of Peake's microcosm, and, to some

extent, with the philosophy of the man who created that microcosm. Hence, the present chapter is devoted to the life and work of the man in the "black cape with a scarlet lining, a man of invincible charm and histrionic gifts,"[13] to Mervyn Peake.

Imagine strolling about Picadilly Circus, London, in 1950, where amongst other oddities one sees a man dressed in a dark green suit with a black cape draped over his shoulders, sketching a portrait on the back of a package of cigarettes. To heighten this picture, consider that from every pocket protrude pieces of paper containing completed sketches or poems, while from below his trousers noticeably hang the pyjamas he has forgotten to take off.[14] Such would have been one's introduction to Mervyn Laurence Peake at that stage in his career.

Thirty-five years earlier, however, Peake was far from London. Born in Kuling, China, in 1911, he was the son of a missionary doctor. His father, Ernest Cromwell Peake, born in Madagascar, was a mixture of Swiss and English,

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[13] Alex Hamilton, "Mervyn Alone", Arts Guardian (January 5, 1972), p. 8.

[14] Reconstructed from information obtained during an interview with Dr. Gordon Smith, Taunton, England, 13 June 1972. The notes from this interview are in my possession. Gordon Smith and Mervyn Peake were very close friends. They first met at Eltham College, Blackheath, England.

while his mother, Elizabeth Powell, was Welsh. During the years spent in China, Mervyn and his elder brother lived with their parents in the Russian compound. It was here, nurtured on Welsh myths and Chinese legends, that Mervyn Peake began his education. "His first memories were of going to school on a donkey with a family coolie, stroking a camel whose jaws were one of the first frightening sounds he heard, as they nearly closed on his innocent right arm, just before it was pulled away to safety."[15]

It was in China, at ten years of age, that Peake published his first article in a periodical of the London Missionary Society. The subject was the different modes of travel with drawings to illustrate the text, a format which Peake was to preserve throughout his career.

These first eleven years in China were for this young boy a strange "mixture of English nonconformity, and almost bourgeois convention. Congregational hymns, tea-parties, a straight-laced upbringing . . . surrounded by dragons and carvings of ancient imagination and disastrous

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[15]Maeve Gilmore, "Introduction to Mervyn Peake Exhibition at the National Book League 1972", in Word and Image III, Mervyn Peake 1911-1968, prepared by members of the National Book League under the guidance of Clifford Simmons (London, 1972), p. 5. Maeve Gilmore is Mervyn Peake's widow. She is referred to as Maeve Gilmore-Peake in footnoting material recorded during my interview with her.

beauty."[16] The inadequacies of higher educational systems in China at this time, however, finally led Ernest Peake and his wife to return to England with their sons. It is not unlikely that the political and economic instability facing China was also a major influence in bringing about this decision to return to the relatively secure confines of England.

The England in which Mervyn, his elder brother, and their parents arrived in 1922 was, however, one of change. The country was suffering from the after effects of World War I: the coalition government of Lloyd George was ready to fall, women were slowly emancipating themselves, and technology was advancing rapidly. In short, the English life style "was felt, quite correctly, to be advancing towards great new benefits of material wealth, mobility, transport, communication, and entertainment."[17]

Shortly after their arrival in England, Mervyn and his brother were sent off to Eltham College, a school at Blackheath for the sons of missionaries. Here, Mervyn proved to be a rather mediocre student except in English literature and Art, where his imagination served him to good

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[16] Maeve Gilmore, A World Away (London, 1970), p. 23.

[17] David Thomson, England in the Twentieth Century (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 90.

advantage. On leaving Eltham College, "without any exceptional academic honours,"[18] Peake went to Croydon School of Art, and from there to the Royal Academy School, where he studied for three years. It was 1933 when he left this school to live on the island of Sark, "a world of some three hundred of God's creatures. A world that measured three miles by one-and-a-half."[19]

Peake went to Sark on the invitation of his former English teacher at Eltham College, Eric Drake, who had established an art gallery where artists, including Arthur Bridges, Brenda Streatfield, Frank Coombes,[20] were able to paint without subscribing "'to any set theory or school of thought'."[21] On Sark, as a member of this "20's Group,"[22] Mervyn painted and wrote for several years, living all the while in "a small tin shack with a pet cormorant."[23] It was,

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[18]Gilmore, "Introduction to Mervyn Peake Exhibition at the National Book League 1972", p. 6.

[19]Mervyn Peake, Mr. Pye (London, 1969), p. 13.

[20]Hamilton, "Mervyn Alone", p. 8.

[21]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 66.

[22]William Hodgon and Robin Samuels, Word and Image III, Mervyn Peake 1911-1968, prepared under the guidance of Clifford Simmons (London, 1972), p. 35. The group was so called because most of the artists were in their twenties.

[23]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 67. A self portrait of Mervyn Peake dating from about this period is to be found in Appendix I of this study. It has been reproduced from Word and Image III.

after he left, an island for which he continuously longed, and on which he and his family were eventually to reside for several years. Not only was Peake to return to Sark, he was to use the island as the setting for a later novel, Mr. Pye.[24]

However, despite his fondness for the life style on Sark, Peake was forced to leave the island in 1935 in order to return to London to teach at the now defunct Westminster School of Art. His financial obligations had to be met.[25] It was at the Westminster School of Art in 1936 that he met Maeve Gilmore, "a convent-reared girl, with a built-in nervousness,"[26] who served as the subject of many of Peake's drawings and poems and many of whose utterances were later given to the Lady Fuchsia in the Gormenghast trilogy.[27]

Until this time, Peake, having given several art exhibitions, was recognized exclusively for his drawings and

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[24]Not only was Sark used at the setting for Mr. Pye, the island also has certain similarities with the fictive world of Gormenghast depicted in Titus Groan and Gormenghast. The reader is directed to a recent article: "Sark:Death of a Dame", Time, CIV (July, 1974), 39. This article is partially reproduced in Appendix II of this study.

[25]Gilmore, "Introduction to Mervyn Peake Exhibition at the National Book League", p. 6.

[26]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 13.

[27]Information recorded during an interview with Maeve Gilmore-Peake, London, England, 5 June 1972. The notes from this interview are in my possession.

sketches. It was not until 1939 that he published his first book, an illustrated book for children entitled Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor. The story describes how Captain Slaughterboard finds happiness on a pink island with a Yellow Creature. But it is not the story itself which is memorable, rather it is the grotesque intricacy of the accompanying illustrations.[28] A year later "the most beautifully produced of the books that Mervyn illustrated"[29] for children, Ride A Cock-Horse, was published. On perusing this particular book, Walter de la Mare wrote somewhat jokingly to Peake: "How many nurseries you have appalled is another matter. How many scandalized parents may have written to you, possibly enclosing doctor's and neurologist's bills, you will probably not disclose."[30]

It was also at this time, 1939, that Peake designed the sets and costumes for a production of Capek's The Insect Play, performed at the Little Theatre, London.[31]

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[28]The reader is directed to Appendix III.

[29]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 31.

[30]Cited by Gilmore, A World Away, p. 32.

[31]Gilmore, "Introduction to Mervyn Peake Exhibition at the National Book League 1972", p. 7.

Not only was Peake continuously creating, he was also a voracious reader. In the novels of Charles Dickens, he found himself enthralled by that writer's handling of characterisation. Later, he was to draw illustrations for many of the characters in Bleak House,[32] the Victorian ancestor of Titus Groan.[33] Peake also found a special appeal in the poetry of William Blake, in which he would imaginatively immerse himself, attempting to understand "whatever Gods were his."[34] To Lear, Belloc, Carroll, he also turned for the pleasure to be found in nonsense verse, for in their rhymes he found more sense than in "an income-tax form, or any of the other innumerable documents with which life becomes increasingly laden."[35] Peake's own volumes of nonsense verse reveal his fascination with this

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[32]These illustrations, never made available to the public, are in the possession of Maeve Gilmore-Peake. Unless otherwise stated, the following information as to Peake's reading habits was recorded during the interview with Maeve Gilmore-Peake, 5 June 1972.

[33]Recorded during an interview with Dr. G. Smith, 13 June 1972.

[34]Mervyn Peake, "Blake", in A Reverie of Bone (London, 1967), p. 24. In quoting from Peake's poetry, quotations will be taken from the earliest published volume in which the poem appears.

[35]Maeve Gilmore, "Introduction", in A Book of Nonsense, by Mervyn Peake (London, 1972), p. 9.

particular art form.[36] Often, and at some length, he would bring the nonsensical element into everyday conversation. Imagine giving Peake street directions to a particular place in London, and being greeted with the reply, "Oh, if I had only known, I would have brought my camel."[37] That most people would pass on somewhat puzzled, if not annoyed, is not unlikely; however, if a positive response was elicited, an evening might be spent discussing that "the trouble with geraniums/is that they're much too red."[38]

Peake had a view of life which was ever ready to find and to accept the ridiculous element. Peake sought out and embraced the ridiculous, but not the merely horrific. His tastes ran to Sterne's Tristram Shandy and the Grossmiths' The Diary of a Nobody rather than to such novels of Gothic horror as Maturin's Melmoth, the Wanderer or Walpole's The Castle of Otranto. In this respect, when the American publishers of Titus Groan subtitled his novel "Gothic," he was singularly displeased, for he felt the tone of the book had been misunderstood.[39] Those publishers and

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[36] Mervyn Peake, Rhymes Without Reason (London, 1946); Mervyn Peake, A Book of Nonsense (London, 1972).

[37] Recorded during an interview with Dr. Gordon Smith, 13 June 1972.

[38] Mervyn Peake, "The Trouble with Geraniums", in A Book of Nonsense (London, 1972), p. 41.

[39] Recorded during an interview with Maeve Gilmore-Peake, 5 June 1972.

reviewers who levelled this term at Peake's first two novels ignored an essential quality in his work, his use of the grotesque to produce a partially comic effect. So busy were they examining the walls of Gormenghast, that they passed over the denizens to be found in the passageways. To criticize Peake's first two novels as Gothic horror stories is to lavish one's attention solely on the "ponderous architectural quality"[40] of Gormenghast. That Peake erected an imaginary castle does not necessarily imply that he furnished it with the humourless Gothic paraphernalia of graveyards, ghosts, strange noises, secret panels, and supernatural visitors.[41]

In 1941 Peake's first volume of poetry, Shapes and Sounds, appeared. The poems in this volume, as in later ones, can be appreciated simply as a record of Peake's life and the external events surrounding it -- a diary in verse form. This particular volume contains poems about the London of the late 1930's and early 1940's. It is an expectant London "of sudden fear and firelight," towering "erect, the great stones at her throat."[42] Toward those who walk her streets,

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[40] Mervyn Peake, Titus Groan, Introduction by Anthony Burgess (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 15.

[41] Robert Stanton, An Introduction to Fiction (New York, 1964), p. 59.

[42] Mervyn Peake, "LONDON, 1941", in Shapes and Sounds (London, 1941), p. 1.

"Grouped nightly at the cold, accepted wall,"[43] Peake feels a special attraction, seeing in their way of life a world within London which he "cannot enter."[44] It is, however, Peake's sensitivity towards life and his appreciation of its fleeting riches that links these poems together: "I am too rich already for my eyes."[45] In addition, certain of the poems record Peake's revulsion from the Second World War. Despite a letter from Augustus John recommending him as a war artist, he had been called up to fight, "Gunner Peake 5917577,"[46] in the spring of 1940, a year prior to the publication of Shapes and Sounds. Although Peake hated the concept of war,[47] he felt a certain obligation to fight for the freedom he believed each man and woman was entitled to.

Peake, however, was not particularly adept as a gunner. During the first part of the war a cartoon appeared

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[43] Peake, "The Cocky Walkers", in Shapes and Sounds, p. 2.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Peake, "Coloured Money", in Shapes and Sounds, p. 22.

[46] Gilmore, A World Away, p. 40.

[47] Recorded during an interview with Dr. G. Smith, 13 June 1972.

an Lilliput, showing an officer marching ahead of his men with a slightly puzzled-looking soldier on his back. The caption read, "You realize Mervyn, that I can't do this all the time!"[48] It was not long before the army realized that Peake was of little practical value to it. From the night he apparently dropped a cigarette on the floor of his barricks, burning the building to the ground,[49] until the day when, during a training session, his rifle fell from his hands, the army tried to mould Peake into the type of gunner it needed: "It's just I'd love to know, sir,/Which one of them is wrong."[50] Peake's refusal to pick his rifle up led those in authority to diagnose that he had suffered a nervous breakdown; he was, in turn, hospitalized. "Out of his breakdown he learned to make a bamboo recorder, and to play it."[51]

Nevertheless, in spite of his nervous collapse, it was during his career as a gunner that Peake first conceived of the imaginative world of Gormenghast. It was, at first, simply a response to the ritual imposed on him by the

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[48]Smith, 13 June 1972.

[49]Smith, 13 June 1972.

[50]Mervyn Peake, "I waxes, and I wanes, Sir", in Rhymes Without Reason (London, 1944), p. 32.

[51]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 47.

army;[52] nothing as elaborate or as "tidy as a trilogy had been envisaged."[53]

Peake's first novel was written "intermittently, at short rapid intervals," the novelist "never knowing a line ahead -- far less a chapter."[54] Peake's first novel, like his later ones, was written in brown publishers' dummies, the mere presence of which "seemed to tender, generate and promulgate ideas as generously as a Roman Catholic in the face of a family planning clinic."[55] As one idea led to another, however, Peake scrapped some of the original chapters of the novel in the belief that they were too comic, "for the 'feel' of the book had become more serious . . . something more important seemed to be materializing."[56] The expansion and elaboration of the fictive world of Gormenghast was begun, characteristically accompanied by marginal sketches

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[52]Recorded during an interview with Dr. G. Smith, 13 June 1972.

[53]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 105.

[54]Mervyn Peake, "How a Romantic Novel was Evolved", in S. Schimanski & H. Treece, eds., A New Romantic Anthology (London, 1949), p. 80.

[55]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 40.

[56]Peake, "How a Romantic Novel was Evolved", p. 80.

of the characters, so that he could "imagine what sort of things they would say"[57] as he developed the manuscript that was to be later entitled Titus Groan.

Finally, having been given sufficient time by the army to recuperate from his breakdown, Peake was sent to Salisbury Plain for a course on theodolites. After the first lecture, he told the Commanding Officer that when "he saw a 6 or a 9, or a 0, he always thought of female shapes, a 7 or a 1 as masculine."[58] He was soon allowed to retire to the back of the lecture room to continue with his novel. During one of his leaves from this "theodolite nightmare,"[59] Peake joined his wife and his two young sons, Sebastian and Fabian, in London where, on a visit to the Cafe Royal, he talked about the fictive world of Gormenghast with Graham Greene, who was to be instrumental in getting Eyre and Spottiswoode to publish Titus Groan.[60] Returning to his "course" on theodolites, Peake was again diagnosed as being on the verge of a breakdown, and hence was invalided

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Gilmore, A World Away, p. 47.

[59] Ibid., p. 48.

[60] Recorded during an interview with Dr. G. Smith, 13 June 1972.

out of the army. Until the war ended, he was given a position with the Ministry of Information, during which time he did a series of drawings of Adolf Hitler.[61]

Following the war, Peake was commissioned as an artist to go to Germany so that he could graphically record the human suffering caused by the Hitler regime. His view of the nonsensical quality in life must have been confirmed by this, since, despite recommendations, he had earlier been passed over as a war artist. Nevertheless, the ruined structures and the mutilated bodies with which Peake was confronted in Germany repelled and horrified him as he saw what destruction man was capable of: "In twisting flames their twisting bodies blackened."[62] While in Germany, Peake went to Belsen, a visit recorded both pictorially[63] and poetically:

> (Her limbs like pipes, her head a china skull)
> Then where is mercy?
> And what
> Is this my traffic? for my schooled eyes see

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[61]Certain of these drawings remain in the possession of Maeve Gilmore-Peake. There is, at present, some possibility that these drawings will be published in book form in the near future. One of Peake's drawings of Adolf Hitler is to be found in Appendix IV of this study.

[62]Cited by Gilmore, A World Away, p. 56.

[63]The whereabouts of many of these illustrations are no longer known. Several, however, belong to the British War Office, while others are in the possession of Maeve Gilmore-Peake.

The ghost of a great painting, line and hue,
In this doomed girl of tallow.[64]

The many letters he wrote to his wife while in Germany attempt to capture the war-time monstrosities that he was required to record. In one letter, after describing to Maeve the beauty of the ancient German castles, he tells her of the "boy whose face looked about sixteen, but whose hair was grey, who was hobbling down the steps of a town-hall with a crutch and only one leg."[65]

After his return to England, Titus Groan having recently been published (1946), Peake moved his family to Sark. Royalties from his first novel, however, were not sufficient to support his wife and two sons, especially with another child soon to be born. It was therefore necessary for Peake to continue to illustrate books, a task he had begun during the early years of the war when he had illustrated Carroll's The Hunting of the Snark and Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Several of his sets of illustrations for books were executed on Sark, including Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland,

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[64] Mervyn Peake, "The Consumptive. Belsen 1945", in The Glassblowers (London, 1950), p. 15.

[65] Cited by Gilmore, A World Away, p. 57.

Collis's Quest for Sita, and Stevenson's Treasure Island,[66] and it was during this period that he firmly established his reputation as one of England's foremost book illustrators.[67]

With the publication of Titus Groan, it had become obvious to Peake that the story of life in Gormenghast and in particular of his titular hero, Titus, could be extended to another volume. While he was on Sark, the plans for a second novel in which he would further expand upon the nature of life in the imaginary world of Gormenghast and the fortunes of the seventy-seventh Earl began to gestate. "Gormenghast was growing and each day . . . the people in it were progressing, sadly, tragically, humorously."[68] At the same time, "despite the praise of critics,"[69] the sales of his first novel, Titus Groan, were rather limited: "Titus Groan never reached the widest possible public; it was destined to

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[66] See Appendix V. Here is recorded a list of all published books illustrated by Mervyn Peake. See also, Gilmore, A World Away, pp. 150-151.

[67] Cora Gordon, "London Commentary", The Studio (Autumn, 1944), pp. 90-91; Bernard Denvir, "Mervyn Peake", The Studio (Winter, 1946), pp. 88-90; "Illustrating Alice", The Listener (Dec., 1954), p. 1106; Ervine Metzl, "Ghosts and Things by Mervyn Peake", American Artist (Feb., 1955), pp. 24-29. These articles attest to Peake's stature as an illustrator of books.

[68] Gilmore, A World Away, p. 74.

[69] Anthony Burgess, "Introduction", in Titus Groan, p. 9.

be something of a coterie obsession."[70]

While on Sark Peake also wrote The Rhyme of The Flying Bomb, a long poem about a sailor and a baby trapped in London during the Second World War.[71] The poem vividly captures the devastation wrought by the bombs -- technological inventions which destroy both the sailor and the child:

> And the babe slid out of the sailor's coat
> And hovered above his head,
> And the blood of the babe was mixed with the oozing
> Flow of the sailor's blood.[72]

It was not with this episode, however, that Peake concluded the lyric, for he allows this "babe that was born in the reign of George" to return to "the womb again,"[73] granting him a second opportunity for life.

By 1948, Peake had written and published Letters from a Lost Uncle, an illustrated book generally classified as a piece for children, but more aptly read in terms of Peake's fondness for the nonsensical. The work consists of a series of typewritten letters to a nephew from his lost uncle:

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[70] Ibid., pp. 9-10. Statistics from Penguin Books for 1972 indicate the sales from the Gormenghast trilogy were 123,500 copies. As these statistics indicate, the trilogy has, in recent years, attracted a rather sizeable audience.

[71] Mervyn Peake, The Rhyme of the Flying Bomb (London, 1962). This poem, being mislaid for a number of years, was not published until several years after it had been written.

[72] Ibid., p. 41.

[73] Ibid., p. 43.

Dear Nephew

> I have decided to write you a letter. It is the first I have tried my hand at for many years. It will certainly be the last. I am sick of it already as a matter of fact.[74]

The letters continue in this vein, relating the adventures encountered on the uncle's quest for the White Lion, and his finding of Jackson, the turtle dog: "You will understand, unless you are very stupid, how exciting it is after so many years spent in searching for the White Lion, to feel so close to him."[75] Together with these fragmented letters, come samples of soup and coffee stains spilt by Jackson as he waited on his master.

The years on Sark proved to be an active and productive period for Peake, for he also had a book of his drawings published,[76] in the preface to which he expressed certain of his views on art. To him the major problem confronting the artist was the search for "his language,"[77]

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[74] Mervyn Peake, Letters from a Lost Uncle (London, 1948), n.p.

[75] Ibid., n.p.

[76] Mervyn Peake, Drawings of Mervyn Peake (London, 1949).

[77] Ibid., p. 10.

the manner in which he could best express "the highest flights of his mind and his imagination."[78] It was not an easy task, for Peake believed that many artists never discovered their particular "language," merely "a mannerism -- a formula for producing effects, the fruit of suicide."[79] While such artists could "make marks on paper," they were simply recording and not creating. Artistic creation was for Mervyn Peake the expression of one's vision using the known "language" in such a manner that the result was a singularly unique creation: "As the earth was thrown from the sun, so from the earth the artist must fling out into space, complete from pole to pole, his own world which, whatsoever form it takes, is the colour of the globe it flew from, as the world itself is coloured by the sun."[80] It was a precept for artistic creation which Peake continually attempted to apply to whatever medium he was working with.

Finally, in 1949, finding it virtually impossible to live on Sark without a private income, Peake and his family returned to London. "We had to go back," writes Maeve, "where there was work to be found, for painters and a

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[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., p. 11.

writer."[81] On his return to London with another collection of poems, The Glassblowers, about to be published, Peake obtained a teaching position at the Central School of Art in Holborn.

The title for Peake's new volume of poetry, published in 1950, was taken from a poem he had written during his brief career in the Civil Service when he had been commissioned to visit a factory in Birmingham in order to record graphically the process involved in blowing glass.[82] That Peake exceeded the terms of his assignment is evidenced by the fact that he returned from Birmingham not only with a painting, but with a poetic expression of the process:

> There is a molten language that is glass
> Unborn, a poetry of barbarous birth;
> It sings in sand and roars in furnace-fire;
> The blowers breathe it voiceless as they pass
> Through brimstone halls and girdered isles of ire.[83]

Other poems in the volume record the horrors, personal and social, of the Second World War, while still others express

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[81] Gilmore, A World Away, p. 83.

[82] Several of the drawings made here are to be found in the Birmingham Art Gallery, Birmingham, England, and in The Imperial War Museum, London, England.

[83] Mervyn Peake, "The Glassblowers", in The Glassblowers (London, 1950), p. 19.

love for his wife: "You are my front, my limb --/Yet more than these: You are the maeve of me."[84]

Throughout this small volume of verse there is expressed, as in Shapes and Sounds, the sense of joy which Peake found in life: "To live at all is miracle enough./ The doom of nations in another thing./ Here in my hammering blood-pulse is my proof."[85] Unlike his first volume of verse, however, The Glassblowers contains a certain grotesque element, a sense that lurking beneath one's personal joy a sinister force awaits: "An ugly crow sits hunched on Jackson's heart."[86] Peake had partially experienced this "ugly crow" during his minor breakdown while in the army. Within four years he would once again experience it in the form of Parkinson's Disease: "A light has fled out of my bones and from life its rhyme."[87]

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[84]Peake, "For Maeve", in The Glassblowers, p. 30.

[85]Peake, "To Live at all is Miracle Enough", in The Glassblowers, p. 3.

[86]Peake, "An Ugly Crow Sits Hunched on Jackson's Heart", in The Glassblowers, p. 28.

[87]Peake, "Absent From You Where is There Corn and Wine?", in The Glassblowers, p. 37.

Soon after the publication of The Glassblowers, Peake's second novel, Gormenghast, was published;[88] and with the publication of this novel, still other "Titus" books began to be conceived. Two years elapsed, however, before Peake actually began to write the third book in the planned Gormenghast series.

It was at this period in his career that Peake was initially attracted to the idea of writing a play, hoping to bring the bizarre denizens of his imagination on to the London stage. The Wit to Woo was written in a matter of weeks,[89] and after being circulated amongst readers for several years,[90] the play eventually opened on 12 March 1957 at the Arts Theatre, London. Critical and popular judgment of the play was indifferent; it ran for only three weeks, Peake receiving but £17 for the performances.

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[88]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 86. Peake was awarded the Heinemann Prize of £100 by the Royal Society of Literature for these two works. The telegram he received read as follows: "I have the honour to inform you that my Council wish to award you a prize in respect of your novel Gormenghast and your book of poems The Glassblowers."

[89]This play only exists in manuscript form and I was not allowed to examine the actual manuscript, which is in the possession of Maeve Gilmore-Peake. She was, at that time, editing the play with a view to publication.

[90]Gilmore, A World Away, pp. 98-125. Maeve Gilmore has cited many of the letters pertaining to this play in her memoirs of Mervyn Peake. While most readers reported that they enjoyed the play, they also believed it would never be successful on the stage.

Those years in which The Wit to Woo was being sent from the desk of one prospective director to another also witnessed the publication of Mr. Pye and "Boy in Darkness," the latter being a short story that had been requested by Eyre and Spottiswoode for inclusion in an anthology of science-fiction stories by John Wyndham, William Golding, and Mervyn Peake. Peake's prose piece told the story of "Titus outside the Titus books"[91] who, having escaped from the ritual of his ancestral home, was confronted by two sinister forces -- the humanesque goat and hyena, servants of the Lamb. These two creatures attempt to bring about the subjugation of the boy to their master, so that he will be in control of the boy's brain, as he is of theirs. However, the task is thwarted, for the Lamb is slain by the boy, who finds within this creature "complete emptiness devoid of bones and organs."[92] With the slaughter of their master, the goat and the hyena are able to assume their original forms: "Out of the intense darkness where Hyena and the Goat had crouched in subjection before their lord, two ancient men emerged."[93]

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[91] Ibid., p. 105.

[92] Mervyn Peake, "Boy in Darkness", in The Inner Landscape (London, 1970), p. 77. The story is the same as in the original edition entitled Sometime Never (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1953).

[93] Ibid., p. 77.

To criticize this short story as one of Mervyn Peake's inferior works is not unwarranted. In "Boy in Darkness," it is as if the reader were lost in a dark corridor neither knowing why nor possessing any of the instruments necessary for finding the exit. Peake, presenting one fantastic event after another, allows anything to happen without attempting to establish any system of causality. This short story may be likened to a dream wherein there is no logical system of cause and effect. In "Boy in Darkness," as in a dream, the reader must either accept what happens simply because it happens or turn away unsatisfied.

"Boy in Darkness," combining the characteristics of a dream with Peake's concept of orthodox Christianity, presents a despairing picture of the Christian religion. Peake, believing orthodox Christianity to be a meaningless system of elaborate rites and complex beliefs,[94] attempts to persuade the reader in this story that the established Christian Church, symbolized by the cave, reduces civilized man to the level of beast. Once reduced to this level, man loses his sensitivity to and his understanding of those that are not part of this system of beliefs and ceremonies,

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[94]Recorded during an interview with Maeve Gilmore-Peake, London, England, 5 June 1972.

consequently attempting to bring others into subjugation, so that they, too, may become beasts serving the Lamb. Moreover, Peake shows that those who succumb to orthodox Christianity are forced to worship a grotesque effigy. Only when man can abandon his connection with this effigy, by destroying it and leaving the cave, can he be free. Until then he will remain as either goat or hyena, kneeling before the lifeless Lamb.

In Mr. Pye, which was published shortly after this short story, Peake treats the elements of Christian myth with humour and sympathy -- qualities absent from "Boy in Darkness". The novel, filled with hymns that Peake had learnt as a child in China, tells the delightful story of Harold Pye, who arrives on Sark with the intention of converting the inhabitants of the island to the pursuit of divine love. This task is singularly frustrating to Mr. Pye, for in his pursuit of his ideal concept of life on Sark, he develops wings, to compensate for the growth of which he must devote his days on the island to searching out and performing evil deeds. As a result his wings are replaced by horns, and Mr. Pye eventually learns that there can be no balance between these two forces; he must either accept the wings or the horns. That he chooses the former leaves the inhabitants of the island in awe: "It was a never-to-be-forgotten sight. There was beauty in it . . . and there was

pathos -- for he looked so solitary -- adrift in the hollow air."[95]

Mervyn Peake, in Mr. Pye, attempts to persuade the reader that Christianity is more than a meaningless system, based on elaborate ceremonies and complex beliefs, to which man, if he is to worship God, must adhere. Rather, Peake attempts to convince the reader that God, the "Great Pal,"[96] can exist within each person, and to express His existence is to love and understand one another. In effect, Mervyn Peake believes that man must attempt to apply the principles of Christianity as taught by Christ and recorded in the Gospels.[97] However, because evil is such a powerful force, he does not believe that this can always be an easy task. Man can build barricades as Mr. Pye does, to disassociate himself from the fundamental teachings of Christ, and hence from God. Nevertheless, Peake also believes that man must struggle to destroy such barricades, so that he can come to know his "Friend" (God).[98] Using this friendship, Peake

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[95]Peake, Mr. Pye, p. 278.

[96]Ibid., p. 67.

[97]Gilmore-Peake, London, England, 5 June 1972.

[98]Peake, Mr. Pye, p. 67.

believes that man can set out to bring harmony into the world.

Not long after Mr. Pye had flown off the island of Sark, Mervyn Peake began to write the third volume in the Gormenghast series, Titus Alone. However, what was to become the final volume in the series was not conceived of as such. Not only was Titus to journey to a world in which scientists were developing technological devices and structures which could control human behaviour and thought, his quest was to be continued through many regions. From Peake's notes there is evidence that at least a fourth volume had been planned in which Titus's quest would take him to mountains, archipelagos, and lagoons, where he would be confronted by psychiatrists, lepers, and angels.[99] Because of Peake's lengthy illness, it was impossible for him to continue Titus's quest beyond the third book, Titus Alone, and even that was completed only with immense difficulty, for by 1954 Peake's illness was beginning to manifest itself as tremors in his hands. By 1956 these tremors had increased, forcing Peake to attempt to escape the pressures of family life by returning to Sark. Here, he hoped he could continue with his yet untitled novel. While on Sark he wrote to Maeve of the serenity he believed he had found:

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[99] Gilmore, A World Away, p. 106.

> . . . the weather bleaches my soul. It's like a furnace, but I am thriving on it, and am writing at top gear. THANK YOU SWEET one. What you say about Titus 3 helps me. Titus 3 is for you as they are all for you . . . My brain is clearing day by day. With a strong healthy brain one can make studies -- and when you have more time from chores and less fatigue we will make progress together.[100]

Peake was never to know such serenity again, for shortly after his return to London, following the premiere of The Wit to Woo, it was falsely diagnosed that he had suffered a severe nervous breakdown. He was placed in the Virginia Water Hospital, where he was given Electroshock Therapy. His first letter to Maeve expressed his personal horror of the treatment and of the hospital:

> I have lost my identity -- I long for your white arms around my neck. I am afraid of something subtle. It is the smell of the place -- its miles and miles of corridors -- the expression on the faces -- some of whom have been here for years.[101]

Nevertheless, despite Peake's fear of his particular form of therapy, it seemed to diminish the symptoms -- tremors and hallucinations -- for which he had been placed in the hospital. He was allowed to return home on weekends where he continued to write the third "Titus" book. It was not easy, for the electrical treatment had clouded his short-term memory and daily continuity of thought became difficult.

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[100] Ibid., p. 123.

[101] Ibid., p. 128.

After nine months, he was released from Virginia Water with the cursory sentence that nothing more could be done, for he had, in fact, not suffered from a breakdown, but was experiencing the early symptoms of Parkinson's Disease.

On his release from the hospital, following a family sojourn on Sark, where all "miracles that one expected in childhood almost came to pass,"[102] Peake returned to his position at the Central School of Art. But once more he began to degenerate both mentally and physically and was admitted to a neurological hospital, where it was conclusively diagnosed that Mervyn Peake, at forty-six years of age, was suffering from premature senility or Parkinson's Disease. He was sent home until the symptoms of the disease should become so acute that he would require hospitalization.

It was at home and in the Aylesford Priory in Kent, where he spent some time in the belief that it would aid his ability to concentrate, that he completed a rough draft of Titus Alone, published in 1959. The novel was, however, after its first publication, reconstructed and simultaneously reissued in 1970 by Eyre and Spottiswoode and Penguin Books. The reasons for this revision and reissue are twofold. When Maeve Peake typed the copy of Titus Alone that was sent to the publishers in 1959, she was working from an incomplete

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[102] Ibid., p. 130.

manuscript. At the time, she was unaware that her husband had misplaced certain sections that effected the final chapters.[103] Because of Peake's confused mental state, he was unable to remember or relate to his wife what he had actually written, and hence an incomplete copy of Titus Alone was, in fact, sent to the publishers, Eyre and Spottiswoode. The publishers, however, unable to consult with Mervyn Peake, agreed to accept the copy of Titus Alone only if they were allowed to edit it in order "to make the book coherent."[104] Maeve Peake, in need of money, accepted their offer.[105] Thus, when the first text of Titus Alone appeared, it was not only incomplete, it was also altered from the version sent to the publishers.

Finally, following Peake's death, his widow discovered additional sections of the manuscript. On the basis of this new evidence, Langdon Jones was commissioned to re-examine the manuscript of Titus Alone and to oversee the publication of a more authoritative text. His addition of the discovered

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[103] Gilmore-Peake, London, England, 5 June 1972.

[104] Langdon Jones, "Publisher's Note", in Titus Alone, by Mervyn Peake (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 7.

[105] Gilmore-Peake, London, England, 5 June 1972.

sections "principally affect Chapters 24 (an entirely new episode), 77, 89, and from Chapters 99 to the end where the original text has been considerably built up."[106] Jones also deleted "twenty-five words of Titus's delirium, in which he remembered characters whom only the reader, not he, had met."[107] Perhaps it was only an oversight that the editor who had been assigned the task of making the first edition of Titus Alone "coherent" had allowed these words to remain. Nevertheless, it is the reconstructed version of Titus Alone that scholars accept as the authoritative text, for it is agreed to be closer to its "author's intentions."[108]

Shortly after the publication of Titus Alone, the simplest task in Peake's daily routine became an impossibility: "It was a kind of nightmare," writes Maeve Gilmore adding that "each day . . . he floundered, trying to draw what would have been second nature to him."[109] It was in this mental and physical condition that he wrote his

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[106] Jones, "Publisher's Note", in Titus Alone, p. 7.

[107] Ibid., p. 8.

[108] Ibid., p. 7. The reconstructed version will be used for quotations.

[109] Gilmore, A World Away, p. 139.

last story, Over the Border or The Adventures of Footfruit, in which "a healthy, happy man"[110] is willingly moulded into the shape civilization desires, "because they don't like people being different."[111] At a time when Peake's own identity was rapidly being taken away from him by Parkinson's Disease, it was as if he were warning himself in this story that he must use all his inherent capabilities to fight the process: "Hang on . . . This is the real thing. Strap on your breast-plate."[112] There was, however, no "breast-plate" powerful enough to stop the disease. In one last desperate attempt to slow down the degenerating process, Peake was given a brain operation. While the operation eased the tremors, his brain remained clouded, and "it was not long before his landmarks fled him."[113] The last years of his life were spent in states of semi-consciousness in nursing homes throughout London. Finally, "he heard the call, and he upped and he went."[114] Mervyn Peake died on 17 November 1968.

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[110] Mervyn Peake, "Over the Border or The Adventures of Footfruit", in A Book of Nonsense, Introduction by Maeve Gilmore (London, 1972), p. 79.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid., p. 87.

[113] Mervyn Peake, Titus Alone, p. 9.

[114] Peake, "Over the Border or The Adventures of Footfruit", p. 85.

His obituary in The Times began by noting that he had written "the remarkable Gormenghast trilogy . . . imaginative fantasies which revealed Peake's gift for the sombre, the fearsomely comic, the ghoulish and the pictorially macabre."[115] Since that note, however, his "remarkable" trilogy has received only cursory attention. The remainder of this study attempts to rectify that gap by examining in detail Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy.

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[115] "Obituary for Mervyn Peake", London Times (November 19, 1968), p. 13.

CHAPTER II

THE FANTASY FRAMEWORK

Since the term 'fantasy' will be used repeatedly in this study, it would be well before going further to define the term. One of those words which never mean quite the same thing to any two people, 'fantasy' can mean anything from a psychological process[1] to a literary form. For the purposes of this study, however, 'fantasy' will be used in the latter sense, to refer to a literary form. Despite Everett Bleiler's despairing conclusion in his "Introduction" to The Checklist of Fantastic Literature that "the term 'fantasy' in modern literature . . . may be almost all things to all men,"[2] this chapter attempts to deal with fantasy as a literary form, discussing some of the salient characteristics of the form as perceived and expressed by certain of Mervyn Peake's fellow fantasists, notably E.M.

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[1]Excellent discussions of this process are to be found in Eric Klinger, Structure and Functions of Fantasy (New York, 1971); Robert Plank, The Emotional Significance of Imaginary Beings (Springfield, 1968).

[2]Everett Bleiler, "Introduction", in The Checklist of Fantastic Literature (Chicago, 1948), p. 3.

Forster, Kingsley Amis, C.S. Lewis, and J.R.R. Tolkien,[3] relating Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy to their views where applicable.

Confessing that he "would rather hedge as much as possible,"[4] E.M. Forster's essay on "Fantasy" in Aspects of the Novel[5] reveals his uncertainty as to the special nature of fantasy literature. Classifying fantasy according to the demands placed on the reader, Forster argues that it compels the reader to make adjustments not normally required by other literature, compels him to believe the unbelievable.

Before proceeding to Forster's definition of fantasy, it should be noted that he believes the mere presence of a single fantastic event transforms that work into fantasy. In this respect, he is using the term 'fantasy' in a dual sense, first simply as a literary device, the presence of which necessitates its second sense, a literary form.

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[3] I am aware of a substantial number of magazines (Science Fantasy Review, Extrapolation, etc.) dealing with fantasy and science fiction both in practice and theory (primarily the former) which are not considered in this study. The fantasists to be discussed represent a sizeable cross-section of those writing on fantasy literature as well as practising in the genre itself at roughly the same time as Mervyn Peake.

[4] E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (London, 1963), p. 104.

[5] Forster has been included in this discussion on the basis of fantastic stories such as "The Machine Stops" and "The Celestial Omnibus."

His classification of the subject matter of fantasy -- it can scarcely be called a definition -- includes within its bounds such beings as gods, ghosts, angels, monkeys, monsters, midgets, witches as they relate to ordinary life; or ordinary men in no man's land, the future, the past, etc.; or intensive dissection of man's personality; or, finally, the use of parody or adaptation.[6] To use Forster's criteria would make it quite impossible to come to terms with fantasy literature: Tristram Shandy is fantasy because it implies the supernatural,[7] while Ulysses uses adaptation.[8] These two examples should suffice to illustrate that Forster's criteria for fantasy are much too compendious and nebulous to be of any practical value. The major weakness of his essay seems to me to be a conceptual flaw whereby he labels a work as fantasy on the basis of a single fantastic event. Surely the sideshow should not determine the nature of the entire exhibition.[9]

Kingsley Amis, unlike Forster, places strict limitations on the nature of the apparatus to be found in a

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[6]Forster, pp. 105-106.

[7]Ibid., pp. 104-105.

[8]Ibid., pp. 113-115.

[9]Ibid., p. 104. Forster has alluded to fantasy as a sideshow inside the main exhibition.

fantasy novel. In his study on science-fiction prose,[10] Amis distinguishes briefly between science fiction and fantasy, a prose form for which he has no personal liking. "I think it better," he bluntly admits, "to say straight out that I do not like fantasy, whether from Beowulf to Kafka, or in the specialized contemporary magazines."[11] Acknowledging that fantasy and science fiction are closely related forms distinguishable in some instances only with great difficulty, Amis differentiates, albeit briefly, between fantasy and science fiction, arguing that fantasy makes a point of flouting fact or presumptive fact.[12] If the decor of a science-fiction novel consists of "robots, space-ships, techniques, and equations,"[13] a fantasy novel is, for Amis, shabbily furnished with elves, broomsticks, occult powers, and incantations."[14] Dismissing Mervyn Peake as "a bad fantasy writer of maverick status,"[15] Amis would

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[10] Kingsley Amis, New Maps of Hell (New York, 1960).

[11] Ibid., p. 22.

[12] Ibid., p. 18.

[13] Ibid., p. 22.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., p. 152.

allow him to furnish his trilogy with any imaginable fantastic element, for which he need offer no explanation. Mervyn Peake, however, was not aware of the latitude that Kingsley Amis would have permitted him, and hence he used narrative techniques that enabled him to give verisimilitude to the imaginary worlds of Gormenghast and the totalitarian technocracy.[16]

Amis's singularly hostile analysis of fantasy represents it as a literary form in which the possible extension of known fact, either natural or mechanical, which characterises science fiction, is displaced by impossible supernatural or magical elements. In this respect, while he believes that the substance of a fantasy or science-fiction novel can never be found in the world as normally perceived, he would also insist that a science-fiction novel, unlike a fantasy novel, has a perceptible relation to reality:

> Science-fiction is that class of prose narrative treating of a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesised on the basis of some innovation in science or technology or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extra-terrestrial in origin.[17]

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[16]The reader is directed to Chapter IV of this study for fuller discussion of these narrative techniques.

[17]Amis, p. 18.

While Amis was busily building walls to distinguish fantasy from science fiction, C.S. Lewis was attempting to destroy these very walls by indicating the similarities between fantasy and science fiction. In his essay "On Science Fiction,"[18] Lewis divides into five sub-species science fiction or fantastic literature, which he was later to define briefly as "anything which is not naturalistic, which is not about what we call the real world."[19]

Space travel is the focal point of the first three sub-species, with the common denominator of a second inhabited planet. The fourth sub-species deals with our planet and the ultimate destiny of man.

No brief summary can adequately describe Lewis's fifth sub-species, in which "sub-species and sub-sub-species break out in baffling multitude."[20] It is in this final classification that Lewis emphasizes the affinity between science fiction and fantasy. Not only are stories containing elements of both concurrently published in such popular magazines as Fantasy and Science Fiction and

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[18] C.S. Lewis, "On Science Fiction", in Of Other Worlds, ed., Walter Hooper (London, 1966).

[19] C.S. Lewis and others, "Unreal Estates", in Of Other Worlds, p. 92. A transcript of a conversation between Professor Lewis, Kingsley Amis, and Brian Aldiss.

[20] C.S. Lewis, "On Science Fiction", p. 69.

Fantastic Worlds, but fantasy and science fiction frequently merge in the same story.[21]

This final sub-species may be expressed as "an imaginative impulse . . . working under the special conditions of our own time,"[22] which may or may not involve esoteric scientific knowledge and special technological equipment, as long as the story is plausible within the premises established by its creator. Two types of stories may be placed in this sub-species: that involving the known world with the establishment of a certain fantastic postulate (or postulates) controlling that world, and that involving another world with its own set of standards.[23]

This other world is important for "its quality, its flavour;"[24] it is a world which Lewis believes is not so much a comment on life as an addition to it, enlarging "our conception of the range of possible experience."[25] That such stories have little resemblance to reality as we

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[21] Ibid., pp. 67-70.

[22] Ibid., p. 67.

[23] In this sub-species, Lewis includes such works as Spenser's The Faerie Queene, Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, and Peake's first novel, Titus Groan, which had just been published.

[24] Lewis, "On Science Fiction", p. 70.

[25] Ibid.

perceive it is their strongest asset, for they give us a vision which transcends time and space -- a vision in which normal logic is meaningless. Such stories possess their own validity; their world is logically and philosophically as viable as this one.

This final sub-species replaces mundane reality with a "wider area of possible experience."[26] If writers of realistic fiction present the known and the ramifications thereof, writers of these works present the unknown, that which we have yet to learn and experience. Such works present fictive worlds which liberate the imagination from the normal standards of this world, creating worlds with which we are not familiar and thereby enabling us pleasurably to learn to experience life in various new ways. Lewis, believing the vicarious experience derived from such worlds to have some connection with the mythopoeic, "a mode of the imagination which does something to us at a deep level,"[27] confesses that he is unable to explain this connection, but that it would seem to be related to one's mode of imaginative perception, one's ability to see universal qualities in specific illustrations.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., p. 72.

Moreover, Lewis views the creation of an imaginary world as a technique which enables a writer to create an alien environment in which to objectify abstract concepts: right and wrong, good and evil, beauty and truth. Similarly, Peake views the fictive worlds of Gormenghast and the totalitarian technocracy as concrete worlds in which to explore such abstractions as power, freedom, self-identity, and moral growth. The distinctive character of his treatment of these ideas will be extensively discussed in the following chapter.

Thus, for Lewis, fantasy and science fiction are not two different literary forms; rather they are related types of specialized imaginative fiction which may exist symbiotically within a single work. While Amis insists that science fiction must have a basis in science or pseudo-science, Lewis would not be so rigid: "I took a hero to Mars in a space-ship, but when I knew better I had angels convey him to Venus."[28]

Mervyn Peake, having used the supernatural in other of his prose works -- "Boy in Darkness" and Mr. Pye -- would, in general, agree with C.S. Lewis that the fantasist should be allowed to use whatever techniques seem most appropriate to enrich the work artistically or to express

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[28] Ibid., p. 69.

a particular thematic point. While Peake apparently saw no conflict between the use of specialized scientific devices and the supernatural in a particular work, he also believed that the fantasist should not be irrevocably bound to the use of either.

Peake was willing to use whatever fantastic elements were necessary to develop imaginary worlds and to express particular thematic points. The absence of such supernatural beings as ghosts, angels, and gods from the Gormenghast trilogy is attributable simply to the fact that they are neither artistically nor thematically necessary. But he does not eschew the supernatural entirely. In the first two volumes of his trilogy, he creates a supernatural quality by presenting the reader with a strange castle inhabited by bizarre denizens whose lives consist of elaborate rituals decreed by ancient codes of law:

> We begin somewhere near the outer wall, the ponderous ramparts, the time-eaten stone extremities of Gormenghast, the seat of the ancient and historic house of Groan. Beyond the wall dwells a nameless breed, who on one day in the year submit their wooden carvings to the eye of Sepulchrave, Earl of Gormenghast. Within his dark domain, governed by the portentous ritual of centuries, dwells a stranger breed. We are introduced, in turn, to Rottcodd of the feather duster, curator of the Hall of the Bright Carvings; the eighteen Grey Scrubbers in the Great Kitchen, who follow an hereditary calling; the stiff-kneed, taciturn Mr. Flay, the Earl's first servant; his mortal enemy Swelter, the head cook . . . Fuchsia

> of the wild black hair, the Earl's daughter, who is alone with the innocence of her senses in a secret attic in the castle; the red-haired Countess with her swarm of snow-white cats . . . the ancient Sourdust, clad in crimson sacking . . . the shock-headed and whinnying Dr. Prunesqualor; the Earl himself, tragic of face under the iron crown he wears.[29]

In Titus Alone, however, having abandoned Gormenghast, Peake creates a world with characteristics closer to the world as normally perceived. But he continues to endow this world with a supernatural quality by replacing the castle and its denizens with specialized technological structures such as the crystal city and mechanical brains.[30] In addition, such alien regions as the Under-River and the Land of Abandoned Projects add to the supernatural quality of Titus Alone. Peake, as indicated, was willing to establish a supernatural quality in his trilogy by using whatever techniques best suited his purposes. That he refused to be confined by a rigid set of rules in his creation of Gormenghast and the totalitarian technocracy gives his trilogy greater scope than works by those fantasists who felt obliged to adhere to either space ships and robots or angels and gods. Peake simply insisted on the right to select whatever techniques were necessary to create fully substantiated and viable imaginary world-systems.

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[29] "Where is Fancy Bred?", T.L.S., March 23, 1946, p. 137.

[30] Peake, Titus Alone, pp. 31-37.

J.R.R. Tolkien is in basic agreement with Mervyn Peake on these crucial issues. The creation of imaginary worlds is the focal point of Tolkien's definition of fantasy in his essay "On Fairy-Stories."[31] In this essay, Tolkien views fantasy, which lies at the heart of what he calls "Faerie" -- that nebulous realm whose qualities are "indescribable though not imperceptible"[32] -- as an independent literary form which is characterised both by the traditional meaning of fantasy as an equivalent of the imagination and by its contemporary implications of "unreality," or lack of adherence to established fact. This combination produces a "higher form of Art,"[33] the creation of a "Secondary World," the realm of "Faerie," which has its own unique and separate 'reality' from our ordinary world, the "Primary World."[34] Fantasy, used in this way, reveals the artist as a myth-maker who creates his own history "with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers."[35]

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[31] J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories", in Tree and Leaf (London, 1964), pp. 11-70.

[32] Ibid., p. 16.

[33] Ibid., p. 44.

[34] Ibid., pp. 44-45.

[35] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Foreword", in The Fellowship of the Ring (Toronto, 1971), I, 4.

Not all fantasy, however, qualifies for Tolkien as myth-making, for the world which the artist creates is not always fully developed. If the "arresting strangeness"[36] which is one of fantasy's most noticeable characteristics is not adequately substantiated, the work will merely exhibit the use of fantastic elements, but will not be fantasy. The creation of a green sun, for instance, denotes the fantastic, whereas the creation of a "Secondary World" inside which the green sun will be made credible denotes fantasy.[37] Thus, Tolkien places stricter demands on the fantasist than do Forster or Amis. To Tolkien only those writers creating an imaginary world that generates verisimilitude are true fantasists. Such writers will draw, of necessity, on the Primary World, but -- the crucial point for both Tolkien and for Peake -- they are not enslaved by it. Their imagination transforms the material derived from the "Primary World" into "something else . . . something new."[38] In other words, the fantasist, combining his own experience with his imaginative interpretation of reality, "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates"[39] the world as we know it

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[36]Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories", p. 44.

[37]Ibid., p. 45.

[38]Ibid., p. 53.

[39]S.T. Coleridge, "Biographia Literaria", in Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge, ed. with intro., by D.A. Stauffer (Princeton, 1951), p. 263.

in order to reformulate the essence of life, the constituent elements of which it is composed.

C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Mervyn Peake would agree that the fantasist, drawing on certain concepts and images familiar to the reader, transforms these concepts and images, so that they assume a new and unique perspective within the fantasist's construct. An interesting corollary is Tolkien's belief that the happy ending, "the eucatastrophe"[40] with which all true fantasies end, leaves the reader with a glimpse of underlying truth about man's ultimate goal. The sense of "joy"[41] that the reader feels at the end of a fantasy story is also to be found in the world as normally perceived. To glimpse this "joy" in the real world is to realize evangelium,[42] "good news,"[43] for mankind, for whom there can be no universal defeat. Later in this study the unique sense of "joy" with which Mervyn Peake's trilogy concludes is considered.[44]

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[40]Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories", p. 263.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

[44]The reader is directed to the concluding remarks in Chapter III.

A general consideration of these fantasists thus points to the conclusion that no simple definition can do justice to fantasy literature. It is a complex genre that can be viewed from different perspectives. On the one hand, E.M. Forster and Kingsley Amis prefer to label as fantasy any work that contains a single fantastic element no matter what the substance of the rest of the work. Amis even argues for a marked distinction between fantasy and science fiction. C.S. Lewis, on the other hand, argues that fantasy and science fiction are closely related forms subsumed under the general classification of fantastic literature. And Peake and Tolkien are in general agreement with Lewis's view.

However, science fiction as it relates to the future poses somewhat different issues from those hitherto mentioned. Stories dealing with future scientific possibilities generally express fears about the direction in which scientific and technological innovations are leading man. The vague hope that "gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived . . . in the heart of man"[45] with which H.G. Wells's "The Time Machine" ends becomes increasingly untenable during the twentieth century. George Orwell's 1984 does not permit much optimism in assessing man's future, nor does E.M. Forster's short

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[45] H.G. Wells, "The Time Machine" in The Complete Short Stories of H.G. Wells (London, 1970), p. 91.

story, "The Machine Stops," wherein we are faced with "man, the flower of all flesh, the noblest of all creatures visible . . . beautiful naked man . . . dying, strangled in the garments he had woven."[46] Likewise, in Titus Alone, Mervyn Peake's view of the possible applications of technology offers little consolation to the reader. While Peake shows us that such remarkable structures as the crystal city are one aspect of technological advancement, he also provides us with the negative corollary: technology can create such sinister structures as the "factory," wherein man can be enslaved and destroyed.

Not only does the fantasist create imaginary worlds, he must also make his world in some sense credible for the reader.[47] To this as to the

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[46] E.M. Forster, "The Machine Stops", in The Eternal Moment (New York, 1928), pp. 83-84.

[47] See Jane Mobley, "Toward a Definition of Fantasy Fiction", Extrapolation, XV (May, 1974), 117-118. "It can be said that all fiction creates worlds peculiar to the fiction itself, but in realistic narratives the worlds are still dependent for their focus on the world the reader knows. This sort of fiction stands in recognizable relation to life; it creates an illusion of life and the effect on the reader depends on its 'convincing reading of life' . . . In other words, the fiction depends on a norm grounded in the details and standards of mundane reality and it derives its validity, at least in part, from its relation to this norm. Fantasy fiction, however, is not conditional in this way. It creates an absolute reality which is not contingent upon everyday reality, but is instead self-sustaining. Fantasy fiction, like symbolic logic, operates on givens. Logic is valid when it is internally consistent whether that consistency relates to physical reality or not."

other problems confronting fantasists, their solutions differ widely. Certain fantasists, H.G. Wells and C.S. Lewis for example, transport a character (or characters) from our world to an imaginary world or to another planet to serve as a commentator on the alien world, thereby establishing a mediator between the familiar and the unfamiliar and allowing the reader more easily to understand the logic of the fantasist's construct. Such fantasists as J.R.R. Tolkien and Mervyn Peake, however, make no attempt to transport the reader or their fictional characters from our world into another, nor to establish mediators between the known and the unknown. Rather, they simply abandon our world in favour of imaginary world systems. While the reader may be initially attracted to such fictive worlds because of their "arresting strangeness" he nevertheless needs to be persuaded that the imaginary world with which he has been presented has its own internal logic. Its creator must convince the reader that the strange qualities that attracted him to this world are indeed the norm for this fictive world. The more fully developed the history, the geography, the socio-political system, the moral and aesthetic values of the fictive world, the more readily the reader will be able to accept the fantasist's construct.

Such substantiation of the autonymous logic of the fictive world may take slightly different forms. While most fantasists, including C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Mervyn Peake, intersperse information pertaining to their fictive worlds and their inhabitants throughout their novels, additional authenticatory techniques are also used. J.R.R. Tolkien, for instance, includes within The Lord of the Rings what might be termed the apparatus of a scholar (maps, appendices, genealogies) as one technique to substantiate Middle Earth more fully. This technique provides the reader with greater and more readily assimilable knowledge of the history, geography, and lineage of Middle Earth and its inhabitants than, for instance, is known of Gormenghast and the Groans. Only in the chapter entitled "The Library" in Titus Groan does Peake provide elaborate details about the history of the Groans, and even there we are not informed as to the origins of their ancestral home. Tolkien, in his use of the above apparatus, provides greater historical documentation of Middle Earth and its inhabitants than does Peake for Gormenghast and the Groans. Moreover, Tolkien's major structural device, the quest, would operate less efficiently and less comprehensively if the reader were not provided with maps to consult.

A unique authenticatory technique selected by Mervyn Peake was the use of sketches of his characters.

For Peake, such sketches provided a path by which he could enter into his characters' minds and personalities. Neither the geography nor the history of Peake's fictive worlds is a primary focus of concern. Rather, he develops these aspects to complement his major thematic concern: to illustrate what happens to an isolated group of people who become trapped -- psychologically, morally, physically -- in systems of their own design.

In pursuing this design, Peake must convince the reader that, however alien the denizens of Gormenghast may appear to be, their physical abnormality falls within the range of possibility and their psychological processes, even if abnormal, are coherent and hence plausible within the specified context. While all good writers attempt to render their characters credible, the fantasist is confronted with a more difficult task, for he must persuade the reader that physically and psychologically grotesque characters who behave abnormally are in fact plausible. For example, in his role as fantasist, Peake must not only render the physical enormity of the Countess of Groan, he must also provide a psychological context within which her emotional need for the birds who nest in her hair and for her hundreds of white cats will be seen as plausible and

coherent. Likewise, he must convey to the reader Lord Sepulchrave's melancholia in such a way that Sepulchrave's perching on the mantlepiece in the belief that he is an owl shall seem perhaps odd but by no means implausible nor incoherent.

The total effect of all this is thus somewhat paradoxical. While the reader, upon entering Gormenghast, is confronted with, in Tolkien's phrase, an "arresting strangeness," this quality becomes less and less paramount as Peake develops his world and the bizarre denizens who inhabit it. The first two volumes of the Gormenghast trilogy, focusing on the nature of life in Peake's microcosm, present innumerable authenticatory details about the order of that world and about the physical appearance and personality of those who inhabit it. In the third volume, Titus Alone, however, there is a change. The reader is abruptly confronted with a further species of "arresting strangeness" in the various regions encompassed by the totalitarian technocracy -- the projection of the ominous possibilities of science on man's future.

In this third volume, passing beyond the "Secondary World" of Gormenghast, Peake creates what might be called a "Tertiary World," concurrent with but independent of the home of the Groans. It is, however, not farther removed from the reality of our world, but closer to it: a nightmare

vision of the possibilities that confront mankind, where scientific experiments, destroying animals and humans alike, force those who refuse to conform to escape to the bleak regions of Under-River, entering upon a permanent exile.

As has already been remarked, Mervyn Peake, in his creation of these two world systems, was confronted with the onerous task of making his imaginary worlds and their inhabitants credible. One may extend Tolkien's discussion of "the green sun" to the Groan castle and the factory: it is Peake's responsibility as a fantasist to create imaginary worlds within which these structures and their inhabitants will seem credible. The results are the "Secondary World" of Gormenghast and the "Tertiary World" of the totalitarian technocracy, worlds which Peake has made sufficiently substantial for C. Day Lewis to find himself almost believing "Mr. Peake's fantastic world[s] to be the real one."[48]

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[48] C. Day Lewis, "New Novels", Listener, XXXV (April, 1946), 552.

CHAPTER III

THE GORMENGHAST TRILOGY: THEMES AND PATTERNS

Mervyn Peake, as indicated in the last chapter, created two complex and decidedly unique imaginary world-systems. This chapter attempts a fuller understanding of these systems. In this respect, it first examines the nature and pattern of the fictive worlds depicted in the trilogy. Secondly, the dominant concerns and motifs revealed by an analysis of these fictive worlds forms the basis for a consideration of the principal themes expressed within the trilogy.

An examination of Peake's imaginary worlds encompasses two aspects of the trilogy, the "stable, unchanging organization in which each thing, person, and event has its own proper place"[1] and "the movements, actions, and exchanges of those who make up the kingdom."[2] The latter will be termed the "commerce of the cosmos"[3] while the

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[1]Marjorie Wright, The Cosmic Kingdom of Myth (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 1960), p. 65.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

former will be designated the "geography of the cosmos."[4] The "geography of the cosmos" will first be examined in terms of the imaginative settings of the trilogy and secondly in terms of the social framework wherein the "commerce of the cosmos" is transacted. The "commerce of the cosmos" will be discussed in terms of the various movements which take place within the trilogy: the power movement, the identity movement, and the freedom movement.

The power movement is essentially the struggle to gain control of a particular region and its inhabitants. In the first two volumes of the trilogy, Steerpike's attempt to supplant the Groan lineage and set up a virtual dictatorship forms the focal point of the power struggle, while in the third volume the scientists' attempt to supplant the pattern of life known by Muzzlehatch and Juno, establishing instead a totalitarian technocracy, is the major power movement. The struggle for self-awareness invariably experienced at certain stages in the trilogy by the principal characters is the basis of the second movement. In certain instances, as in the case of Titus, this identity struggle becomes the motivating factor for the freedom struggle whereby the process involved in defining oneself necessitates physical freedom from the existing life style.

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[4] Ibid.

Thus, Peake, combining the "commerce of the Cosmos" with the "geography of the cosmos", creates two unique imaginary worlds, each expressing similar thematic concerns.

The imaginary setting for the first two volumes of the trilogy is Gormenghast castle and its environs. The castle, of "ponderous architectural quality,"[5] is in the process of decay, with its "time-eaten buttresses" and its "broken and lofty turrets"[6] being but one aspect of a castle "ancient by nature . . . in the process of crumbling away. The white dust lolling between the gaping bricks; the worm in the wood . . . corrosion and mildew; the crumbling patina; the fading shades; the beauty of decay."[7] Inside the castle, corridors stretch endlessly in all directions connecting the four wings of the castle, while the labyrinthine stairways lead Peake's characters to the innumerable storeys in their "gaunt asylum."[8]

Outside the castle proper, "those mean dwellings that swarmed like an epidemic"[9] are occupied by

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[5]Mervyn Peake, Titus Groan (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 15.

[6]Ibid.

[7]Mervyn Peake, Titus Alone, p. 31.

[8]Peake, Gormenghast (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 429.

[9]Peake, Titus Groan, p. 15.

the Outer Dwellers or Bright Carvers. Their village, consisting of clay hovels landscaped by cacti, is one of utter simplicity, standing in contrast to the elaborate home of the Groans.

As for the physical boundaries of the realm of Gormenghast, to the east lie the quicksands and the tideless sea, to the west the twisted woods and the escarpment, to the south the grey salt marshes, and to the north the wastelands and Gormenghast Mountain.

This, then, is the physical locale for the first two volumes of the trilogy: Gormenghast, "a tiny, timeless, self-sufficient realm."[10]

There is, however, toward the end of Titus Groan, an indication that other regions co-exist with Gormenghast. The indication referred to occurs during Keda's journey following the death of her two lovers. Keda, Titus's wet nurse, this Outer Dweller who had been allowed to live for a while within the castle, turns away from her familiar world of mud huts and stone walls, journeying "through many regions", moving "from province to province".[11] It is to one

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[10] Bruce A. Beatie, "Titus Groan Leaves Home," Saturday Review, L (1967), 31.

[11] Peake, Titus Groan, p. 350.

of the many regions co-existing with but unknown to Gormenghast that Titus, the seventy-seventh Earl of Groan, eventually journeys in the final volume of the trilogy, Titus Alone.

The world depicted in Titus Alone is given no precise boundaries, and hence the defined vastness of Gormenghast is lacking in this world. The setting in this final volume consists of several structural regions: the cities depicted in the first section; the Under-river world and land of abandoned projects of the middle section; the factory region of the final section. There are, one learns in the Under-river, at least "two great cities"[12] in this world; one a city of brick and stone ("the tortuous, poverty-stricken town"[13] of Muzzlehatch's district) and one a city of "crystal structures."[14] These two cities reflect one of the principal characteristics of the setting, representing a world in the process of physical change wherein traditional structures and ancient relics co-exist with technological innovations and glass cities. The latter innovations and structures are in keeping with "the spirit

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[12]Peake, Titus Alone, p. 112.

[13]Ibid., p. 32.

[14]Ibid., p. 33.

of the age,"[15] an age in which science is moulding the world into a new form, creating "new cities and new mountains; new rivers and new creatures. New men and new women."[16] It is a world in which machines are almost human, "not quite, but almost,"[17] and in which humans become increasingly like machines, as with the two helmeters. As the world depicted in the third volume proceeds towards the scientific age, the setting of the "geography of the cosmos," in contrast to the Gormenghast situation, offers little background stability.

In the first two volumes of the trilogy, the second aspect of the "geography of the cosmos," the social framework, is hierarchical in structure, consisting of an ordered system "in which each thing, person, and event"[18] is given a definite position on a vertical scale. Unlike the imaginary worlds created by Tolkien or Lewis, Peake's world is headed by no gods or supernatural beings, rather the controlling powers are man-made forces.

Heading the hierarchy of the world of Gormenghast are two symbiotic inanimate forces, the castle and the Groan

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[15] Ibid., p. 106.

[16] Ibid., p. 28.

[17] Ibid., p. 106.

[18] Wright, loc. cit.

law. The law, written through succeeding generations of Groans, decrees the importance of the castle, while the castle, in turn, provides a stage whereon the written law may be transformed into an endless series of ceremonies. It is by this law that the nature of life in Gormenghast is determined, a law which enforces upon the denizens of the castle and, in particular, the ruling family, a pre-determined role in this continuous ritual. The Groans have become puppets performing duties in meaningless ceremonies decreed by their ancestors through the law. Succeeding generations of Groans have combined to produce a world where physical structures and codes of law are of greater significance than men and women. The Groans, having created their own deities, are now forced to worship them:

> I do abjure you hold each cold stone sacred that clings to these, your grey ancestral walls. I do abjure you hold the dark soil sacred that nourishes your high leaf-burdened trees. I do abjure you hold the tenets sacred that ramify the creeds of Gormenghast.[19]

Next in importance on the hierarchical scale is the ruling family of Gormenghast; important for the symbolic roles performed by them in the pageantry of the castle. They are the principal actors in a ritualistic drama which uses

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[19]Peake, Titus Groan, p. 123.

as its script the ancient volumes written by their ancestors. The Master of Ritual, directing the drama and interpreting the scripts, occupies the next level on the hierarchy. The gentry and professionals of Gormenghast, namely the Prunesquallors and the professors, occupy the next level of the hierarchy, followed on the scale by the sundry servants of the castle. Lord Sepulchrave's servant, Flay, occupies the highest level of the servant section of the hierarchy, while the eighteen Grey Scrubbers, those deaf inhabitants of the slab face, repositories of "the lower human values,"[20] occupy the lowest level of the hierarchy of the castle proper. The Mud Dwellers, being outside the walls of the castle, occupy one of the bottom rungs of the hierarchical scale of the world of Gormenghast. These Dwellers, in turn, have their own sub-hierarchical system, elevating those with artistic ability to the highest rung of the village hierarchy. Like the inhabitants of the castle, the Mud Dwellers, passing laws orally from generation to generation, also exhibit a ritualistic life-style. Although their system of ritual lacks the intricacy of that used in the castle, it is no less binding:

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[20] Ibid., p. 27.

> At the heart of their rugged and unconventional life there was an orthodoxy as hard as iron. Their conventions were ice-bound. To move among them for a day without forewarning of their innumerable conventions would be to invite disaster.[21]

The bottom rung of the hierarchy of the world of Gormenghast is reserved for those who are exiled for whatever reason from either the castle or the village of the Mud Dwellers. Those who have violated the written or unwritten sacrosanct rules find themselves turned into the wilds surrounding the inhabited area of Gormenghast. With the unfolding of the "commerce of the cosmos," three characters (Flay, Keda, and her bastard child) find themselves at some time on the lowest rung of the realm of Gormenghast. In addition, Titus's self-exile at the end of the second volume would place him, in the eyes of the law, on the lowest rung of this realm.

This, then, is a cursory view of the nature and structure of the imaginative world of Gormenghast. It is a world with a singularly rigid hierarchical structure governed by codes of law passed down through generations of Groans, compelling the Groans to live within an elaborate ritualistic system. In a world where development has ceased and where change is heresy, man has created his own

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[21] Ibid., p. 279.

deities, the castle and the law, to which he has subjugated himself. As the One Ring in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings could control all activity, binding life in a rigid system, so Peake created, eight years prior to the first publication of Tolkien's trilogy, a world already bound, not by supernatural forces, but by elevation to a position of supreme importance of ancient codes of law and architectural structures.

In Titus Alone, the second aspect of the "geography of the cosmos," the social framework, is continuously shifting toward one of three patterns: the traditional life style associated with Muzzlehatch and Juno; the anarchical life style typified in the Under-River and in the land of abandoned projects; the totalitarian technocracy centred about the marble city and the factory. The encroaching technological totalitarian pattern of life, destroying the traditional system, reduces most of this world to a state of anarchy. Caught between tradition and innovation, the inhabitants depicted in this volume are without a stable social position. As the technological world supplants the world of brick buildings and candle-lit courts, of fishermen and beggars, of stone gaols and lunatic asylums, many of the inhabitants of the world take refuge in the Under-River region. Not only do the denizens of the Under-River come from the surface world geographically

depicted in the third volume, they come from various surrounding regions where political and technological change has brought about the subjugation of human values to the ruling forces. Forced into a world of perpetual darkness and dampness, the denizens of the Under-River live in anarchy, inhabiting a world which has "no doctors and . . . no authority" in which "the sick were free to leap among the shadows and soar with their own fever. And the hale were free to spend their days in bed, curled up like cats, or at full stretch, rigid as men in armour."[22]

The actions and movements of those that remain on the surface are partially determined by the scientists through their technological devices. Their freedom is limited to participation in insignificant ceremonial events such as Lady Cusp-Canine's party or Titus's trial. They are subject to the controlling forces of this world, and hence, when Titus is in the glass city and the cannon booms, all except the seventy-seventh Earl are forced to assume a statuesque pose, becoming "stiff as scarecrows caught in the full flight of living, their half-way gestures frozen."[23] Later, another more sinister form of enslavement

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[22]Peake, Titus Alone, p. 111.

[23]Ibid., pp. 35-36.

is to be noted in the factory, where the sick, the poor, and the old are put to death:

> 'No, no, no!' came the voice. 'I want to live.'
> 'But you are very poor and very ill,' said another voice, with the consistency of porridge.
> 'You're unhappy. You told me so.'
> 'No, no, no! I want to live. I want to live. Give me a little longer.'[24]

The factory, representing a more ominous and more obvious form of enslavement than that found in the glass city, is a decidedly bleak vision of what the enveloping technological system represents. The limited physical freedom of those who inhabit the glass city is denied those victims imprisoned by the scientists in the factory. Emphasizing the absence of freedom which technological structures such as the factory bring about, Peake depicts the myriad faces which Titus sees staring from the factory as being physically similar: "every window was filled with a face, and every face was staring at him, and most dreadful of all else, every face was the same."[25] The motif is further emphasised in the form of the two helmeters, who represent not only physical, but mental uniformity. As the inhabitants of the glass city have been

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[24] Ibid., p. 204.

[25] Ibid., p. 168.

conditioned to freeze when the gun booms, so too have these two helmeters been the subjects of experiments which have trained them to think and act simultaneously. The scientists are using technology to create a world similar to that of Gormenghast, a world where human freedom is thoroughly circumscribed.

The denizens of Gormenghast have enslaved themselves through their emphasis on traditional structures and their antipathy to change, while the denizens of the world depicted in Titus Alone are in the process of being enslaved through changing priorities, with "the spirit of the age" directed toward scientific experimentation. In contrast to the inhabitants of Gormenghast, those in the factory world are in the process of being trapped by change. This encroaching technological world is, however, more sinister than Gormenghast, for it not only controls human freedom, it ignores human dignity. There is in Gormenghast a sense of dignity determined by the hierarchical structure: each inhabitant is accorded certain privileges and obligations depending upon his or her position in the hierarchy. Despite the lowly position of the Outer Dwellers in the Gormenghast hierarchy, they are recognized and respected by the castle for their artistic ability. In the world depicted in the third volume, however, human dignity

is subjugated to the whims of the controlling forces, particularly the scientists.

The embryonic stage of the age of technological totalitarianism and the final stage of the traditional system known by Muzzlehatch and Juno combine to produce a world in which the denizens are deprived of a stable social position. In this respect, the second aspect of the "geography of the cosmos," the social framework, combines with the first aspect, the setting, to produce a world with little environmental or social stability.

Complementing the "geography of the cosmos" are the three major movements (power, identity, freedom) which are subsumed under the term the "commerce of the cosmos."

The fictive world of Gormenghast has as its norm obedience to the castle and the Groan law. In addition, the maintenance of the rigid Gormenghast hierarchy is indispensable to the maintenance of order. Steerpike, one of Swelter's kitchen apprentices, is the first to upset the ordered pattern of the realm. Rebelling against his social identity, Steerpike rejects his position within the hierarchy and begins his climb to power, attempting to supplant the Groan family and assume control of the castle. From his servile lot in the castle kitchen at the beginning of the first volume of the trilogy to his position as Master of Ritual in the middle sections of the second

volume, Steerpike takes advantage of the ordered pattern of life within Gormenghast. In a world with such a rigid hierarchical structure, the inhabitants find it difficult to cope with someone who would break from his decreed position, violating the ancient law. Initially, the denizens of the castle are only vaguely aware that Steerpike has broken from the hierarchy, and until he becomes a threat to the continued existence of the castle nothing is done to combat his climb to power.

This disinclination of the inhabitants of the castle to act other than at times prescribed by the law is partially responsible for Steerpike's early success. Dr. Prunesquallor recognizes Steerpike as "a diabolically clever little monster,"[26] while the Countess believes "he must be sent away for . . . . he will do harm,"[27] but neither takes positive action against him until he has destroyed, in one way or another, many of the inhabitants of the castle.

In addition, Steerpike's own ambition, combining intelligence with feigned affability, enables him to worm his way through the various strata of the Gormenghast hierarchy. Impressing Prunesquallor with the potential of

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[26]Peake, Titus Groan, p. 178.

[27]Ibid., p. 399.

his brain and plying Irma with flattery, Steerpike is accepted into the doctor's household. From these quarters, he moves into the central castle, pretending to aid the two half-witted sisters of Lord Sepulchrave, Cora and Clarice, to obtain Gertrude's power. Cora and Clarice's pursuit of power, however, varies inversely with Steerpike's, for his rise to power is accompanied by their subjugation until they are eventually imprisoned by Steerpike and forced to do homage to him, crawling beneath the carpet "dressed in their purple finery."[28]

Paralleling Steerpike's subjugation of Cora and Clarice is his struggle to ingratiate himself with the new Master of Ritual, Barquentine, thereby learning the secrets contained within the innumerable tomes which control the daily life of the castle. Finally, when Steerpike has accumulated sufficient knowledge to use the ancient tomes for his own purposes, he destroys Barquentine. With this murder a new process begins within Steerpike whereby the desire for power is subordinated to the need to destroy. During the first two volumes, his acts have become increasingly sinister, extending from playful manipulation of the denizens of the castle to physical slaughter, until toward the end of the second volume Steerpike can no longer

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[28]Peake, Gormenghast, p. 48.

control his criminal behavior: "he was no longer a criminal because he chose to be. He had no longer the choice."[29] When Steerpike inadvertently leads Flay, Prunesquallor, and Titus to the chamber in which "the decomposing relics"[30] of Cora and Clarice lie, the denizens of the castle are finally motivated to seek out and destroy this menace. Steerpike's death at Titus's hands allows Gormenghast to revert to its ritualistic system of life; but we have been shown through Steerpike's behaviour how an ossified system which does not permit self-realisation or social mobility may force the energetic individual into both self-destructive and social destructive criminality.

The struggle for power is also an integral aspect of the third volume and, as in Gormenghast, it is a struggle to control the world. In essence, it is an attempt by the scientists and technologists to impose on life their own totalitarian pattern. As with Steerpike's rise in the early stages of the first two volumes, it is virtually a one-sided struggle, for no one is motivated to act against the scientists' experiments. With the destruction of his zoo, however, Muzzlehatch, realizing that the continued existence

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[29] Ibid., p. 444.

[30] Ibid., p. 381.

of life as he knows it is severely threatened, sets out to find and destroy the centre of this encroaching technological system. The inhabitants of the factory world parallel the denizens of Gormenghast, passively permitting the scientists to assume power, while they partake in a series of largely meaningless rituals: the cocktail party, Titus's trial, the daily gathering to watch the sunset. In this power struggle the reverse of the Gormenghast situation is represented, for Muzzlehatch does not destroy the scientist, Cheeta's father and one of those principally responsible for the factory structures, rather he destroys the chief factory, striking at the individual through the destruction of the institution. Whether this destruction has any ultimate effect on the "spirit of the age" is merely a matter of speculation, for Titus's quest continues and he leaves the factory region behind.

Not only is the bid for power directed toward control of world systems, whether it be Gormenghast or the factory world, it is also an element involved in personal relationships. As has been indicated, the ability to manipulate other people is an essential aspect of Steerpike's rise to power. He preys on the denizens of the castle as he moves up the Gormenghast hierarchy, manipulating the inhabitants of the castle as a puppeteer would his puppets. Paralleling Steerpike's attempts to

control the denizens of Gormenghast is Cheeta's attempt to control Titus. Foiled in her attempt to persuade Titus to remain with her, Cheeta conceives of an elaborate party at which she will mock both his ancestral home and his existence. In this mockery, Cheeta attempts to destroy Titus's sanity, emotionally torturing him into madness:

> Were there a 'Gormenghast', then surely this mockery of his mother must humble and torture him, reminding him of his Abdication, and of all the ritual he so loved and loathed. If, on the other hand there were no such place, and the whole thing a concoction of his mind, then, mortified by this exposure of his secret love, the boy would surely break.[31]

Thus, Peake not only shows how the controlling forces in his fictive worlds subjugate those within them to servile roles, he also shows how the denizens of his imaginary worlds attempt to manipulate one another. The result, in both instances, is that the victims are confronted with intense struggles for identity.

In the first two volumes of the trilogy, this struggle for identity is subordinate to the prescribed ritual, for both social and self awareness are ideally determined by one's hereditary role, which is, in turn, decreed by the law. The ideal, however, does not always function in Gormenghast, and hence the identity movement is

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[31] Peake, Titus Alone, p. 233.

primarily concerned with the reconciliation of one's prescribed social role with one's concept of self. Those denizens of the castle who find that the ideal blending of social and self-awareness is not tenable have two alternatives: acceptance of their social role with the creation of a self-awareness compatible with but not determined by that role; or rejection, partial or entire, of their social role together with acceptance of the necessity for redefinition of their identity, either social, personal, or both.

In general, most of the denizens of Gormenghast adhere to the ideal, allowing their decreed social identity to determine their self-image. The conflict between Flay and Swelter is more readily understood with reference to this ideal identity pattern, for when Flay strikes Swelter with his ceremonial chain he not only offends the chef's dignity, he violates Swelter's social position as head chef. Thus, Swelter's hatred towards Flay is twofold, social and personal.

Lord Sepulchrave's identity has also been determined in terms of the ideal pattern. Sepulchrave, symbol of the Groan law and figurehead for the castle, has been moulded into a melancholic, alienated person under the pressure of the innumerable duties he must perform. His identity is so fully dependent upon the castle that he does

not consider himself as an entity separate from it. As one cannot conceive of a functioning body without a head, so, too, Lord Sepulchrave cannot imagine himself without Gormenghast: "He was part of it. He could not imagine a world outside it."[32] When part of the castle is destroyed, namely the ancient library in which Lord Sepulchrave's beloved collection of books is stored, a part of the seventy-sixth Earl is destroyed also -- his sanity begins to give way, forcing a break between his social and personal identity. No longer is Sepulchrave and the seventy-sixth Earl the same person, for part of Sepulchrave is now an owl: "'Owl . . . Wants mice . . . Wants twigs: on mantelpiece! Hooting! Lordship's mad'."[33] The social aspect of Lord Sepulchrave attends his son's ceremonial breakfast, but the new personal identity which he has assumed longs to be freed:

> . . . for there can be no ending to the owls whose child I am to the great owls whose infant and disciple I shall be so that I am forgetting all things and will be taken into the immemorial darkness far away.[34]

So delicately balanced is this ideal relationship between social and personal identity in the fictive world

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[32] Peake, Titus Groan, p. 62.

[33] Ibid., p. 369.

[34] Ibid., p. 401.

of Gormenghast that the slightest disturbance has horrendous ramifications, invariably resulting in death: Swelter is destroyed by Flay in the Hall of Spiders, Sepulchrave is eaten by owls in the Tower of Flints.

The two characters who select the first alternative to the ideal, that is acceptance of social identity with the creation of a self identity compatible with but not determined by that role, are the Countess of Groan and her daughter, the Lady Fuchsia.

Gertrude is able to function as a symbol of the ancient law, fulfilling the duties required of her, while, at the same time, she is able to retain a distinct personal identity. Surrounding herself with white cats and wild birds, Gertrude succeeds in her attempts "to freeze the outsider [the castle] off."[35] This freezing process is for Gertrude the ability to live in a world of prescribed duty and ritual, participating physically while remaining mentally isolated. In her role as Countess of Groan, Gertrude has a deep respect for the castle and the tradition on which it is based, as is evidenced by her visit to Dr. Prunesquallor in her belief that an enemy threatens the continued existence of the castle. Unaware,

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[35] Ibid., p. 398.

at that time, that it is Steerpike who is intent on destroying her ancient home, Gertrude as Countess of Groan vows to destroy whatever force dares to rebel against the established pattern of life in the castle: "I will crush its life out: I will break it: not only for Titus' sake and for his dead father's, but more -- for Gormenghast."[36] Later, she welcomes the flooding of Gormenghast in the knowledge that it will force Steerpike, the revealed enemy, to succumb to the search party. Finally, following the destruction of Steerpike, Gertrude reverts to her personal identity, becoming once more "the heavy and formidable figure, with her white cats for ever within range of her whistle and the wild birds upon her massive shoulders."[37]

Fuchsia, on the other hand, is unsuccessful in her attempts to establish a personal identity independent of her symbolic role. In the early years of her life, her personal identity had been defined through her imagination: she created a world apart from Gormenghast inhabited by "the fierce figures of her making, as they strolled from corner to corner, brooded like monsters or flew through the air with burning wings."[38] Fuchsia finds that as she

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[36]Peake, Gormenghast, pp. 42-43.

[37]Ibid., p. 505.

[38]Peake, Titus Groan, p. 80.

matures her ability to sustain this imaginative world diminishes: her inability to reconcile her personal identity with her social identity creates within her an intense emotional conflict. If she functions in Gormenghast without the use of her imagination, she is overwhelmed by the meaninglessness of her life, for "in spite of her title and all that it implied" she realizes that she is "of little consequence in the eyes of the castle, a purposeless misfit of a child, hapless and solitary."[39] Her life becomes a constant struggle wherein she fluctuates erratically between her social and personal identity. For a brief time she finds in Steerpike someone who appears to offer companionship and love, but Steerpike has merely feigned these qualities in order to manipulate the Lady Fuchsia. Upon her realization that she has been used by Steerpike to further his elaborate calculations to control the realm, she suppresses any capacity she had for love, reverting instead to melancholy imaginings. "When Fuchsia heard the news of Steerpike's treachery and when she realized how her first and only affair of the heart had been with a murderer, an expression of such sickness and horror darkened her face that her aspect was, from that moment, never wholly free of that corrosive stain."[40] It

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[39] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 452.

[40] Ibid., p. 395.

is during one of Fuchsia's melancholic states that she conceives of the idea of suicide and climbs to the window sill outside her room. A knock on her door interrupts her, forcing her "into a sudden consciousness"[41] of her social identity, but in her attempt to make the necessary transition between these two aspects of her personality, she falls to her death. For the Lady Fuchsia, there could be no reconciliation between her personal and social identity.

Although the seventy-sixth Countess of Groan finds a means of existing in an ossified system such as Gormenghast, her daughter is unable to succeed. Fuchsia can neither completely reject her role as another inmate in the ancestral castle nor convince herself that the role is meaningful. She, unlike Titus and Steerpike, is unable to divest herself of her decreed social role. Both her brother and Steerpike, however, refuse to accept the roles imposed on them by the ancient codes of law: each in his own way sets out to find an alternative to the social identity imposed on him by these codes.

Steerpike, as has been indicated, finds that his concept of self is not suited to his position in the Gormenghast hierarchy, and hence he attempts to supplant

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[41] Ibid., p. 454.

the existing pattern of life in the realm with one more congruous with his personal identity. To bring into existence a dictatorship controlled by "his cold, calculating . . . ordered mind"[42] becomes Steerpike's eventual plan. The major flaw in this plot is that Steerpike does not realize that there is in man's mind a certain irrational element that cannot be determined with mathematical precision. It is this element which enables Cora and Clarice to live two days longer than Steerpike calculated: "he deduced that they must have died from starvation on about that day when . . . he first rose from his sick bed. In point of fact they died two days later."[43] This incalculable aspect of human behaviour will lead to Steerpike's eventual downfall, for it is not only the behaviour of those around him which he cannot fully determine, there is within him this irrational element which his brain cannot fully understand or control. As his acts of destruction directed against the denizens of the castle continue, Steerpike's mind becomes increasingly warped until such acts no longer serve as a means to accomplish his earlier objectives, rather he is content to destroy for the pleasure that it gives him. His sole desire becomes

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[42] Peake, Titus Groan, p. 177.

[43] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 305.

"to be alone and evil."[44] "His cold, calculating . . . ordered mind" has been perverted: "there was nothing left, no, of the brain that would have scorned all this. The brilliant Steerpike had become a cloud of crimson. He wallowed in the dawn of the globe."[45] The method by which Steerpike chooses to redefine his social identity not only destroys him, it renders him psychologically and morally repellent both to the other denizens of Gormenghast and to the reader.

Titus's initial rejection of his social identity is, at first, an unconscious rejection, for at the end of Titus Groan he is still too young to make rational decisions. This first volume foreshadows Titus's struggle for identity and his eventual rebellion against the ancient codes of law and ritual of Gormenghast. During his christening, Titus interrupts the ceremony, falling from the pages of the ancient tome in which he has been placed. Later, during the ceremony by which he succeeds to the Earldom of Gormenghast, Titus, to the horror of the denizens of the realm, throws the symbols for the house of Groan, the ivy and the stone, into the lake. In the second volume, Titus continually rejects the influence asserted by the ancient

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[44] Ibid., p. 444.

[45] Ibid., p. 497.

codes of law and the castle to mould his personal identity. Because he frequently absents himself from the multitudinous ceremonies of Gormenghast, Titus's behaviour becomes of concern to the major figures in the Gormenghast hierarchy. To ignore duties decreed by the law is an offence of such seriousness that Titus is on occasion imprisoned, a punishment prescribed centuries ago for such offences. Still, he refuses to allow his personal identity to be subjugated to his social identity, defying the behavioural patterns decreed by the codes of law. His challenge to these codes takes the form of unprescribed sojourns in the wilds surrounding the castle. On one of his many visits to the uninhabited expanse encompassing Gormenghast, Titus discovers Keda's bastard child, "the thing," in whom he finds the ideal of his concept of self identity: the freedom to be and to do as one pleases.

It is here that the interaction with the third movement begins, for Titus seeks to free himself, as he believes "the thing" has done, from the influence of Gormenghast. Rejecting his social role as the seventy-seventh Earl of Groan, Titus begins a quest for his personal identity: "I want to be myself, and become what I make myself, a person, a real live person and not a symbol any more."[46]

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[46] Ibid., p. 459.

Titus's quest for his personal identity is one of the main thematic concerns of the final volume, wherein he continues to experience an intense conflict between his social and personal identity. To be physically free of Gormenghast, Titus learns, is not to be free of its influence. He realizes that he cannot simply reject the values and norms with which he lived for the first eighteen years of his life. The challenges and the mockeries levelled at his social identity and his ancestral home during this quest intensify Titus's uncertainty about his identity until he is no longer certain of the existence of Gormenghast. To assert his social identity in this factory world is pointless, for no one has heard of Gormenghast: "Your ways are curious, your terms are meaningless. I will ask you once again. What is this Gormenghast? What does it mean?'."[47] In his adherence to his social identity, however, Titus is eventually brought to realize that it is and always will be part of his personal identity, "for he carried his Gormenghast within him."[48] But he also realizes that it must be subject to his personal identity. With this knowledge, the freedom he believed he would find by leaving Gormenghast has been acquired. During the course

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[47] Peake, Titus Alone, p. 77.

[48] Ibid., p. 263.

of his adventures in the factory world, Titus's social identity and his ancestral home have been placed in proper perspective. They have laid the foundation for the creation of his personal identity, but it is he who must choose the design of this identity, building on it with each new experience. With this increased knowledge it is impossible for him to return to the confines of Gormenghast.

As Titus struggles in the factory world to come to terms with his personal and social identity, many of the denizens of the region are in the process of subjugating their personal identity to the totalitarian technocracy, permitting the scientists to determine their life style and behavioural pattern. In their acceptance of "the spirit of the age," the inhabitants of the factory world are enslaving themselves, as centuries ago the inhabitants of Gormenghast had, to man-made structures and devices. That the scientists are manipulating man's brain through the use of technological inventions, as evidenced by the two helmeters, the inhabitants of the marble city, and the denizens of the factory, makes this technological system more sinister than Gormenghast.

Most of the persons depicted in the third volume are acquiescent to having their identities thus determined for them, but there are those who have found that it is impossible to live under this system, many of whom have

fled to the Under-River, where they live in anarchy. Here, reminiscing about their pasts while awaiting an end to their misery, are found the apparent "failures of the earth . . . the great conclave of the displaced."[49]

Those who remain on the surface and who have neither opted for the scientific way of life nor attempted to reconcile their personal identity as defined by the traditional system of Muzzlehatch's region with this new technological system are to be found in the region of abandoned projects. Clinging desperately to the only joy that remains to them "in a world gone joyless,"[50] the sunset, the people in this region have become, as have those in the Under-River, "masters . . . in the art of doing nothing."[51]

In contrast to these two groups stand Muzzlehatch and Juno who, in the first sections of the third volume, manage to retain a personal identity defined by the traditional system while interacting with the totalitarian technocracy. As this technological system attempts to assert its power, however, it annihilates Muzzlehatch's

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[49] Ibid., p. 132.

[50] Ibid., p. 157.

[51] Ibid., p. 151.

animals, threatening his personal life style. Such an emotional shock is the destruction of his zoo that Muzzlehatch's mind becomes unbalanced: "this was not the Muzzlehatch he used to know. This was something quite different. A solitary who had no friends, nor needed any: for he was obsessed."[52] With his personal identity partially destroyed, Muzzlehatch searches out the central factory: "he had no right, no wish to escape the disgusting world itself across whose body he must now retrace his way into the camp of the enemy."[53] To destroy the central factory is not to put an end to the influence of the scientists, however, for Muzzlehatch is finally murdered by two products of this age, the Helmeteers. Muzzlehatch's earlier passivity, allowing "the spirit of the age" to manifest itself in such a powerful form, had made the possibility of destroying the system a virtual impossibility for any one person.

Unlike Muzzlehatch, Juno, persuaded by Anchor that a stage of her life was ended, sets out to find "a new life."[54] Leaving the world created by science before it can obliterate her personal identity, Juno embarks, as

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[52] Ibid., p. 241.

[53] Ibid., p. 157.

[54] Ibid., p. 196.

Titus had, upon a quest, leaving behind her familiar world for "another country."[55]

Refusing to allow any one system fully to determine their identity, Juno and Titus with Anchor as guide fly out of the factory world, finding the utmost freedom possible in Peake's imaginative universe -- the freedom to mould their personal and social identity as they choose, selecting, as Titus does at the end of Titus Alone, paths "never known before."[56] With Titus's realization that there can be no end to his quest, the third volume concludes.

The imaginary worlds created by Mervyn Peake combine the "geography of the cosmos" with the "commerce of the cosmos" to evoke two decidedly different world systems. The ancient world of Gormenghast with its rigid hierarchical structure, powerful codes of law, and myriad ceremonies stands in contrast to the factory world with its ill-defined structure, its technological devices, and its developing ceremonies. Yet in the three movements which form the "commerce of the cosmos" these fictive worlds are shown to have similar motifs.

As the identity movement unites with the freedom movement, the denizens of both worlds are shown to live in

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[55] Ibid., p. 197.

[56] Ibid., p. 263.

closed systems, unable to conceive of other patterns of life. "'There is nowhere else',"[57] Gertrude warns Titus as he leaves Gormenghast, while Cheeta's last words to him are, "'I hate you . . . I hate your Gormenghast. I will always hate it. If it were true I'd hate it even more."[58] So wrapped up in their particular pattern of existence are the denizens of each of these world systems that they are unable to "hear the rushing of the larger worlds"[59] or to "see them as they circle round the sun."[60]

These two imaginary world systems reveal a complex circular pattern wherein man has created structures which he elevates in time to a position of supreme importance and to which he eventually subjugates himself, now forced to submit to the very structures he once created. Most of the inhabitants in these fictive worlds, however, need this subjection and are unable to function without it, as evidenced in the Under-River and the land of abandoned projects. To continue their obedience to the castle and

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[57] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 510.

[58] Peake, Titus Alone, p. 252.

[59] Charles Dickens, Bleak House (London, 1971), p. 21.

[60] Ibid.

the ancient codes of law, the denizens of Gormenghast, following the flood, set about repairing their ruined home. Toward the end of Titus Alone the persons at Cheeta's party turn on Titus, Juno, and Anchor to seek vengeance, partially for the destruction of the central factory and partially for their own personal discomfort. Preferring to be enslaved in some form of system, the inhabitants of Peake's imaginary worlds will struggle to maintain that enslavement.

To remain within a given system is to devote one's life to the perpetuation of that system, allowing the principles on which it has been constructed to increase in complexity. As Peake has illustrated, as long as there are devotees of the pattern of life that exists in either Gormenghast or the factory world, such world systems can never be completely destroyed. Moreover, having limited themselves to the narrow range of experience provided by these fictive world systems, such devotees will continually disavow the existence of other life styles. In so doing, they will eventually be irrevocably (because unknowingly) confined in a prison of their own making. Although, as previously indicated, both Gormenghast and the factory world suffer some form of destruction, the inhabitants of these world systems refuse to consider abandoning the mode of existence known to them

in favour of another way of life; rather they set about rebuilding the only system they can conceive of. In this respect, neither the inhabitants of Gormenghast nor of the factory world view their particular style of existence as an evil pattern that must be destroyed. To them, evil is any force that threatens to destroy their familiar pattern of life, as Steerpike is to Gormenghast and Titus is to the factory world. In Gormenghast, the most fundamental evil to be sought out and destroyed is the desire for change; while in the factory world, resistance to the changes initiated by the totalitarian technocracy is the supreme crime.

That Peake has created a more vicious and confining system in the factory world than in Gormenghast does not mean that its inhabitants cannot learn to idolize and to perpetuate that system. In Titus Alone, Peake has illustrated how readily people will learn to adapt to any given system no matter how negative it may appear. By the end of this volume, the reader is fully aware that the scientists have the potential to create a mechanical world void of men and women, bound together instead by equations and scientific devices. That Peake chose to create certain affinities between the imaginative world depicted in the third volume and the world as normally perceived heightens the emotional impact of this evolution, for

during his sojourn in the army, in Belsen, as a war artist, and in various hospitals, Peake saw certain affinities between the development of modern man and the totalitarian technocracy depicted in Titus Alone. We, too, Peake would argue, have acquired the necessary skills to construct crystal cities, to build human zoos, and to manipulate man's brain.

Nevertheless, although Peake created decidedly unique world systems, each in its peculiar way moulding and manipulating its inhabitants, he did not depict all aspects of these fictive worlds in completely negative terms. It is through the relationships of various characters in his imaginary worlds that Peake assured the reader that such patterns of life are not totally empty and meaningless. That such fictive worlds have "many good and true people"[61] in them reduces the impact of the negative elements to be found in these worlds. The familial love which develops between Titus and Fuchsia minimizes the futility of their symbolic roles in the Groan lineage, as does Nannie Slagg's concern for both of them. Flay's and Prunesquallor's affection for Fuchsia and Titus adds warmth to the world of Gormenghast that the ancient codes of law fail to prescribe.

Yet Peake eliminates most of the personalities we learn to appreciate and admire during our stay in

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[61] Ibid., p. 21.

Gormenghast. If the bond between these characters was the redeeming quality of this ancient world, forces within it have destroyed those that have provided that world with its warmth. Keda, Flay, Sepulchrave, Nannie Slagg, and Fuchsia have been destroyed by the time Titus decides to leave Gormenghast: each in his own way has "finished with Gormenghast" and is "in some other climate."[62] To leave Gormenghast after the death of these characters is not to depart from a place that offers the warmth of human intercourse. Rather, it is to leave a world that is no longer worth remaining in, for with the exception of the Prunesquallors and the Countess of Groan, the latter having already returned to her reveries, the fictive world of Gormenghast has simply become a massive architectural structure confined by various geographical features. Those characters that Peake had created and then in turn removed from Gormenghast left behind centuries of architectural creation, now reduced to something "dank and foul . . . no place to live in. After dark there was illness in every breath. Animals had been drowned in its corridors, a thousand things had decayed. The place was noxious."[63]

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[62] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 507.

[63] Ibid., p. 504.

For those who choose to remain in this moribund world there is no opportunity to attain a new way of life and, as before the flood, they acquiesce in their symbolic roles as prescribed by the ancient codes of law. Titus, no longer able to accept the "meaningless ceremonies whose sacredness appeared to be in inverse ratio to their comprehensibility or usefulness,"[64] leaves his ancestral home.

His entry into the technological world of the third volume is accompanied by his introduction to a few denizens who have not been completely integrated into this world system, and hence still retain a certain degree of generosity and compassion, as found in Muzzlehatch, Lady Cusp-Canine, Juno, Anchor, and the trio from the Under-River. To Titus and to the reader, these characters are the redeeming quality of an encroaching scientific world system, a system that is singularly cold and sinister. The struggles and aspirations of these acquaintances of Titus humanize a world based primarily on scientific equations and technological devices. The limited tenderness and understanding that these characters show to Titus stand in contrast to the emotional and intellectual perversity of Cheeta and her parents.

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[64] Ibid., p. 505.

These qualities, love, compassion, understanding, that link one person to another or to a particular place cannot be fully understood by the ruling forces in this world, and hence, when Cheeta conceived of her elaborate mockery of Titus's ancient home in the belief that such a spectacle would reduce him to madness, she failed, as Steerpike had failed in Gormenghast, to take into consideration that there exists within the heart of man certain incalculable forces. Both failed to understand the irrational bond that not only links one being to another but to life. Cheeta's calculations that Titus would yield to her demands following her exaggerated depiction of those who had lived within the Groan castle are thwarted by his own desire for life and, more importantly, by those who come to his aid. To the reader, the "bizarre, outlandish faces"[65] of those who come to Titus's rescue is an indication that the scientists have not fully succeeded in their attempts to manipulate all the inhabitants of the region. In addition, "the battered masks" and "the hanks of hair"[66] created by Cheeta to represent the denizens of Gormenghast are used by Peake to clarify the apparent contradictions of life in Gormenghast, for all that those like Cheeta and her father can understand is that

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[65]Peake, Titus Alone, p. 238.

[66]Ibid., p. 249.

Gormenghast, if it exists at all, is a world of bizarre rituals and of beings with physical abnormalities absent from their technological world.

What Cheeta's mockery could not capture were the struggles, dreams, and aspirations of those who had lived in Gormenghast -- qualities that are heightened because of their absence from Cheeta's "horrible charade."[67] To bring forth Fuchsia "walking like a duck"[68] or the seventy-sixth Countess of Groan "with exaggerated grandeur, trailing a length of dusty, moth-eaten fustian"[69] is simply to create artificial surfaces, for no power wielded by Cheeta or the scientists can adequately capture that tormented adolescent who fell from her attic window or the "infinite gentleness"[70] of her mother as "she drew the corner of the sheet up a little further"[71] to cover her daughter's corpse. The ultimate effect of Cheeta's mockery is to create within the reader an increased fondness for the Groan family and for those that had served them. Through Cheeta's re-creation

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[67] Ibid., p. 237.

[68] Ibid., p. 234.

[69] Ibid., p. 233.

[70] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 462.

[71] Ibid., p. 462.

of "that part of Gormenghast that was made of flesh and blood"[72] Peake has shown that there was much good in that ancient world that cannot be understood simply by insistence on external appearances.

But he has also shown in his elaboration of the imaginary world of Gormenghast itself that it is not without its negative qualities. Its "dead repetitions" and "moribund ceremonies"[73] can only limit the intellectual and spiritual growth of those who acquiesce in them. It is, as previously indicated in this chapter, a world system to which Titus can never return, for the knowledge that he has gained from his experiences both in Gormenghast and in the worlds of Muzzlehatch and of the scientists has brought him to an increased level of awareness, so that he knows that to remain in any one system is to accept defeat. To return to Gormenghast would be for Titus to find security but not meaning in life. No longer able to believe in the value of his symbolic role as a link in the Groan lineage, Titus discovers in his own way, as Juno and Anchor have in theirs, that the ceaseless quest for a better way of life is perhaps all that one can aspire to. Titus's decision to continue his search for "some kind of knowledge"[74] absent

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[72] Ibid., p. 504.

[73] Ibid., p. 506.

[74] Peake, Titus Alone, p. 262.

from both Gormenghast and the factory world is the "quality of the 'joy'"[75] in Peake's fantasy. Peake, in his refusal to allow Titus to devote himself to any given system, asserts his belief in that special quality in mankind which refuses to accept "final defeat."[76] Because of a belief in a better way of life, a select group of people will always embark on some form of quest, leaving behind them, as Titus did, "everything that belonged to his home."[77]

And so ends Mervyn Peake's last novel. Not in defeat. Not in triumph. But in the quiet certainty that the need to question extant patterns of life and to search for still better ones is everything. Undeniably, Titus's quest may only reveal systems similar to Gormenghast or the factory world; but so too, he may find a new world, a glimpse of the truth, "and all that lies beyond the tenuous skyline."[78]

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[75] Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories", p. 62.

[76] Ibid., p. 60.

[77] Peake, Titus Alone, p. 263.

[78] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 508.

CHAPTER IV

THE GORMENGHAST TRILOGY: TECHNIQUES OF SUB-CREATION

It has been previously shown in this study[1] that the creator of an imaginary world can posit any imaginable basis for that world. Such a world can contain anything from Tolkien's Hobbits to Lewis's Sorns; but if the reader is unable to envision a fictive world congruent with such fantastic beings, he will soon turn away unsatisfied. In other words, the creator of an imaginary world must endow it with an "inner consistency".[2] He must persuade the reader that "what he relates is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world."[3] The more vividly developed the imaginary world, the more likely that the reader's "mind can enter"[4] into that world, thereby inducing "belief"[5] in the fictive events. "What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator'."[6]

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[1] See Chapter II, pp. 55-60.

[2] J.R.R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories", pp. 62-63.

[3] Ibid., p. 36.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., pp. 36-39.

[6] Ibid., p. 36.

To what extent Mervyn Peake succeeded in his role as a 'sub-creator' is considered in this chapter. In this respect, this chapter analyses certain of the stylistic and structural principles on which Peake constructed his Gormenghast trilogy in order to make the imaginary worlds depicted therein appear tangible and alive.

Mervyn Peake, in the first two volumes of his trilogy, shaped an imaginary world which is different from ours in some essential way by first combining words to create a new image, "Gormenghast," and then by setting out the actions and the characters to be consistent with that image. The manner in which Peake accomplishes this "setting out" procedure may aptly be termed "Realism of Presentation,"[7] defined by that other fantasist, C.S. Lewis, as "the art of bringing something close to us, making it palpable and vivid, by sharply observed or sharply imagined detail."[8] While this quality is particularly evident in Titus Groan and Gormenghast, it is absent from Titus Alone, a suggestive feature that will be dealt with later in this chapter.

Approximately the first hundred pages (Chapters 1-13) of Titus Groan are exclusively devoted to rendering the fictive world of Gormenghast and its denizens "palpable and

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[7] C.S. Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism (Cambridge, 1961), p. 57.

[8] Ibid.

alive." The reader's introduction to this "fantastic castle not to be located on any map"[9] is followed by a detailed account of the architectural features of the castle and the physical characteristics and actions of its inhabitants on a particular day in an unknown year: "The eighth day of the eighth month," Flay informs Rottcodd, adding that he is "uncertain about the year."[10] In these introductory chapters, the reader is allowed to observe those characters that are to become important in the future life of the realm. Moving from one of the attics of the castle, the Hall of Bright Carvings, Peake permits the reader to descend with Flay through the kitchens and "a labyrinth of stone corridors"[11] to the very rooms in which the sundry members of the Groan family reside, thereby giving us some idea of the physical structure of this ancient castle. Throughout Titus Groan and Gormenghast, he expatiates not only on these details, but on the geographical confines of the realm of Gormenghast.[12]

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[9] "Some Recent British Novels", New Republic, CXV (Dec., 1946), 740.

[10] Peake, Titus Groan, p. 21.

[11] Ibid., p. 41.

[12] This aspect of Peake's first two Gormenghast novels has already received detailed consideration in Chapter III of this study; see pp. 63-64.

Yet, as indicated in the previous chapter, Gormenghast is more than "towers" and "tracts"[13] it is also a world composed of "Mr. Peake's creatures."[14] Not only does Peake guide us through his fictive castle and over the rugged lands surrounding it, he presents us with descriptive details of his "creatures" and of their personalities. As we pass along "the stone passages"[15] and are introduced in turn to "Lord Sepulchrave, the Countess Gertrude, Fuchsia their eldest child, Doctor Prunesquallor, Mr. Rottcodd, Flay, Swelter, Nannie Slagg, Steerpike and Sourdust,"[16] the graphic nature of Peake's prose style becomes apparent: "Peake uses the precise and evocative language of the poet, coupled with the eye of an artist."[17] Each paragraph Peake wrote was for him like painting a picture, with the page the canvas and the words the paint:

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[13]Peake, Gormenghast, p. 7.

[14]Paul Green, "Gothick", New Statesman, LXXV (Jan., 1968), 114.

[15]Peake, Titus Groan, p. 25.

[16]Ibid., p. 86.

[17]Langdon Jones, "The 77th Earl", New Worlds, CLXXVIII (April, 1968), 62.

The paper is breathless
Under the hand
And the pencil is poised
Like a warlock's want
But the white page darkens.[18]

Mervyn Peake's "inexhaustible piling of detail upon detail"[19] for which he has been harshly criticized with respect to Titus Groan and Gormenghast, is not without artistic purpose, for it allows him to attribute an "aggressively three-dimensional"[20] quality not only to his world, but to the characters that inhabit that world. In this respect, the more visual details Peake can provide about his grotesque characters, the more precise and meaningful will be the reader's picture of these beings. Peake's attempt to render his grotesque characters with physical verisimilitude lends a strong visual quality to his novels. Because of the physical abnormalities of the characters depicted in Gormenghast, the reader, if he is to envision such distorted features, must be presented with sufficient verbal pictures to be able to "see" Titus's ugliness or Gertrude's immensity. Simply to write that Titus was ugly or that his mother was of gigantic stature would not be

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[18] Peake, "Introduction", in Drawings by Mervyn Peake, p. 7.

[19] N.L. Rothman, "Chiaroscuro Grotesque", Saturday Review, XXIX (Nov., 1946), 38.

[20] Anthony Burgess, "Introduction", in Titus Groan, p. 10.

adequate, for Peake must show in what peculiar way these physical traits manifest themselves. The presentation of the bulk of the Countess of Groan successfully demonstrates his ability to create verbal pictures. Titus's ugliness, however, is never fully realized. Only when contrasting the two can it be seen how important this technique is. By permitting Sepulchrave and Prunesquallor only to comment briefly on Titus's facial features, Peake never fully develops the actual nature of Titus's physical distortion. In a world where physical abnormality is the norm, there would seem to be every reason for Titus to be ugly; but, in terms of the meagre information given to the reader, Titus is no more "hideous"[21] than anyone else in Gormenghast.

After the episode at Titus's birth, we are once reminded that his head was of an unusual shape, being "both long and of a bulk that promised to develop into something approaching the unique."[22] Thereafter, Titus is no longer referred to as a being with repulsive features. One is tempted to speculate that Peake meant the comments about Titus's physical abnormalities to be read in an ironic manner: that he is <u>not</u> physically deformed, but is labelled "hideous" by his father and the doctor because he is physically

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[21]Peake, <u>Titus Groan</u>, p. 51.

[22]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 97.

normal and hence dissimilar to all other infants born into the world of Gormenghast.

This interpretation is particularly enticing in connection with Titus Alone. The physical characteristics of the majority of the men and women depicted in this volume are not unlike those of the people we see every day on the street, and, in the world presented in this volume, Titus is not considered physically deformed. Rather, it is a world in which many find him physically attractive. Lady Cusp-Canine, for instance, is attracted by "his face" and his "splendid eyes."[23] Moreover, both Juno and Cheeta, finding Titus physically attractive, allow themselves to become sexually involved with the seventy-seventh Earl. Had Peake sufficiently developed his original picture of Titus, greater clarity and consistency would have been given to the presentation of Titus throughout the trilogy. As it stands, Peake's presentation of Titus is decidedly enigmatic, with the reader never fully believing that Titus is a "hideous child."[24]

Titus's mother, however, is presented in such minute visual detail that the reader can readily "slide into the

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[23]Peake, Titus Alone, p. 63.

[24]Peake, Titus Groan, p. 51.

capacious midnight regions of her bosom."[25] Peake attains this effect by describing her stature in terms relative to her surroundings, so that she is always "obliterating the furniture she sat in."[26] This picture of the Countess constantly overshadowing and hence diminishing the confines within which she has been placed is repeatedly emphasized by Peake:

> On the first horse, a great grey hunter by any normal standard, was seated, side-saddle, the Countess. She had been hidden among leaves, only the horse showing itself; but immediately she became exposed to view her mount became a pony.[27]

Highly sensitive to linguistic shades and subtleties, Peake selected his words to create vivid images of the Countess's size. Throughout the first two volumes, the appearance of the Countess tends to reduce the beings and objects that surround her, so that her acquaintances become like dwarfs, the furnishings of Gormenghast like those of a doll's house. While Peake's development of the Countess's size can thus be considered highly successful, his failure to develop Titus's ugliness can only invite the criticism that he did not fully visualize or substantiate this particular aspect of his

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[25] Ibid., p. 317.

[26] Ibid., p. 304.

[27] Ibid., p. 489.

fictive world.[28]

Not only did Peake create vivid verbal pictures of most of his characters, he also explored certain aspects of their personalities. In this respect, Peake, in his role as third-person-omniscient narrator, presents the reader with the struggles of his characters as they attempt to understand their personal and social identities in terms of their ancient world.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, Peake has explored the conflicts which the Groans, their friends, and their servants endure as they learn to live with the rules and ceremonies imposed on them by the codes of law. If the ultimate effect of these conflicts is singularly grotesque, the development of these struggles gives a quality of verisimilitude to the world depicted in Titus Groan and Gormenghast. Peake employs all available techniques to give us insight into his characters, thereby allowing us to understand them and their motivations. By the end of Gormenghast, not only do we know what the denizens of

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[28]To trace Peake's success in developing the physical characteristics of other of the inhabitants of Gormenghast would add little to this chapter. It could be noted, for instance, that Peake used descriptive detail to reduce Nannie Slagg to the size of a midget or to flatten Irma's chest. Suffice it to say that the physical characteristics of all the characters, with the exception of Titus, are sufficiently developed that the sketches of them that were later included in certain editions merely confirm the reader's concept of their physical appearance.

Peake's fictive world look like, we know also how their minds function and how they relate one to another. At the Dark Breakfast, for instance, Peake, using the stream of consciousness style,[29] guides us about the table, allowing our minds to flow with those of his characters. The section devoted to this breakfast gives the reader insight into the personalities of Peake's characters hitherto unexperienced in Titus Groan. Previously, we had only been told what they were thinking or feeling, but, in these few pages,[30] Peake gives his major characters a new dimension. No longer are we being told what they feel or think. Rather, we become one with them, permitting our minds to flow with theirs. Sepulchrave's bizarre longing for the owls becomes our longing, so too does Gertrude's affinity for birds and cats become our passion. In the fullest sense possible, the reader's "mind can enter" into the fictive world of Gormenghast through cohabiting the minds of the denizens of that world.

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[29] Robert Stanton, An Introduction to Fiction, pp. 64-65. As a literary term, the stream of Consciousness Style, "was first applied to the long (45 pages) unpunctuated, nearly chaotic rendering of Molly Bloom's thoughts at the end of Joyce's Ulysses." The section in Titus Groan is not unlike that found in Ulysses.

[30] Peake, Titus Groan, pp. 392-402.

Yet, as these "over-life size friends"[31] attempt to understand themselves and certain aspects of their world and the behaviour of those they must communicate with, the effect is one of "amusement and disgust, laughter and horror, mirth and revulsion."[32]

To understand how these apparently diverse aspects intertwine, one may use Thomson's example of "very small children . . . to whom one makes grimaces which increasingly distort the face."[33] His argument is based on the hypothesis that "the child will laugh at the face pulled only up to a certain point (presumably, while it is still sure of the face as a familiar thing); once this point is passed, once the face becomes so distorted that the child feels threatened, it cries in fear."[34] This "thin dividing line between the two reactions," Thomson further argues, "is of interest to the student of the grotesque, or, to put it more precisely, the situation where both reactions are evoked at the same time, where both the comic aspect of the abnormal and the

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[31]Gilmore, A World Away, p. 74.

[32]Philip Thomson, The Grotesque (London, 1972), p. 24.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., p. 25.

fearful or disgusting aspect are felt equally."[35] This quality in Peake's trilogy may best be expressed as "the horrifying tinged with the comic."[36]

To illustrate how this quality functions in Titus Groan and Gormenghast, an examination of the process by which Steerpike's values become warped, resulting in his terrorization of Gormenghast castle and its inhabitants, will suffice. Initially, Steerpike is presented in a sympathetic manner. Our introduction to him in Swelter's kitchen is to a lonely boy for whom the drunken chef has, as far as we know, an unwarranted loathing:

> 'I shall shing to you, Steerpike, to you,' whispered the cook . . . 'To you, the newcomer, the blue mummer and the slug of summer - to you the hideous, and insidious, and appallingly cretinous goat in a house of stenches.'[37]

That Steerpike desires "to escape from the Great Kitchen"[38] in hopes of finding a better position in Gormenghast castle attracts the reader to him. In a world where no one seems interested in doing anything, Steerpike appears to be a

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 37.

[37] Peake, Titus Groan, p. 37.

[38] Ibid., p. 53.

youth we can admire, for in him, at least, there is a quality of vigour absent from the other characters.

In the early chapters of Titus Groan, Steerpike's playful manipulation of Irma or of Cora and Clarice has a certain innocence about it and his antics with these brainless women are decidedly entertaining. While we realize that Steerpike is using these women to attain his own goal (a better position in the Gormenghast hierarchy), his manipulation of them does not initially seem to threaten the castle or the women involved, nor outrage the reader's sensibilities. However, as Steerpike's values become more distorted, and as he attempts to destroy not only parts of the castle, but the people in it, we become aware of the sinister aspect of his personality -- his desire for absolute power and his willingness to murder and destroy to attain it. Once brought to this realization, the reader is repelled by Steerpike's warped motivation. But while by this stage we know that Steerpike's plans for the castle are of a singularly negative nature, Peake continues to depict his treatment of the aforementioned women and of the other denizens of Gormenghast in a humorous vein, so that, although we are sometimes horrified at his plans to destroy Gormenghast, we are also frequently amused at the means used to attain that goal. In this respect, his command that Cora and Clarice sit in Gormenghast lake with "only their long

necks and saucer-like faces"[39] above the water creates a highly comic situation. That Steerpike has complete control over the minds of these two women, who, "powerless to disobey him,"[40] are treated as his slaves, lends a certain horrific aspect to the episode. In short, we simultaneously feel aversion and mirth.

However, in the second volume, Gormenghast, Steerpike's personality becomes "so distorted" that we no longer recognize him as the same person who escaped from Swelter's kitchen. Not only does his personality become increasingly warped, his physical appearance becomes correspondingly more and more repulsive: "Nor was he, physically, any longer personable."[41] The more destructive and gruesome Steerpike's values and behaviour become, the less able the reader is to find anything to amuse him. "And we laugh, we laugh with a will in the beginning . . . but

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[39] Ibid., p. 475.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 302. The distorted features of Steerpike are given greater clarity in the following pages of the novel: "The burns upon his face and neck and hands were there to stay. Only the worms could put an end to them. The effect of the face was of something skew-bald; the taut crimson tissue, forming fiery patterns against the wax-like pallor of his skin. His hands were blood-red and silky; their creases and wrinkles like those on the hand of a monkey."

we don't laugh any more."[42] By the end of the second volume, we are no longer experiencing the full effect of the grotesque, as defined earlier in this chapter. Rather, Peake turns more and more to the horrific. To return to Thomson's example, the once recognizable face has been distorted beyond recognition.

In his third volume, Titus Alone, Peake, for the most part, continues to explore the workings of the minds of his characters in this fictive world in terms of the grotesque. Once again the reader is presented with a group of characters whose behaviour simultaneously amuses and repels. In the Under-River, the antics of the characters are decidedly entertaining. As they cart about hundreds of copies of the same book that no one ever intends to read or disentangle wool with no thought of knitting, the reader finds a certain levity in the situation. At the same time, however, the realization that this meaningless way of life, imposed in one way or another on these denizens by the powers governing the surface world, is to be their fate until they die, forces us to recoil in horror.

As Peake moves us away from the Under-River towards the central factory, the effect of the grotesque is diminished, and, as in Gormenghast, the horrific aspect of

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[42]Samuel Beckett, Endgame (New York, 1958), p. 19.

this world and the values of those that control a sizeable section of it becomes paramount. There is nothing comic about the values and behaviour of those like Cheeta and her father. Having no regard for human or animal life, their only desire is to destroy, either for science or for the personal satisfaction that it gives them. If, in the Under-River, we are occasionally amused by the behaviour of the characters, as we approach the central factory, we are shocked by the cruelty of the situation.

In this instance, however, I should like to change Thomson's example of the familiar face that becomes unrecognizably distorted. Rather, I posit that in Titus Alone Peake's child (the reader) has simply been shown himself in a mirror. Unable to bear the image that he sees there, he recoils in horror. To accept this hypothesis is to understand why Peake did not devote long passages of descriptive detail creating physically abnormal denizens within the crystal city or the factory region, for he did not intend that these characters should be physically or psychologically different from those in the world as normally perceived. In his last novel, Peake has taught us to know his characters not as "over-life size friends," as in Titus Groan and Gormenghast, but as extensions of ourselves. In his role as teacher, Peake has convinced us that if his characters in Gormenghast are "tangible and

alive" those in the totalitarian technocracy are capable of walking our streets.

The style used by Peake in writing his trilogy enhances the nature of the world systems depicted therein. Had Titus Groan or Gormenghast been written in the style of Titus Alone, that is in a "harsh, strident, episodic"[43] manner, Peake would have been unable to capture adequately the decaying grandeur and timelessness of the fictive world of Gormenghast. Likewise, had Titus Alone utilised the "florid richness of the prose"[44] found in Peake's earlier Gormenghast novels, the constant turmoil and rapid flux of time which are paramount in his last novel would have been lost. As it stands, however, Peake has written each of his novels "in a style germane to its substance,"[45] so that the style of each novel reflects the characteristics of the world and the values of the inhabitants contained therein.

In Titus Groan and Gormenghast there is, for the most part, a distinctly soporific quality about Peake's prose. If we find the rhythm of these two novels frequently lulling us to sleep, it does no more than reflect the tone

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[43] Lin Carter, Imaginary Worlds (New York, 1973), p. 101.

[44] Ibid., p. 99.

[45] Peake, "Introduction", in Drawings by Mervyn Peake, p. 11. Since the style of Titus Groan and Gormenghast is fundamentally the same, they will be considered as a unit. The style of Titus Alone will be considered separately.

of life in Gormenghast. Peake repeatedly reminds us that "the huge, corroding bell-like heart of Gormenghast was half asleep and there appeared to be no reverberation from its muffled thudding."[46] To capture this quality of Gormenghast without forcing the reader into a "detachment of trance"[47] necessitates that Peake, as he guides us from one room of the ancient castle to another, does so using "repetition plus variation."[48] In a world where one day is like another, and for the creation of which Mervyn Peake has been criticized for nothing more than scene after scene of "infinite monotony,"[49] he has, in fact, given vitality and variety to that world through the richness of the language and through repetition with significant variation. Peake, in these two volumes, selects his words and phrases precisely and appropriately to create a vivid "succession of pictures painted in detailed high relief,"[50] as in the

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[46]Peake, Gormenghast, p. 17.

[47]Ibid., p. 12.

[48]Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p. 154.

[49]N.L. Rothman, "Chiaroscuro Grotesque," p. 38.

[50]Review of Gormenghast, T.L.S. (December 1, 1950), p. 761.

episode in which Cora and Clarice give Steerpike a tour of their room of roots:

> It seemed at first as though it would be impossible to stir at all in this convoluting meshwork, but Steerpike was amazed to see that the twins were moving about freely in the labyrinth. Years of experience had taught them the possible approaches to the window. They had already reached it and were looking out into the evening. Steerpike made an attempt at following them, but was soon inextricably lost in the writhing maze. Wherever he turned he was faced with a network of weird arms that rose and fell, dipped and clawed, motionless yet alive with serpentine rhythms.[51]

As with this room of roots, each time we enter a room in the castle or adjourn to the surrounding forests, Peake creates intricate pictures from a variety of angles. On one occasion he examines one aspect of a particular picture, while on another occasion the same picture is examined from a different position. In the room of roots, for instance, the reader not only "sees" the room through the narrator's eyes, but through those of Cora, Clarice and Steerpike. In each instance the reader views the room in a slightly different manner, so that each visit to this particular room fills us "with surprise and freshness."[52]

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[51] Peake, Titus Groan, p. 251.

[52] Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p. 154.

The intricacy of the pictures that compose the world of Gormenghast together with the variety of positions that the reader is forced to assume as he is presented with them enables Peake to persuade the reader, as he repeatedly climbs the stairs to Fuchsia's attic or constantly gropes through the subterranean tunnels of the castle, that he has not experienced this particular episode before.

Yet, in these two volumes, we not only move in space through Gormenghast, we also move irregularly in time. Although Peake's first novel, Titus Groan, extends over approximately one year, it cannot be divided into four equal parts, each parallel to one season. Rather, as we wade through Titus Groan, the hands of Peake's clock speed up, so that by the end of the novel time is moving at a faster rate than at the beginning. While the first chapters cover one day: "Time is no element at all. You look up to find that you have been reading for seventy-five pages, of the announcement of the birth of Titus Groan,"[53] the last chapters encompass several months. In these last chapters, however, Peake also persuades the reader that the passage of time, albeit a day, a month, or a year, is insignificant. Like Mr. Rottcodd at the end of the novel, we are no longer able to distinguish whether a couple of months or a year has

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[53] N.L. Rothman, "Chiaroscuro Grotesque", p. 38.

passed since Titus's birth. Moreover, we realize that in Peake's fictive world the distinction does not matter, for, in retrospect, despite the efforts of Steerpike, the ancient codes of law see to it that change is superficial. "It is as if the whole spectacle took place under water. So that at the end of the book everyone is pretty much where he began."[54]

If, at the end of Titus Groan, Peake has convinced us that the distinction between days and months is not significant, then during the first sections of Gormenghast wherein the professors are introduced he persuades us that time itself can be stopped. Once Peake has recapitulated the major events of Titus Groan, informing the reader that six years have lapsed since "Titus has entered his stronghold,"[55] we become trapped in a moment of time. Peake locks the reader in a timeless cell with that "hoary band of professors through whose hands . . . . Titus will have to wriggle."[56] The experience is excruciatingly painful. Peake's language merely intensifies the boredom of characters such as Deadyawn, Bellgrove, Opus Fluke. These professors

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[54]"Some Recent British Novels", p. 740.

[55]Peake, Titus Groan, p. 506.

[56]Peake, Gormenghast, p. 15.

contribute little to the reader's understanding of Gormenghast, and hence, considering their relative lack of importance in Peake's fictive world, the episode involving them could have been treated with greater brevity. To have been trapped with them for twenty-five pages would have been more than sufficient. As this section of Gormenghast now stands, it can do little more than alienate Peake's reader, for, as one professor after another is introduced, it becomes obvious that there are no characteristics to differentiate them one from another: "Every shade is another shade of grey."[57] To criticize Peake for over-developing and over-substantiating this particular aspect of his fictive world does not seem unwarranted, for the section devoted to the professors enhances his second novel, Gormenghast, neither thematically nor artistically. Had Mervyn Peake reduced the "vile subterranean light that filled the Professors' Common-Room"[58] to a mere glimmer, the novel would have been tautened.[59]

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[57] N.L. Rothman, "Chiaroscuro Grotesque", p. 38.

[58] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 51.

[59] Approximately every other chapter of the first two hundred pages of Gormenghast is devoted to the professors. These chapters seem to me to represent Peake's way of mocking the English educational system and those who worked within it.

While Peake uses elaboration as one of the principles to render the events and characters of his fictive world credible, the use of such a technique can lead to excessive descriptive detail. Not only can Peake draw the reader into his imaginary world by using this technique, he can also force him to withdraw by burdening him with excessive details which have little relevance to the fictive world.

As soon as Irma has married Bellgrove, the newly appointed head professor, Peake gives us the key to our cell. Once again we begin to move in time: "And the days move on and the names of the month change and the four seasons bury one another and it is spring again and yet again."[60] However, as we watch "Titus Groan . . . wading through his boyhood,"[61] the passage of time in Peake's fictive world assumes a sense of urgency. During the last hundred pages of Peake's second novel, the inhabitants of Gormenghast are brought to the realization that, as the years have passed, Steerpike has been attempting to destroy, not to perpetuate, their way of life. No longer can they drift through time: they are forced to take action against Steerpike before he destroys them.

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[60]Peake, Gormenghast, p. 337.

[61]Ibid., p. 338.

This sense of urgency that has been hitherto unexperienced in Titus Groan or Gormenghast, intensified by the flooding of Gormenghast, forces those in this ancient castle to move constantly from room to room, and from floor to floor:

> Meanwhile in the main body of the castle there was little time for any other activity than that of moving upwards, eternally upwards, the multitudinous effects of Gormenghast.[62]

In these last chapters of Gormenghast, the effect is one of rapid movement in time and space as the inhabitants of this fictive world fight against time, hoping both to escape the flood and to destroy Steerpike. To reflect this movement Peake has varied his sentence length. Gone are the rambling sentences characteristic of Titus Groan and the early sections of Gormenghast. They are replaced by a mixture of short sentences interspersed with longer ones:

> Suddenly the sky was wide above him. An inland sea was ahead of him. A steady rain was pouring down, but compared with the long deluge they had grown to accept as normal, it seemed that he was afloat in good weather. He allowed the canoe to slacken speed of its own and when it had come to a bobbing standstill he turned her about with a stroke and there ahead of him the upper massives of his kingdom broke the surface. Great islands of sheer rock weather-pock'd with countless windows, like caves or the eyries of sea-eagles.[63]

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[62] Ibid., p. 432.

[63] Ibid., p. 439.

The rhythm of the sentences reflects the actual situation in Gormenghast wherein all who travel are subject to the back and forth, up and down, movement of the canoes as they paddle about the flooded ruins of the castle. Moreover, this fluctuant rhythm reflects the changing fortunes of Steerpike and the inhabitants of the castle as they struggle for control of Gormenghast.

Until the flood subsides and Steerpike has been destroyed, rhythm and syntax continue to suggest a certain degree of instability within the fictive world of Gormenghast. Once Steerpike has been murdered and the flood subsides, Peake reverts to the style with which he began Titus Groan; a soporific quality is once more expressed in his syntax.[64]

The latter section of the last chapter in Gormenghast (Chapter 80) reflects a subtle change in Peake's style, however. As Titus comes to the realization that he must escape from Gormenghast or remain forever a meaningless symbol, Peake changes his syntax by shortening his sentences and eliminating adjectives so that the effect achieved is one of intense conflict and rapid action. In this respect, the style of the end of Gormenghast is not unlike that of the opening of Titus Alone. In the last pages of Gormenghast, the style looks forward to that of his last

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[64]Peake, Gormenghast, pp. 501-506.

novel, Titus Alone. It is, for the most part, a style that is "less rich and robust"[65] than that of Titus Groan and Gormenghast.

The narrative techniques of Titus Alone have been described as "immensely unsatisfactory"[66] relative to those of Titus Groan and Gormenghast. Lin Carter, one of the exponents of the "appalling imperfections"[67] hypothesis of Titus Alone, expressed the view that the novel should never have "been written, much less published."[68] He then proceeds to dismiss the novel as the product of Mervyn Peake's "rare disease."[69] While this criticism may be initially attractive, it is, on present evidence, not tenable.

First, it should be noted that, at the time he began to write Titus Alone, Peake's creative faculties were not impaired enough to explain a change in structural and

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[65] Lin Carter, Imaginary Worlds, p. 101.

[66] Ibid., p. 100.

[67] Ibid., p. 101.

[68] Ibid., p. 100.

[69] Ibid., p. 101.

narrative techniques used in either Titus Groan or Gormenghast.[70] Indeed, it has already been indicated that the style of the final section of Gormenghast looks forward to that of Titus Alone. Second, Peake himself expressed the view that the artist should use a style that adequately conveys the substance of his work.[71] That he has taken Titus out of the decadent world of Gormenghast into a world with decidedly different external structures necessitates that Peake abandon a prose style that conveys a certain soporific quality, replacing it with a "language"[72] that more aptly conveys the sense of turmoil that exists both within Titus and the world he finds himself thrust into. Hence, Peake began Titus Alone "in an unorthodox irregular style in order to enhance its effect."[73]

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[70]It was not until about half way through the manuscript of Titus Alone that Peake's illness began to interfere seriously with his work. Undeniably, his lapses of memory and physiological problems would give a certain unevenness to his style as the novel progressed. However, in the published version, it is impossible to determine at what stage in Titus Alone Peake's illness necessitated that he use a disjointed, episodic structure, since the novel, as originally conceived, was structured on episodes. Indeed, the last sections of Titus Alone tend to be more unified than those in the beginning of the novel. To support this hypothesis one need only compare Lady Cusp-Canine's party with Cheeta's. It is impossible to tell which was written by physical and mental necessity and which was planned to enhance the effect of the novel.

[71]Peake, "Introduction", Drawings by Mervyn Peake, pp. 7-11.

[72]Ibid., p. 9.

[73]Stuart Miller, The Picaresque Novel (London, 1967), p. 132.

As in the conclusion of Gormenghast, the sentences are invariably short and spasmodic, giving to the novel a rapid, uneven movement. This effect, enhanced by the short chapters (some are no longer than a paragraph in length),[74] reflects the fluidity of the world-system depicted in Titus Alone. The constant shifting from one episode to another emphasises the rapidity with which events and people move in this world. In addition, this episodic structure enables Peake not only to explore a vaster area than in Titus Groan and Gormenghast, but to project a world in a state of chaos with fragmented values. Not only does the episodic structure reflect the anarchy that exists within this world, it also serves to elucidate the confused state of Titus's mind:

> A VOICE. 'O Titus, can't you remember?'
> TITUS. 'I can't remember anything except . . .'
> VOICE. 'Except . . .?'
> TITUS. 'Except the way.'
> VOICE. 'The way where?'
> TITUS. 'The way home.'
> VOICE. 'Home?'
> TITUS. 'Home. Home where the dust gathers and the legends are. But I have lost my bearings.'
> VOICE. 'You have the sun and the north star.'
> TITUS. 'But is it the same sun? And are the stars the stars of Gormenghast?[75]

Both Titus and many of the inhabitants he meets in the regions he journeys through are searching for some form of order, for

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[74] Peake, Titus Alone, p. 50. (See chapter twenty-four in the original edition).

[75] Ibid., p. 33.

a recognizable pattern within which they can find security.

At the same time, however, Peake presents episodes that counterbalance the supposition that the world depicted in Titus Alone "is without order, is chaotic."[76] Those episodes involving the crystal city, technological devices and the central factory encourage the reader to see that, despite the apparent disorder of much of this world, there exists a scientific force capable of implanting a rigid and irreversible order. The absence of descriptive detail in the presentation of these episodes intensifies the cold and sinister world that the scientists plan for humanity.

The mixture of episodes, the fusion of order with disorder, in Titus Alone leaves the reader with decidedly ambivalent feelings. Neither can he sympathize with the totalitarian technocracy, nor can he find any meaning in the way of life depicted in the Under-River or the land of abandoned projects. In the world depicted in his last novel, Peake offers the reader no security. His use of short sentences, abrupt clauses, rapid transitions from scene to scene, add to this effect. The "jagged effect"[77]

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[76] Stuart Miller, The Picaresque Novel, p. 10.

[77] Ibid., p. 135.

produced by the style and techniques of Titus Alone reflects the turbulent and disordered nature of the world that the scientists are attempting to mould into a "kind of jail."[78]

Thus, the novel described as "too diffuse and episodic"[79] is not the product of a man who has lost his ability to write in the style of Titus Groan or Gormenghast. Rather, it is the product of an imagination that no longer found any artistic or thematic purpose in perpetuating the story of the world of Gormenghast. As Peake became increasingly concerned about and dissatisfied with the world in which he was living, he selected, in Titus Alone, stylistic and narrative techniques that would enable him not only to bring the themes of his first two Gormenghast novels closer to the world as normally perceived, but to explore still other themes that were relevant to him at this time.

In Titus Alone, Peake abandoned certain of the stylistic and structural principles on which he had constructed his previous Gormenghast novels. In his last novel, he treated with greater brevity the "Realism of Presentation" techniques used in Titus Groan and Gormenghast. In Titus Alone, because of the similarities of the surface

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[78]Peake, Titus Alone, p. 86.

[79]"Gormenghast Again", T.L.S. (November 13, 1959), p. 657.

world depicted therein to our world, elaborate substantiation was not required. In this novel Peake's fictive world is not unlike the so-called normal world. This is not to suggest that there is a one to one relationship between Peake's world in Titus Alone and the actual world. The connection is much subtler than this. Not only does the world depicted in Titus Alone contain certain characteristics of the actual world as Peake perceived it, it also extends and exaggerates other aspects to create a nightmare vision of the possible course of our world. Neither is he saying this is what our world is like or will be like. Rather, he is warning us that modern civilization has the power to annihilate the world as we know it, to make disorder and chaos the norm. On the other hand, we can also build a world with characteristics not unlike those of the totalitarian technocracy. But, as indicated at the end of the last chapter, such possibilities and probabilities can be avoided should we choose "the law of quest. The law that few obey for lack of valor,"[80] whereby we may find either within ourselves or within the universe "some kind of imaginative golden age."[81]

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[80] Peake, Gormenghast, p. 508.

[81] Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), p. 186.

The change in technique from Titus Groan and Gormenghast to Titus Alone permits Peake to bring his themes closer to the world with which the reader is familiar. In his first two novels, Peake had created a world-system that seemed remote from the one as normally perceived. To many this world of Gormenghast is simply a "Gothic Day-Dream,"[82] while to others it is "an elaborate joke."[83] Such views are decidedly simplistic and contribute little to the reader's understanding of Titus Groan and Gormenghast. Peake, in these two novels, abandons the reality with which the reader is familiar, presenting him instead with a unique and fully substantiated fictive world. In this imaginary world, Peake extends to the absurd certain of our values and beliefs in order to illustrate the extreme physical and psychological states that arise when the individual is circumscribed by these very values and beliefs.

Peake created Gormenghast to show how man can be enslaved in systems of his own making. Moreover, man not

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[82] Robert G. Davis, "Gothic Day-Dream", New York Times (November 10, 1946), p. 9. The phrase quoted appears only in the title; the text of the review attempts to show that the American sub-title of Titus Groan, "A Gothic Novel," is misleading, and that those reviewers who have accepted this classification have not fully understood Peake's first novel.

[83] Peake, Titus Alone, p. 86.

only traps himself, but in the process he is blinded by his creation, so that he is unable to realize that he has become a prisoner in the system he has constructed. While Peake believed that man required an ordered system within which to live, he also believed that the system could become more powerful than those who constructed it, thereby forcing its masters to become its slaves. In Titus Groan and Gormenghast, Peake shows the reader how the inhabitants of this imaginary world inverted the system. No longer is it an organization of laws and beliefs from which they can benefit. Rather, the only meaning they can find is to perpetuate the system. Titus's birth is significant, not for any personal joy it gives his parents or others in this ancient realm, but because it ensures that the world of Gormenghast will continue: "The child is a Groan. An authentic male Groan. Challenge to Change! No Change . . . No Change!"[84]

Peake also shows that once the system has been elevated to a position of supreme importance, the basis on which it functions increases in complexity, so that it eventually requires experts to interpret the rules and regulations that evolve. In Gormenghast, only the Master of Ritual is fully able to understand the codes of law that

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[84]Peake, Titus Groan, p. 23.

have been passed through generations of Groans. As the intricacies of the system develop, it becomes increasingly difficult for those confined within it to break free, as exemplified in the second volume of the trilogy, wherein Titus repeatedly attempts to run away from Gormenghast only to be sought out and brought back.

Not only does Mervyn Peake show that a particular system can limit freedom, he also presents a more complex and disturbing proposition: man can learn to live without freedom and if offered it, will merely reject it. The system on which Gormenghast has been constructed does not include freedom as one of its characteristics. Since the inhabitants have accepted this system as their ideal, the fact that it does not include freedom can only mean that this particular quality is not essential to life as they perceive it. Peake shows how certain values that both he and his reader consider to be important can be eliminated from a particular system, their absence becoming desirable. Instead, the denizens of Gormenghast, having replaced freedom with elaborate rituals and blind adherence to ancient codes of law, have turned Gormenghast into a gaol. Most of Peake's characters are, however, no longer able to see the locks and the bars. So long have they been confined in Gormenghast that they are unable to see it for what it really is.

When Peake first conceived Gormenghast, he described it as a vomiting process, as something he had to develop in order to capture the ritual, the discipline, the complexities, and the struggles of twentieth-century life[85] -- as an analogue to expose our own moral and ethical myopia. When Eyre and Spottiswoode asked him to briefly describe what he had written, so that they could place such information on the jackets of Titus Groan and Gormenghast, Peake found it impossible to express adequately what he had written.[86] Since then many reviewers and critics, like Peake himself, have thrown up their hands in frustration, arguing that readers who look for "hidden meanings may find themselves wondering whether Mr. Peake has done anything more solemn than produce a work of extraordinary imagination, while having himself a very fine time."[87] More recently, however, Anthony Burgess, in his "Introduction" to Titus Groan noted the complexity of the work, a work that combines an imaginary world with "the

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[85]Recorded during an interview with Dr. Gordon Smith, 13 June 1972.

[86]This information is recorded in a letter written by Mervyn Peake to Gordon Smith. The letter is in the possession of Dr. Smith.

[87]Review of Titus Groan, New Yorker, XXII (Nov., 1946), 132.

real one."[88] The accuracy of this view will be more fully discussed in the concluding chapter of this study.

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[88]Anthony Burgess, "Introduction", in Titus Groan, p. 13.

CHAPTER V

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT: A SUMMING UP

While Peake's trilogy, as has been indicated in Chapter II, belongs in part to a modern tradition of fantasy, it does so with a significant difference. Unlike the world-systems created by his contemporaries, Tolkien and Lewis, Peake's world-systems do not simplistically reaffirm the moral beliefs associated with Christianity. Rather, Peake forces his reader to question and re-examine the fundamental concepts of freedom, good, and evil. Indeed little in Peake's imaginary worlds of external and powerful forces can readily be labelled good or evil, a situation which creates a confused and dissatisfied reaction on the part of the reader, who may prefer the security of Middle-Earth or Malecandra, where he finds traditional values and beliefs confirmed or reaffirmed.

However, those readers who accept Peake's imaginary worlds will find out that they have been taught to look at "the world in some other fashion."[1] They will come to accept Mervyn Peake's claim that the Gormenghast trilogy

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[1]Carlos Castaneda, Journey to Ixtlan (New York, 1973), p. 302.

contains the seeds of "truth . . . . and nothing but the truth,"[2] as they have been taught to understand and perceive it.

This "truth" is, of course, a complex and many-faceted one. It understands that good and evil are not necessarily opposing forces, but can complement one another in the make-up of an individual. For the most part, we cannot even drape Peake's characters in black or white robes in order to distinguish the good from the bad; for Peake's characters are invariably exchanging their robes. The ultimate effect of this is that the reader finds himself feeling a decided ambivalence towards Peake's characters. They defy simple categorization, as both Lewis's and Tolkien's characters do not. We know, for example, that Frodo is good and that no matter what befalls him he will always remain so, but we cannot say this of many of Peake's characters. Neither Steerpike nor Cheeta is introduced as being overtly evil. Rather, Peake initially presents both in sympathetic terms. It is only when he shows us other aspects of their personalities that we recognize them to be sinister and repellent.

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[2]Peake, Over the Border or The Adventures of Footfruit, p. 87.

But if Peake directs our sensibilities, so that we come to despise Cheeta and Steerpike, he does not do so with his other characters. We are never quite sure how to judge such characters as Gertrude and Fuchsia or Muzzlehatch and Juno, for they elude all attempts to categorize and classify, remaining vague and ambiguous.

Not only must the reader accept these changing dimensions of Peake's characters, he also has ambivalent feelings about the world-systems with which he is presented. The absence of certain conditions such as freedom from these world-systems can be viewed as less than desirable. But while the absence of such elements from these systems leads the reader to a negative response, Peake partially counterbalances that aspect with the warmth of human intercourse. Thus, his sympathies lie more with Gormenghast than with the totalitarian technocracy, for at least in the castle, the characters are portrayed with a warmth and tenderness absent from those of the factory world.

There is even a quality of innocence about Gormenghast and those who inhabit it which is absent from the factory world. It has the flavour of the nursery about it with its inhabitants like over-grown children who are adamant about staying in the nursery. Theirs is a huge, incomprehensible, inconceivably old world, with complex

rituals, rules, and regulations, passing the understanding of these 'adult-children'. In fact, their nursery even develops its own bogeyman (Steerpike). When he attempts to destroy this nursery we side with Peake's characters in wanting his destruction, so that the 'adult-children' can continue with their elaborate games. But once Steerpike has been destroyed the games must end. Peake takes Titus and the reader out of the confines of this nursery world, confronting him with an adult world. But that which Titus and the reader find in the adult world is less than consoling. Both long to return to the tenderness of the nursery. In this adult world Titus finds that the conflicts, both psychological and external, are greater than in Gormenghast. He must question the values that he has been raised on, trying to see these in relation to the world in which he has been placed. His struggles enable him to see things in proper perspective and, when he returns to Gormenghast, he is more accurately able to see it for what it actually is -- merely a stage in his moral and ethical development. Titus's experiences have enabled him to see beneath the superficial levels by which most examine the world. He sees not only more deeply and more clearly the nature of surrounding structures and systems, but more deeply into his own nature. Titus's quest can be viewed as an internal journey -- a process by which he comes to better

understand his own personality.

Peake also shows the reader that if there is to be any chance of a "golden age"[3] this psychological quest is imperative. This age is not simply going to happen and we are going to have to struggle to build such a world, but not, as Mervyn Peake teaches us, simply with external forces. Titus does not have to deal solely with Steerpike and Cheeta, but also with his own inner self. It is, as Titus realizes, a struggle that is not easy and one which may have no resolution. It is a continuous process built on many stages, beginning in the nursery (Gormenghast) but continuing into the adult world (the totalitarian technocracy). Peake presents us with a dichotomy, for he shows us that the former has attractions that are absent from the latter. But he also persuades us that we must journey through the latter if we hope to see ourselves and the world about us in a new light. Once again we learn to see Titus's quest as a dual one, whereby he learns to see the world as it really is and explores the inner paths of the mind. Only when we explore both does Peake believe we can be truly free -- free of the inner beasts and more readily able to cope with those to be found in the external world.

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[3]Frye, loc. cit.

Those who read the trilogy as an imaginative warning against undue systematization, whereby man becomes a slave to the systems he has built, only partially understand the complexity of Peake's novels. The trilogy is not simply a warning against such possibilities, it also offers us a glimpse of the qualities in man which render impossible any attempt to find an ideal way of life. We build what we are and therefore it is in ourselves that we must look for a better blueprint of what we are to construct. The process may not always be easy or pleasant and Peake cannot assure us that it will be worth the effort. Whether Titus can ever find the ultimate goal of his quest -- the internal blueprint for the "golden age" -- is not made clear at the end of Peake's final novel, Titus Alone. All the consolation that Mervyn Peake can offer is that Titus has neither surrendered to the world systems nor to himself. To the culmination of Titus's quest Peake has replied, "'No, not yet,' and . . . No, not there'."[4] But, he would surely add, perhaps some day when man is more fully prepared.

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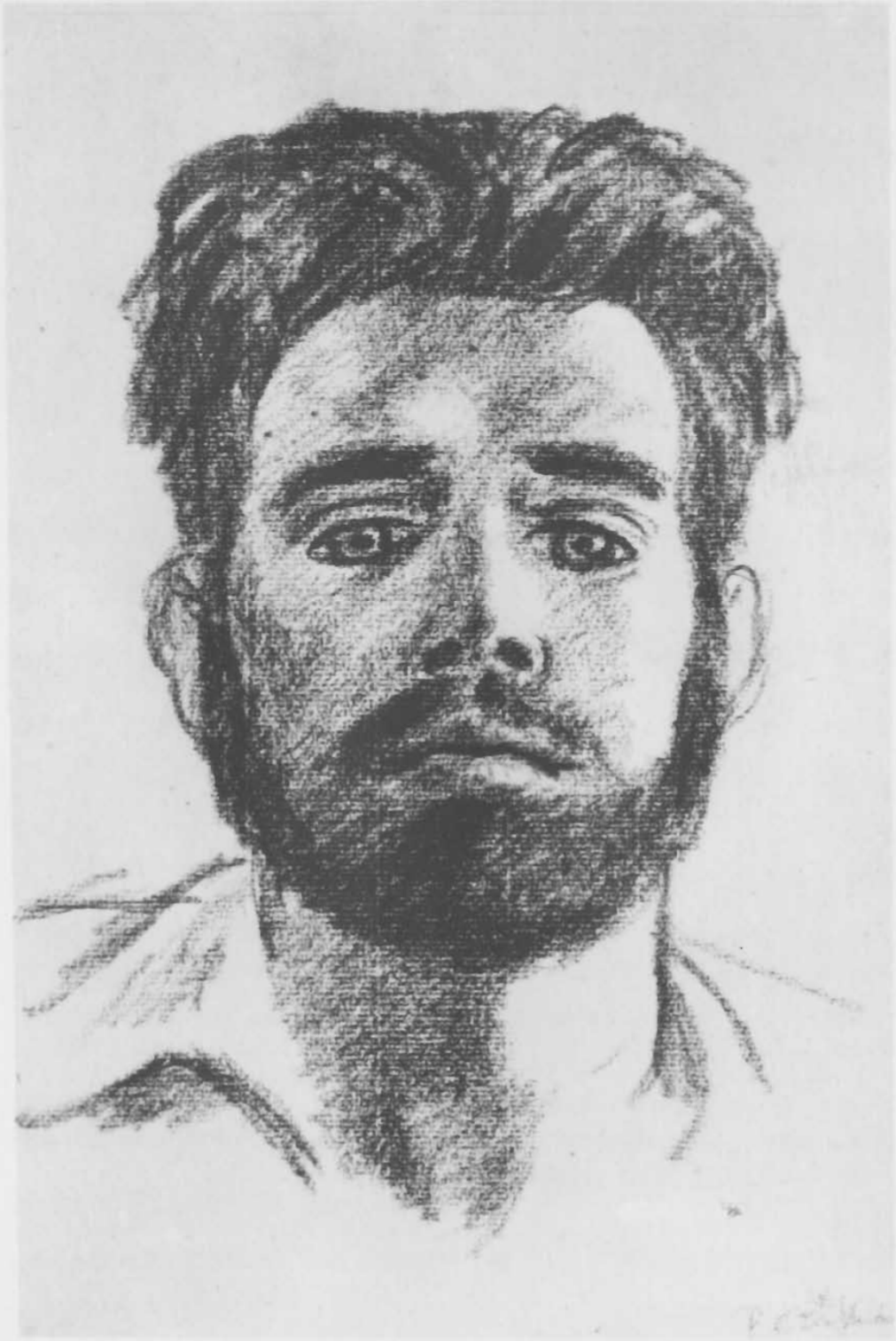
[4] E.M. Forster, A Passage to India (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 317.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I



"Self-Portrait" (1938)
Reproduced from Word and Image III (London, 1972).

APPENDIX II

SARK

Death of a Dame

Nearly all 560 subjects of the medieval fiefdom of Sark gathered . . . around a gnarled oak tree in their parish churchyard to mourn Dame Sibyl Mary Collings Beaumont Hathaway, 21st Seigneur of Sark. . . . During almost five decades of rule over the minuscule (4½ sq. mi.) Channel island, Dame Sibyl had labored to keep the 20th century at bay in what she pridefully called 'the last bastion of feudalism in the modern world'.

Holder of a hereditary fief granted by Queen Elizabeth I in 1565, she kept her latter-day serfs in most agreeable thrall. . . . As a result of her efforts, the farmers and fishermen of Sark pay not a farthing of British income taxes; neither are they plagued by automobiles, transistor radios and unemployment. The tribute Dame Sibyl exacted from the islanders included the traditional tenth sheaf of all cereals harvested and a live chicken each year as tax on every kitchen chimney on her tenants' houses. . . . Other seigneurial privileges included the right to keep bitches, forbidden to the Sarkese for fear that a

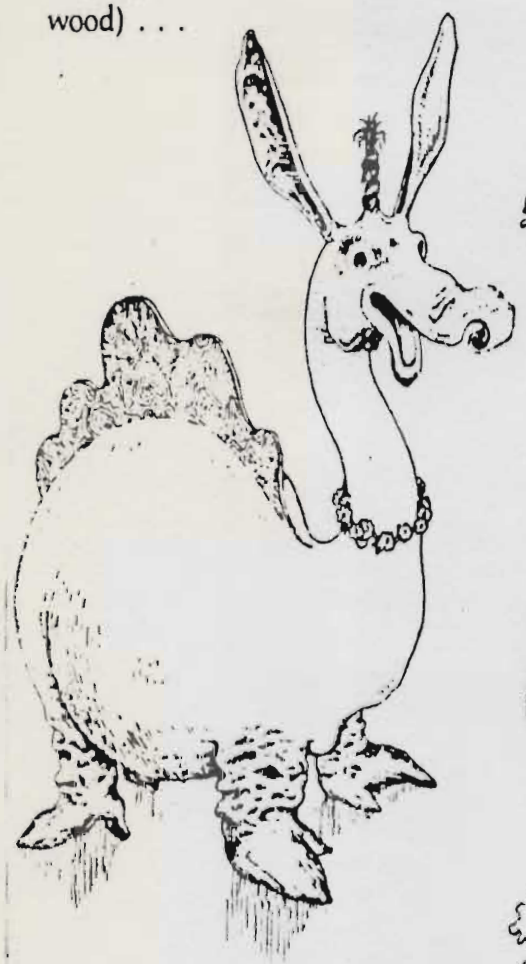
proliferation of dogs might drive sheep over the island's 300-ft. cliffs into the English Channel. That noble prerogative caused one of the rare Sark rebellions against Dame Sibyl's authority. The islanders over-ruled her prohibition, and bitches are now allowed on Sark - provided they are spayed, of course.

Maintaining the islet of anachronisms was no joke for Dame Sibyl. Nor was it merely a commercial venture designed to bring 50,000 tourists to Sark each year to savor medieval folkways and buy tax-free cigarettes and liquor. 'Sark is not a sort of feudal pageant to amuse visitors', she wrote in her autobiography Dame of Sark. 'It is a real live community of people who are happy to have retained their ancient form of government, and possess a subtle dignity of their own, born of many years of independence, honorable work and satisfied old age'. Dame Sibyl often complained that it was not easy to maintain the unchanging character of Sark. For example telephones, electricity, and tractors have been allowed in. She noted that 'it is not easy now to get horses suitable for drawing our carriages. Some of the carriages themselves are 100 years old and it is hard to get wheel replacements and so on for them'. . . . In recent years, the crippled old lady maneuvered her electric cart along Sark's unpaved roads, greeting every

islander by name. 'So long as my life may be extended,' she said, 'I shall strive to maintain this little feudal paradise, with all its traditions, laws and customs, as an oasis of quiet and rest'.

This article may be examined in its entirety in "Sark: Death of a Dame", Time, July 29, 1974, p. 39.

There was the Balleroon with his backbone made out of three-ply (that means very thin wood) . . .



And the Dignipomp . . .

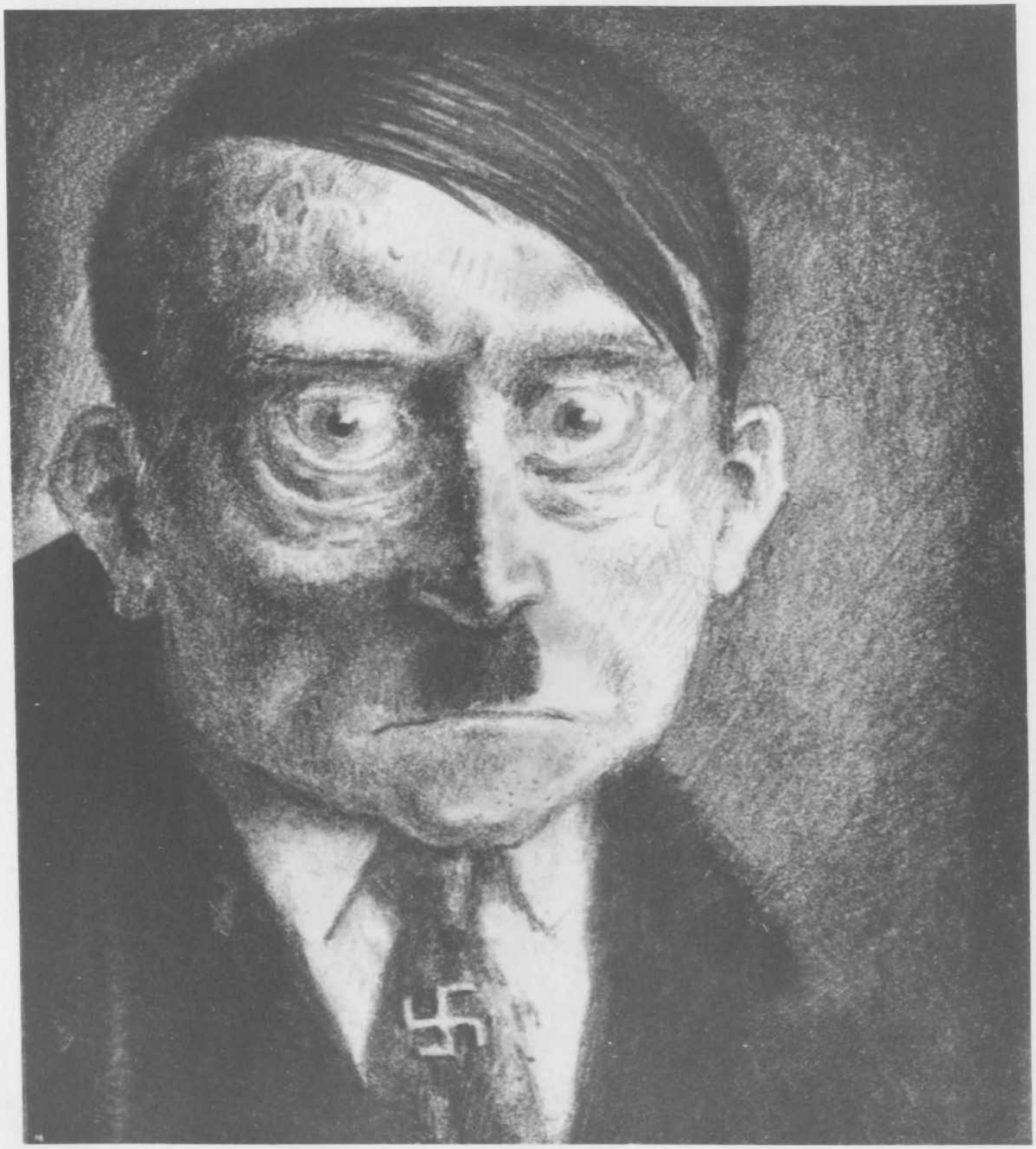
And the Hunchabil whose dreadful croaking always got on the Yellow Creature's nerves . . .

The lonely Mousterashe who was sensitive and didn't make friends very easily . . .

And the Guggaflop who was very, very lazy . . .

Reproduced from Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor (New York, 1968).

APPENDIX IV



Hitler 'Self-Portrait' (1943)
Reproduced from Word and Image III (London, 1972).

APPENDIX V

Books Illustrated by Mervyn Peake

(This list excludes his own work)

Austin, P.B. The Wonderful Life . . . of Tom Thumb. 2 vols. Stockholm: Radio Sweden, 1954-55.

Balzac, H. Droll Stories. London: Folio Society, 1961.

Caroll, L. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Stockholm: Zephyr, 1946.

--------. Hunting of the Snark. London: Chatto and Windus, 1941.

Coleridge, S.T. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. London: Chatto and Windus, 1943.

Collis, M.S. Quest for Sita. London: Faber and Faber, 1946.

Crisp, Q. All This and Bevin Too. London: Nicholson and Watson, 1943.

Drake, H.B. Oxford English Course for Secondary Schools. Book I. London: Oxford University Press, 1957.

--------. The Book of Lyonne. London: Falcon, 1952.

Grimm, J. & Grimm, W. Household Tales. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1946.

Haynes, D.K. Thou Shalt Not Suffer a Witch. London: Methuen, 1949.

Hole, C. Witchcraft in England. London: Batsford, 1945.

Joad, C.E.M. Adventures of the Young Soldier. London: Faber and Faber, 1943.

Judah, A. The Pot of Gold and Two other Tales. London: Faber and Faber, 1959.

Laing, A.M. More Prayers and Graces. London: Gollancz, 1957.

--------. Prayers and Graces. London: Gollancz, 1944.

Palmer, E.C. The Young Blackbird. London: Wingate, 1953.

Sander, A. Men: A Dialogue between Women. London: Cresset, 1955.

Stevenson, R.L. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. London: Folio Society, 1948.

--------. Treasure Island. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1949.

Wyss, J.D. The Swiss Family Robinson. London: Heirloom Library, 1950.

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Peake, Mervyn. A Book of Nonsense. Introduction by Maeve Gilmore. London: Peter Owen, 1972.

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