

**Understanding Gormenghast: Interrogating the Lost
Mythopoeia**

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by

Ruchira Mandal

Department of English

Jadavpur University

Kolkata — 700032

Certified that the Thesis entitled

Understanding Gormenghast: Interrogating the Lost Mythopoeia submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Prof. (Dr.) Rimi B.Chatterjee (Department of English, Jadavpur University), and that neither thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree/ diploma anywhere/ elsewhere.

Countersigned by the Supervisor:



Candidate:



Date: 3rd December, 2020

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Peter Harding, *The Tower of Flints*, 1992, in Mervyn Peake, *Titus Groan* (London: The Folio Society, 2000), 43.

“Over their irregular roofs would fall throughout the seasons, the shadows of time-eaten buttresses, of broken and lofty turrets, and most enormous of all, the shadow of the Tower of Flints. This tower, patched unevenly with black ivy, arose like a mutilated finger from among the fists of knuckled masonry and pointed blasphemously at heaven.”

(From *Titus Groan* by Mervyn Peake)

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Origin & Nature of Gormenghast	19
Chapter 2: The Symbolic Content in Gormenghast	54
Chapter 3: The Repressed Feminine in the Titus Groan Novels	104
Chapter 4: The Quest for Identity in <i>Titus Alone</i>	186
Conclusion	226
Bibliography of Works Cited	261

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Understanding Gormenghast: Interrogating the Lost Mythopoeia

Introduction

I cannot give the reasons,
I only sing the tunes:
the sadness of the seasons
the madness of the moons.¹— ('I Cannot Give The Reasons', Mervyn Peake)

Mervyn Peake, writer, illustrator, painter, poet, was a man of many talents, but he is mostly remembered today as the creator of Gormenghast, a sprawling castle of ruins and meandering corridors in the middle of an imagined nowhere, peopled by a group of odd, eccentric or weird characters whose lives are ruled by an even stranger set of inexplicable rules that are together called the 'Groan Law' or 'the Ritual of Gormenghast'. Peake set two novels in this setting, detailing the birth and growth of the castle's seventy-seventh earl, Titus Groan, and a third one in an equally alienating city into which Titus stumbles on his journey away from the castle. Together, these three novels are called the Gormenghast trilogy or the Titus Groan novels, and although their popularity never matched that of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*² or C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*³ (both being older contemporaries of Peake's), they have nevertheless consistently acquired a steady group of readers over the years and have never gone out of print. However, in

¹ Mervyn Peake, *Peake's Progress*, ed. Maeve Gilmore (New York: Overlook Press, 1981), 510.

² J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*. (London: HarperCollins. 1995). First published by George Allen and Unwin in 1954-55.

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (London: HarperCollins, 2005). First published in seven parts between 1950 to 1956 by Geoffrey Bles and Bodley Head.

spite of their cult status, Peake has largely been ignored by the critics and his novels, as well the rest of his oeuvre has been reduced to the sidelines of the canon. Winnington tells us how contemporary reactions to *Titus Groan*, in spite of admiring the author's "macabre power" generally expressed reservations about the novel itself.⁴ Louise Collis, in 'Memory of Mervyn Peake' dubs Peake's life and work as one of the greatest "tragic histories in twentieth century literature and art" whose illness was exacerbated by harsh reviews of his work.⁵

Of the little work that has been done on Peake, mention must be made first and foremost of Peter G. Winnington. Apart from a biography titled *Mervyn Peake's VAST ALCHEMIES: The Illustrated Biography*⁶ (2009), Winnington has also edited and introduced a selection of critical essays at the end of the 1995 Overlook edition of the Gormenghast novels, which is the edition I shall be referring to in this thesis.⁷ Between 1975 and the 1990s, Winnington was also the editor of the journal, *The Mervyn Peake Review*, and from 1988 to 2015 of *Peake Studies*— which remain the main source of studies on and reviews of the work of Mervyn Peake, and in which Winnington himself contributed several articles on Gormenghast, Peake's illustrations and artwork and on other literary works by him. He has also authored a book titled *The Voice of the Heart: The Working of Mervyn Peake's Imagination*, one of the few works that attempt a critical study of

⁴ G. Peter Winnington, "Introduction: The Critical Reception of Titus Books," 1027. The essay was published as an introduction to a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake's *The Gormenghast Novels*.

⁵ Louise Collis, "Memories of Mervyn Peake," 1037-38. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake's *The Gormenghast Novels*.

⁶ G. Peter, Winnington, *Mervyn Peake's VAST ALCHEMIES: The Illustrated Biography* (London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2009).

⁷ Mervyn Peake, *The Gormenghast Novels* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1995). *Titus Groan* first published in 1946 by Eyre & Spottiswoode. *Gormenghast* first published in 1950 by Eyre & Spottiswoode. *Titus Alone* first published in 1959 by Eyre & Spottiswoode. All references pertaining to the 1995 Overlook edition will be henceforth indicated in parentheses with the author's surname.

Peake's oeuvre as a whole, with chapters dedicated to the examination of broad themes or motifs in his fiction and poetry, the two concluding chapters dealing with Peake's plays and the novella, *Mr. Pye*.

Alice Mills in *Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake* attempts a psychoanalytic study of Peake's male characters and points out that these characters all seem to be peculiarly trapped in a psychological stasis. They therefore retreat from encountering the real or symbolic mother, and "the loss of identity in the mother's depths" in some works is extended to a "moral dimension."⁸ But rather than proposing a transcendence or individuation out of the stuckness, Mills suggests that Peake simply "celebrates the oddities of his characters' behaviours."⁹ Mills' work is interesting, and it touches on the issues of moral ambiguity and human consciousness that I examine in my thesis, but I also seek to find a reason behind the 'stuckness' of the characters that may offer an overarching design through which to examine the journey that Titus Groan undertakes.

Tanya J. Gardiner-Scott in *Mervyn Peake: the Evolution of a Dark Romantic* (1989) focusses on the gothic elements in the trilogy, tracing the evolution of the writer's style from aesthetic Gothicism to socially aware dark romanticism. She attempts a close reading of each of the three novels, their individual roles in the overarching narrative context and Peake's artistic development, making a case for Peake's importance as a writer of mythic consciousness, treading, according to Lesley Marx, a borderline between a full-blown academic study and an introduction

⁸ Alice Mills, *Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 226.

⁹ Ibid., 224.

to the work for the uninitiated.¹⁰ It begins with detailed character studies in the opening chapter and then moves on to explore themes of genre and genre-parody, myth, allegory, narrative voice and structures. Gardiner-Scott tries to situate Peake within broader literary contexts such as gothic writers, the Bible, Dickens, Joyce and Milton but often, these links “seem to be very impressionistically introduced.”¹¹ She notes Peake’s post-modern sensibilities and states that his characters as well as readers must work through concepts of good and evil and in the end withhold investment in either to attain “some Sisyphean or Promethean semblance of victory”¹² and Titus’s journey thus mirrors the reader’s journey. My thesis explores some of the same themes as this book, however, as already mentioned, my approach is grounded in trying to find an overarching design to understand the entirety of Peake’s grand vision. Peake definitely makes us question the binaries of good and evil, but his work also offers a clear critique of what he conceives as evil and the rather ambiguous victory of the lonely individual lies in his defiance of the evil arising out of the dominant weltanschauung. This is what I try to explore in my thesis. Gardiner-Scott’s essay ‘A Barrier of Foolery?: The Depiction of Women in *Titus Alone*’ focusses only on the third of the novels featuring Titus Groan, but nevertheless raises the important issue of the place and treatment of women within Peake’s world that I explore in detail in this thesis.

Among the other articles published in the journals edited by Winnington, mention may be made of Pierre François who examines and analyses religious motifs and mythological symbols in Peake’s fiction, primarily in the Gormenghast novels. He also examines the elements of the

¹⁰ Lesley Marx, “Towards Recognition: a review of Tanya Gardiner-Scott’s *Mervyn Peake*,” *Peake Studies* 1, no. 4 (1990):9.

¹¹ Ibid., 10.

¹² Tanya J. Gardiner-Scott, *Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic* (NP: Peter Lang, 1989), 4.

Wasteland myth in these novels as well as in the two novellas— *Boy in Darkness* and *Mr. Pye*, concerning himself especially with the thematic opposites in Peake's works— life and death, the eternal and the temporal, the stasis of the Gormenghast culture opposed to the rebellious instinct in Titus, Titus the solar hero and Steerpike as his demonic counterpart, the human-animal divide, light and shadow, good and evil and so on. François' work is deeply insightful, and he asserts the mythopoeic unity of Peake's trilogy in opposition to those critics who seem to find the third novel to be structurally incompatible with its two predecessors. Where I disagree with him is his inference that the deeper symbolic meaning of Gormenghast is limited to the physical castle itself with no external spiritual reference point for its obscure and meaningless ritual whereas textual evidence repeatedly indicates the possibility of such meaning by the emphasis on such meaning being forgotten. While I agree with him that the stasis of Gormenghast is a necessary catalyst for Titus Groan's heroism, I would like to also examine the reason behind this stasis that is externally manifested in not only the physical dereliction of the castle but also in the loss of its memory.

Hugh Brogan, in his essay titled 'The Gutters of Gormenghast' examines the recurring figure of the solitary boy in Peake's work and tries to ascertain what Titus Groan is truly rejecting in rejecting Gormenghast by drawing a comparison between Peake's dark, crumbling castle and *Hamlet's* Elsinore. Ronald Binns in 'Situating Gormenghast' traces the fate of Gormenghast from order to chaos as the collapse of its author's epic vision which results from the unresolvable tension between artistic imagination and the reality of experience. Others like David Sutton and Margaret Ochoki simply list the elements of the folk-tale or the fairy-tale to be found in the Gormenghast novels without deeper analysis.

A lot of the work done on Peake is rather less critical and more biographically inclined, focusing solely on the parallels between Beijing and Gormenghast. Laurence Bristow-Smith

dwells in length on “the Chinese traces among the foundations of a thoroughly Western building”¹³ that is Gormenghast, comparing the fabulous breakfasts of Sepulchrae and the Dowager Empress, and the Hall of Bright Carvings and the Room of Roots to the architectural wonders of the fabled Summer Palace¹⁴ and even finding in Titus’s renunciation of his family seat something of the Buddhist and Taoist traditions.¹⁵ As Winnington tells us in the introduction to *The Voice of the Heart*:

Practically all the articles and dissertations about Peake’s work ... have taken one of three approaches. They attempt to ‘explain’ the work by the life, or to prove some preconception about it (that it’s political allegory, for instance), or else treat it as an example of a genre (like the gothic or the grotesque) in order to compare Peake with other writers.¹⁶

He goes on to add that most of the extant Peake criticism says less about Peake than the critics’ individual outlooks or biases.

Whether that be true or not, Peake’s *Gormenghast* trilogy has long eluded attempts by readers and critics alike to arrive at any comprehensive or conclusive explanations, for the very nature of Peake’s work is such that it defies the formulas of any one specific genre. One comparatively recent reader in his blog declares that the tale “is a hermetically sealed story from which no hint of a moral or a message escapes.”¹⁷ And that indeed might be the natural reaction to this elaborate trilogy, for it is indeed difficult to define Peake’s work. Is it a coming-of-age story? A fairytale about the defeat of evil by good? A story about the lower classes rebelling against the

¹³ Laurence Bristow-Smith, “The Chinese Puzzle of Mervyn Peake,” *Peake Studies* 3, no.3 (Winter 1993), 34.

¹⁴ Bristow-Smith, “The Chinese Puzzle of Mervyn Peake,” 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶ G. Peter Winnington, *The Voice of the Heart- the Working of Mervyn Peake’s Imagination* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 3.

¹⁷ “The Things They Say,” *Peake Studies* 10, no. 2 (2007): 43.

systemic oppression perpetuated by the social hierarchy? Or is it the tale of an individual's struggle for freedom against a rigid, conservative society? In the beginning, Steerpike's rebellion is directed against oppressive authority represented by Swelter. His desire to escape the confines of the kitchen and find a career more suited to his intellectual talents may even be viewed as an argument for individuality in an inflexibly conformist society. In order to further his ends, he beguiles an impressionable Fuchsia by speaking of equality: "There should be no rich, no poor, no strong, no weak... Equality is the great thing, equality is *everything*" (Peake 227).

But his career trajectory reveals quite the opposite motivation. Steerpike is no hero attempting to topple the hierarchy, but a Machiavellian social climber who merely wants to take the top seat for himself. While Barquentine's treatment of Titus is indeed oppressive and heartless, he at least is driven not by personal ambition but by a fanatical loyalty towards tradition. By killing him, Steerpike assumes the same position, which he uses or rather abuses to further his own designs: "...in the all but invulnerable position of being the only one who had access to the tomes of reference and procedure, he was making a list of duties for Titus which would be both galling and, on occasion, sufficiently hazardous..." (Peake 676).

Nor is there any suggestion in the first two novels of any discontent amongst the lower orders of Gormenghast, although the author implies the existence of a faint tension between the castle's people and the outer dwellers, necessitating such diplomatic tact as the fixing of a specific mode of greeting between the two. The greeting with which these two groups address each other thus relates only to their location with no reference to rank. The outer dwellers greet any member of the castle with the title- 'Gormenghast' while the latter greets the former as 'The Bright Carvers': "It introduced a certain concord at the outset. It was a master stroke of judgement, a tower of tact, in the seventeenth Earl of Groan, when hundreds of years before he had introduced

this tenet into the ritual of the Castle” (Peake 69). The socialist reading is stronger in the third novel, *Titus Alone* with clear demarcations between the privileged and downtrodden sections of society, Titus himself becoming a target of upper-class oppression, but here too his journey is individual, and although he acquires the almost devotional loyalty of the three men from the Under-River, he is more concerned with his personal freedom rather than with any larger, collective good. And more than ever before, he is conscious of his superior position as the seventy-seventh Earl of Gormenghast, a Groan of the blood- making him an unlikely candidate for socialist heroism.

The other, more popular reading of the Gormenghast novels is as gothic fantasy, and Mervyn Peake is often categorized as a gothic writer akin to the likes of Edgar Allan Poe. Certainly, some of Peake’s works, especially his short stories do have the uncanny, eerie quality that we associate with Poe, such as *Danse Macabre*¹⁸ or *Same Time, Same Place*¹⁹. But is the Gormenghast trilogy simply a work of gothic fantasy to indulge the mind’s morbid, gloomy proclivities? The castle setting, with its derelict, dark corridors, skeletons in hidden subterranean rooms and its carnivorous owls seems to possess all the bells and whistles of the traditional gothic tale, but is it truly gothic in terms of its psychological impact? The gothic story plays on man’s primitive fear of evil, of the monstrous, the terror of death arising from the ‘unknown other’. In Gormenghast, the fear of danger is less psychological, and its agent, Steerpike, though described as diabolical is no supernatural figure with mysterious powers. If anything, Steerpike’s methods are quite the opposite of gothic, exhibiting a clinical, cold and calculative rationality that thrives on information, manipulation and a ruthless efficiency. Everything that Steerpike plots is already

¹⁸ Mervyn Peake, *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories: The Centenary Edition*, ed. Sebastian Peake (London: Peter Owen, 2007), 117-130.

¹⁹ Ibid. 131-144.

known to the readers and therefore unlikely to evoke any sense of fear or awe of the unknown. And the deaths in the novels are usually too impersonal and symbolic to create emotional impact— Sepulchrave’s sacrifice to the owls or the death of the Thing by lightening, for instance, or sometimes even comic— such as the death of Deadyawn, the old Headmaster of the school, Sourdust’s burial with an ox’ head, and so on. The only death that emotionally affects the readers and the characters themselves is Fuchsia’s death by drowning, a scene that in mood is more Shakespearean than gothic. What the novels do not have is a lone protagonist tormented by the fear of the supernatural unknown in an unfamiliar world. If Titus Groan has any fears, it is the fear of being caught breaking rules, and not of the ghosts of his father or Keda or Swelter haunting him.

Gormenghast may be ancient and derelict with an abundance of unexplored corridors, but for the most part, the world of the castle is familiar and hardly mysterious to its denizens. What can be said perhaps is that Peake uses elements that in another story or in the hands of another writer might have become a gothic novel— the aunts being tormented by Death who promises punishment for burning their brother’s library and then later being trapped, and dying in an underground room are all familiar ingredients of a gothic tale, but the readers of Gormenghast know it all to be the doings of the very-human Steerpike. Despite the ominous Tower of Flints housing the night owls, Gormenghast isn’t a haunted house. As Ochoki says in her essay: “The castle is not a world of spirits and unfortunately-plagued Christians as conventional Gothic demands.”²⁰ In fact, the castle is not Christian at all, although influences of the Catholic Church calendar may be discerned in its ritual, along with other influences. The religion of Gormenghast,

²⁰ Margaret Ochoki, “Gormenghast: fairytale gone wrong,” in *Critical Assessments*, ed. G. Peter Winnington, in *The Gormenghast Novels*, by Mervyn Peake (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 1995), 1127.

if there is at all one is simply a creed of rigid obedience to an extensive set of precedence and rules, and Steerpike is evil by his acts of disobedience to the Law, and not by yardsticks of metaphysical morality. The conflict in Gormenghast is between tradition and its defiance and nobody ever prays to any supernatural deity to preserve them against the enemy.

How then does one classify Peake's magnum opus? Is Steerpike a revolutionary altered by circumstances or is he an outright villain? Is Titus Groan the Promised Prince or the Wandering Jew? Is he a cowardly escapist or a hero, or what manner of hero is he? The trouble with all these inferences is that none of them offer any simple, complete justification for the events of the novels, or any kind of narrative closure through the readings. The most perplexing aspect of the Gormenghast/Titus Groan novels is that the readers are denied the sense of completion or satisfaction that might be expected on reaching the end of a grand, three-part epic, that sense of understanding of the universe of the story, of its motives and justifications and of justice preserved, having to make do, instead with a vague sense of unease born of unanswered questions. "Placing *Titus Groan* in a category remains a problem, which explains the ambivalence of many of the [contemporary] reviews. Much depended on the reviewers' attitude towards the 'grotesque', the 'fantastic' and the 'Gothic'."²¹ And that is the crux of the trouble— Gormenghast makes us unsettled because it refuses to fit into any neat narrative box, leaving us to ponder over its endless implications. "The proliferation of images is such that the difficulty lies not so much in interpreting them, as in choosing among the plethora of possible meanings."²²

This dissertation, instead of trying to justify any one narrative genre as the right fit for Peake's magnum opus, will rather try to examine why the trilogy seems to resist any single

²¹ Winnington, "Introduction: The Critical Reception of Titus Books," 1027-28.

²² G. Peter Winnington, "Inside the Mind of Mervyn Peake," *Etudes de Lettres* 2, no.1 (1979): 101.

formulaic interpretation and why its effect upon the readers is so deeply unsettling. In order to do so, and to show the Protean nature of Peake's work, I will be examining the various archetypal patterns, mythological symbols and fairytale devices that have been used by Peake. I would like to discover the reason behind the strangeness of Gormenghast, to 'understand' the world of Titus Groan, and to interrogate the lost meaning of the Groan ritual and what it says of Peake's vision of the modern world and of human life. At the risk of falling into the trap mentioned by Winnington of being carried away by my own prejudices, I would like to discover the reason behind the strangeness of Gormenghast, to 'understand' the world of Titus Groan, to attempt an interrogation of the lost meaning of the Groan ritual and what it says of Peake's vision of the modern world and of human life.

My attempt is primarily a Jungian reading, based on his many writings on the collective unconscious, consciousness and the Self. Treating the text as a dark, unfulfilling fairytale, I examine the gap between the collective consciousness of Gormenghast and its collective unconscious and how this gap affects the individual lives of its denizens. In this I have leaned heavily upon the extensive work done on interpretation of fairytales by the Jungian scholar, Marie-Louise von Franz. Apart from these, I have looked into *A Short History of Myths*²³ by Karen Armstrong to trace the history of human civilization and mythmaking in order to understand the rituals of Gormenghast, as also the seminal works on the evolution of myths by James Frazer, Robert Graves and Joseph Campbell. *Women Who Run with the Wolves*²⁴ by Clarissa Pinkola Estés

²³ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2008). Digital Edition. First published in 2005.

²⁴ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (London: Rider, 2008). First published in the UK by Rider in 1992.

and *The Great Cosmic Mother*²⁵ by Monica Sjöö and Barbara Mor provide great insight into the myths of wild women and goddesses which I have incorporated into my understanding of the female characters in the novels.

In the first chapter of this thesis, titled ‘The Origin and Nature of Gormenghast’, we begin on familiar ground by looking at some of the influences that might have shaped Peake’s eccentric Gormenghast, notably his early childhood spent in China— the stories and impressions he might have picked there, and his loneliness as a child of busy parents in an alien country. In this chapter I aim to show how Peake has used certain personal, historical and geographical experiences from his childhood as the starting point for his creation of Gormenghast, as well as the psychological nuances of such an isolated, displaced childhood that might have unconsciously shaped the course of events and patterns of behaviours depicted in his novels. Using this as a premise, I go on to examine the dream motifs in the Gormenghast novels to propose that in creating the space of Gormenghast and peopling it, Peake is essentially writing out his mind. However, in spite of the personal content, or because of it, Peake transcends his individual experience to create something archetypal that resonates along familiar mythical patterns.

In the next chapter, titled ‘The Symbolic Content of Gormenghast’, we delve into a deeper analysis of these patterns in order to further explore the symbols within the text. The primary focus in this section is on the Gormenghast Ritual and its meaning, and in examining the significance of the coded set of actions and observances, I borrow primarily from myths, religious symbols, fairytales and folktales, interrogating interpersonal relationships in Gormenghast in terms of archetypal patterns. This is followed by a brief analysis of *Boy in Darkness* as a dream/fairytale

²⁵ Sjöö Monica and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2013). Epub. First Published by Harper & Row in 1987.

set within the world of Gormenghast, leading to the conclusion that the chief ailment of Gormenghast lies in its repression of the feminine in all aspects of life. The result is a dull, divided, empty existence devoid of meaning. This lack also reflects in the novels' wise old men figures, who instead of being sources of wisdom and guidance to the hero remain stunted and ineffective due to the divorce from the Jungian anima.

This takes us to Chapter Three of the dissertation, 'The Repressed Feminine in the Titus Groan Novels' where I examine the role and treatment of the women in Gormenghast and show how their creative potential is stifled by the patriarchal rigidity of the Gormenghast Law. The crystallized patriarchy of Gormenghast affects not only the women but also the men who remain emotionally repressed, leading to a cycle of stunted, aloof adults and abused children. Yet, there are hints in the language and the liturgy of Gormenghast of a past in which the feminine as the Goddess was venerated. One of these is the recurring feminine symbol of the boat as a metaphor for emotional and artistic release. I also bring in a comparative analysis of "The Cave: Anima Mundi"²⁶, an unpublished play where Peake discusses the decline of the defiant woman from goddess to witch to enemy of the fascist state. This neglect of the feminine is also to be observed in the main female characters in the third novel, *Titus Alone* which unfolds in a city that is far removed from Gormenghast, both in terms of distance and technological advancement. Juno and Cheeta- who appear to be Calypso and Circe to Titus's Ulysses are empowered women with wealth, beauty and numerous admirers, yet the trajectories of their lives are ultimately determined by the men they fall in love with, much like a Fuchsia or a Keda in Gormenghast with far lesser social or individual mobility.

²⁶ Mervyn Peake, "The Cave or Anima Mundi" (Unpublished manuscript courtesy of Mr. G. Peter Winnington, June 25, 2018), PDF.

Chapter Four, ‘The Quest for Identity in *Titus Alone*’ thus examines the hero’s journey in the unnamed City and his interactions with these women as well as with the ambiguous Muzzlehatch and the mythic pattern that they fit into. While the overarching myth in the first two novels— *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* is that of the diseased kingdom signified in the dereliction of Gormenghast castle, the pattern in the third novel is that of the heroic journey. Titus finds himself in an alien land, and having finally left Gormenghast after years of playing the truant schoolboy is now anxious to receive some proof of its existence. In this, and in his insistence on his title of the seventy-seventh Earl, Titus displays the nostalgia of the colonizer for his lost kingdom, a grown up Hugh Silver from Peake’s earliest written story, *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs*²⁷ who is no longer allowed to play at being the lord to lesser people. More than its predecessors, the third novel, *Titus Alone* is explicitly rooted in our contemporary society, drawing clearly from the author’s personal experience of being a war artist and his encounter with victims at the Belsen concentration camp, besides the ominous omnipresence of surveillance technology. But the work is at the same time mythical, with such familiar motifs as the journey to the underworld and battles of strength. Unlike the Greek Ulysses, however, and somewhat like the modern Prufrock or Leopold Bloom, Titus Groan is an unheroic hero who cannot adjust to the rules of a changing world where he is no longer at the centre, and thus he must be constantly rescued out of his battles by figures such as Muzzlehatch and Anchor. The rigid control that the state exercises invites comparisons with Orwell and Huxley, and a discussion of the idealized past in a dystopian setting.

²⁷ Peake, *Peake’s Progress*, 35-44. Peake completed this story in 1923, when he was eleven years old. Its hero, Hugh Silver is, like the author himself, a young expat boy who is separated from his parents and becomes the leader of an African tribe.

The scientists in the factories also remind us of the depiction of the monstrous in contemporary fantasy and science fiction. But rather than depicting the hero's victory against the monsters as is the norm, Peake makes Titus and his readers confront their own innate evil. We find, after all, that the City is not so different from Gormenghast, suffering from the same malaise of meaningless order and exacting the same rigid conformity from its inhabitants most of whom, like the denizens of Gormenghast conform willingly, while those who do not are consigned to the dark, hellish Under-River. Titus, as an outsider is as much an anomaly in this world as Steerpike and Titus himself were heretics in Gormenghast, and thus he becomes relentlessly pursued by the authorities. *Titus Alone* ends with Peake's signature withholding of narrative closure with the failure of yet another mythical pattern. Unlike Ulysses, Titus fails to return to his Ithaca.

However, the journey of the hero, and his turning away from his home also recalls another mythical hero, Aeneas of Troy who sees his home being destroyed and experiences exile only to find his own independent destiny. This seems especially valid when we consider that the Titus Groan novels were not meant to be a trilogy but a series that never came to fruition due to Peake's struggle with dementia and Parkinson's disease. But had the series materialized, perhaps Titus too would have found a home beyond both the archaic ties of Gormenghast and the soullessness of the City, a meaningful existence ruled by passion rather than by compliance.

Titus Groan's suffering resonates with us, for it is born of the existential malaise of rootlessness and loss of meaning in the contemporary world: "There are no longer any gods whom we can invoke to help us. The great religions of the world suffer from increasing anemia, because the helpful numina have fled from the woods, rivers, and mountains, and from animals, and the

god-men have disappeared underground into the unconscious.”²⁸ By refusing to submit to this world order, Titus becomes the questing hero journeying to bring back a sense of purpose and dignity to life: “The change must indeed begin with an individual; it might be any of us.”²⁹

In my conclusion I examine Peake’s rudimentary notes on *Titus Awakes*, the fourth Titus Groan novel, as well as probe further the ambiguous end of the third and last novel he was able to complete. The end of a fairytale is meant to reaffirm faith in the collective order in which there are always neat divisions of right and wrong, good and evil. By refusing to submit to narrative expectations, Peake challenges the status quo defined by these simplistic binaries. At the end of *Titus Alone*, Titus is still alone and homeless because he is still striving for a meaningful world order that does not demand unquestioning obedience, something that cannot be said of either his ancient, ancestral home or the new-age technocratic City, both locales where people function more or less as mechanical units rather than as thinking, feeling beings. “In leaving behind Gormenghast, Titus Groan is initiating a shift from the past to the present— or even to the future.”³⁰ The negation of interpersonal relationships in both Gormenghast and the City become conducive to the rise of a fascist hierarchy where all dissent or even queries are viewed as blasphemy and betrayal. What we witness is the superficial evolution of Western civilization from the medieval Gormenghast to the modern City without a corresponding transformation in the collective psyche.

Since there are no specific references to any religious or mythological framework within the corpus of Peake’s novels, the mythical past being lost and forgotten, every possible

²⁸ Carl G. Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” in *Man and His Symbols* by Carl G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, Joseph L. Henderson, Jolande Jacobi and Aniela Jaffé (New York: Dell, 1968), 91.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Rob Hindle, “Elysian Fields, Hadean Glooms: Titus Groan’s Mythical Quest,” *Peake Studies* 4, no. 4 (1996): 7.

interpretation or attempts to interrogate the mythopoeia of Gormenghast can only be at the level of the conjectural. One cannot know if Peake was basing his fictional vestiges of a mythical past on any concrete systems or from his irrational unconscious. But since mythic patterns are part of the collective unconscious, it may be argued that even though the author himself did not consciously think of a particular influence, an interpretation of the novels along the lines of mythical symbols and ideas nevertheless holds validity. Moreover, a mythological reading of Gormenghast gains further traction when we look at his unpublished play, “The Cave: Anima Mundi” where Peake uses certain mythical symbols that are to be found in subtler forms in the Titus Groan novels.

The overarching theme that connects the medieval, derelict Gormenghast and the modern, sophisticated city is the sensitive soul’s desire for a meaning beyond rational or dogmatic value, a meaning that has been lost with the forgotten stories of Gormenghast. In a poem titled ‘The Heart Holds Memories Older than the Mind’s’³¹, Peake seems to hint at this transcendent sensibility that goes beyond the rigid confines of the individual intellect towards a mythical past in search of a prelapsarian truth:

When beauty rides into the hollow heart
 It is as something that comes home again
 As though for anchorage; or like a reckless
 Prodigal returning to his father
 Of dappled aisles of immemorial cedars.

When a great beauty silences the heart
 And holds it spellbound, it is recognition
 Of something half-remembered, long before
 Atlantis was, when love was the wild fruit
 We fed upon in golden climes forgotten. (c.1946)

³¹ Mervyn Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen (Manchester: Fyfield Books, 2008), 155

Despite its proliferation of images and the traces of myriad influences, the most compelling facet of Gormenghast that stands out possibly is its immense isolation, both from the world and from itself. From the very beginning of the first novel, we are given a sense of an alienated society, a divided world. Even the Bright Carvers with their creative impulses are not free of this alienation: “The air between them was turgid with contempt and jealousy” (Peake 10). As for their relationship with Gormenghast proper, the reader is explicitly told that —

Saving this exception of the day of carvings, and the latitude permitted to the most peerless, there was no other opportunity for those who lived within the walls to know of these ‘outer’ folk, nor in fact were they of interest to the ‘inner’ world, being submerged within the shadows of the great walls. (Peake 10)

The language here is curiously replete with psychological imagery, suggestive of not simply a divided society but of a divided mind, a schism between the conscious and the unconscious, leading to the great sense of unfulfillment which drives the hero, Titus Groan to a quest towards wholeness, towards a “synthesis” or that sense of ‘home’ that he discovers in the end can be found inside his own heart: “He had no longer any need for home, for he carried his Gormenghast within him” (Peake 1022). In this journey, the novels stop being the story of a renegade earl of a fictional castle and become a commentary on the modern world.

Perhaps, if illness had not prevented Peake from carrying out his original plan of a series of novels about the journeys of Titus Groan, his hero would eventually reach the golden climes of a forgotten Atlantis that the author in his real life seemed to have found in the island of Sark, and that his wife, Maeve Gilmore transposed into the fictional life of Titus in the novel, *Titus Awakes*. In this thesis, I shall attempt to interrogate the lost mythopoeia of Gormenghast in an attempt to trace the path of Titus Groan’s journey towards the truth of this lost past.

Chapter One

The Origin and Nature of Gormenghast

Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast novels, though so-termed after the massive and ancient castle where the action opens are actually set in two main locales, the first being Gormenghast itself, the stage for the first two novels, *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, and the City, where the third novel, *Titus Alone* unfolds. At this instant I propose to take only Peake's original trilogy into consideration, not including Maeve Gilmore's *Titus Awakes* which depicts the hero, Titus Groan through a series of episodic experiences set in shifting locales.

Gormenghast is however more than just a setting in the first two novels. Rather it becomes, in all its meandering immensity and inexorable laws an all-pervasive presence that makes it a character in its own right. So much so that even the third novel which presents Titus away from his castle home is not free from the shadow of Gormenghast, remaining a constant, haunting preoccupation in the hero's mind from the very beginning, the ghostly presence becoming quite literal in a scene towards the end when Cheeta, the scientist's vengeful daughter attempts to break Titus by creating a parodic version of the castle and its rituals.

All analysis of Peake's novels thus begin with an analysis of Gormenghast itself, and I will attempt to do the same. As Pierre François remarks, "Few books are more resistant to genre labelling than the Titus books", rendering all critical attempts to do so "tentative and unsatisfactory³²." Perhaps this is the reason why the novels have been treated more or less indifferently by both the literary and popular canon, limiting their readership to a fairly small cult

³² Pierre François, "Godless Religion and Maimed Earldom in *Titus Groan*," *Peake Studies* 9, no.1 (2004): 1.

following. Keeping that in mind, I will try to establish in this chapter the origin and nature of Gormenghast's 'vast alchemies'³³— a Peakian phrase that is used by G. Peter Winnington as the title of his biography of the author— gleaning the author's personal life for possible sources of inspiration. From those experiences we shall try to decipher a method in the meandering madness of Gormenghast and how that reflects on the thematic design of the novels as a whole.

Gormenghast and Peake's Childhood

Out of the overlapping
 Leaves of my brain came tapping
 Tapping... a voice that is not mine alone:
 Nor can the woodpecker
 Claim it as his own: the flicker
 Deep in the foliage belongs to neither
 Birds, men or dreams.

It is as far away as childhood seems.³⁴

Perhaps the most discussed aspect of Gormenghast, that is to say not just the physical "main massing of the original stone" (Peake 9) with its ponderous architectural quality, but of the entire environment of the life that is led within its walls is its connection with the author's childhood in China. Mervyn Peake was born in 1911 in Kuling in China, and though the city of his birth was quite removed from Beijing, more than one critic has traced the origin of the walled-in, secluded nature of Gormenghast to the Forbidden City.

There is no doubt that the author's memories of the concession world influenced his creation of Gormenghast. The castle is full of densely European detail: a Nannie Slagg with black glass grapes in her hat, Doctor Prunesquallor with his port and brandy.... The battlemented appearance of Gormenghast may well take its origin from a style which Brian

³³ Mervyn Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen (Manchester: Fyfffield Books, 2008), 23.

³⁴ Peake, *Peake's Progress*, 256.

Power (in *The Ford of Heaven*³⁵, a delightful memoir of concession life, and one also seen through the eyes of a child) describes as ‘Victorian Tientsin’...³⁶

Not only that, but some of the rituals depicted in the novels may have been inspired by the author’s childish impressions of China. For instance, the day of the Bright Carvers might have originated in the festival of ‘Ch’eng Ming (‘Clear and Bright’) where the Chinese people traditionally burned paper effigies of money, animals, servants or houses in a show of reverence to their deceased ancestors.³⁷ John Watney in his introduction to *Peake’s Progress* also speaks of the traditional Chinese carvings of the Taku road as possible inspiration for the Hall of the Bright Carvings³⁸ which serves as the site for the opening action of *Titus Groan*. Mention may also be made of the flooding of Tientsin in September, 1917, a possible real life precedent for the flood in Gormenghast which plays such a significant role in the action.

In yet another article, Winnington draws another historical parallel between China and Gormenghast. Between 1405 and 1433, the Chinese Empire expanded its marital activities, not to conquer other lands or collect riches but to assert its own superiority. The heavy expenses incurred in this ambition then led to a reversal: “By 1500 it was expressly forbidden to build a sea-faring junk with more than two masts... and China effectively cut itself off from all communications with other peoples and countries.... The Chinese lived as though the rest of the world did not exist.”³⁹ This of course tallies with the denizens of Peake’s fictional castle living on as if the outside world

³⁵ Brian Power, *The Ford of Heaven* (London: Peter Owen, 1984).

³⁶ Charles Gilbert, “Mervyn Peake and Memory,” *Peake Studies* 5 no. 4 (1998): 8.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 10.

³⁸ John Watney, “‘Introduction’ to Mervyn Peake,” in *Peake’s Progress*, by Mervyn Peake (New York: Overlook Press, 1981), 17.

³⁹ G. Peter Winnington, “Burning the Globe: Another Attempt to Situate Gormenghast,” *Peake Studies* 8, no. 2 (2003): 21.

didn't exist and Gertrude's assertion that "there is nowhere else" (Peake 807) outside Gormenghast. "And when the outside world came flooding back in *Titus Alone*, it came as it did for China..."⁴⁰, with technology and poverty and concentration camps. Peake, however wasn't writing a history of China, and thus he transposes these parallels into a fictional world that has a distinctly European tenor despite the Chinese inspiration. Peake himself lends a fictional tenor to his memories of childhood days in China by describing them as "the recollection of some half character in a lost book."⁴¹ With such encouragement, it's easy to look for the beginnings of Gormenghast in the walled missionary compound where the boy Mervyn spent much of his time: "I cannot think of them without a sense of space— of something infinite. The compound was my world— my arena. A world surrounded by a wall. For a wall surrounded us. And on the other side of the wall was China."⁴²

But young Mervyn wasn't the only child living a walled existence in that country. Some of the most fascinating parallels to the tale of *Titus Groan* and Gormenghast are to be found not in Peake's personal experiences but in the impressions of Chinese history that he must have picked up from servants' stories and from readings in his later years. In 1911, around the time Ernest and Amanda Peake were expecting the birth of their second son, Southern China revolted against the Manchurian dynasty of the North, resulting in China becoming a republic. In 1912, the Boy-Emperor, then six years old, exactly the age of Titus at the opening of *Gormenghast*, formally resigned and was then "kept a virtual prisoner inside the walls of the 'Great Within'", studying

⁴⁰ Winnington, "Burning the Globe: Another Attempt to Situate Gormenghast," 22.

⁴¹ Peake, *Peake's Progress*, 479.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 473.

under tutors, “longing to see something of the outside world.”⁴³ In 1924, aged eighteen, once again the age of Titus Groan at the opening of *Titus Alone*, the Boy-Emperor left the walled city and settled in Tientsin as a private citizen. Peter Winnington in his biography of Peake further points out that “the dates of the ‘inner exile’ correspond closely to Mervyn’s childhood years in China, and the Boy-Emperor arrived in Tientsin as an ordinary citizen soon after Mervyn left that city to become just another schoolboy in England (35). It is quite likely that a young Mervyn, restrained within the mission compounds, the lonely child of busy parents who possibly entrusted his care to local nurses and servants heard the story of this prince imprisoned in his own palace and imagined a kindred spirit in him.

Of course, such an identification is made easier by the fact of Mervyn’s status as a white boy in a non-European, oriental country, for the only role in which the colonizer can somewhat identify with the inferior ‘other’ is that of the native prince or ruler. This is reflected in *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs*⁴⁴, Peake’s earliest recorded fictional work where the white boy protagonist becomes the ruler of an African tribe but also later, in the ‘Titus Groan’ novels whose eponymous hero, while railing against the alienating strangeness of the Gormenghast society and seeking to be free from it simultaneously identifies in his role as its ruler. In his desire to be free however, Titus also retains something of the Chinese Prince’s imprisonment. The sense of being powerless and trapped in one’s own dominion certainly pervades the pages of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, and in *Titus Awakes*, the third novel of the cycle, we feel the frustration of a royal prince reduced to a nameless nobody as Titus struggles to hold on to his past as the seventy-seventh

⁴³ G. Peter Winnington, *Mervyn Peake’s VAST ALCHEMIES: The Illustrated Biography*, 35.

⁴⁴ Peake, *Peake’s Progress*, 35-44.

earl of Gormenghast, a place that simply doesn't exist in the collective perception of the modern City, just as the Manchurian Empire no longer exists in the new Republic of China.

This sense of loss and exile can also be located in yet another remarkable parallel that Winnington cites— that of the Kong family, the descendants of Confucius, who had been living in a large mansion for two thousand years. This family conducted elaborate ceremonies to mark the passing of the seasons and to honour the birthdays of the living and the dead. Their title, passed along the male succession line, was 'Yansheng Duke'. The last Duke, Kong Decheng, the son of the 'seventy-sixth' Duke⁴⁵, was born in 1920, was forced to flee in 1937 during the Japanese invasion in 1937, and spent the rest of his life in exile.⁴⁶ Perhaps the similar trajectories of loss and exile in both these tales explain why, despite the mention of a protective moat and an armory, there is no standing army or other defensive mechanism in place in Gormenghast, and why the weapons in the armoury are rusted and useless. Child Mervyn, if he indeed had identified with the Young Emperor, must have sensed the inadequacy of adult protection.

This sense of vulnerability and abandonment is highlighted in *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs*. Begun during his days in China and finished sometime in 1923, after his return to England, *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs* is a fictionalized childhood fantasy adventure tale. Set in 1912, the same year when the young Emperor became a prisoner in his own house, the story is about a boy named Hugh, who, like Mervyn, is the son of Christian missionaries in a foreign, non-European country. Like Ernest Peake, Hugh's father is a missionary doctor. The Silver family is attacked by a tribe of violent African savages (this is certainly not a politically correct work) and both the parents are presumed to be dead. The young hero is rescued by the

⁴⁵ Perhaps this played a role in making Titus's father, Sepulchra the 'seventy-sixth' earl of Gormenghast?

⁴⁶ Winnington, *Mervyn Peake's VAST ALCHEMIES: The Illustrated Biography*, 35-6.

‘Umzibooboo Kaffirs’, the ‘good’ savages who are servants in the household, and they take him to their village and promptly elect him the White Chief. As the chief, the first decision that Hugh makes is to build a “secret hiding place”⁴⁷ where the evil Hottentots cannot find them. After a few adventures with the Kaffirs, Hugh is finally found by a British search party who return him to his parents in England.

A few things stand out in this story. The first noteworthy point is the utter ineffectualness of the parents and their absence throughout the major part of the narrative. Unavailable parents form a recurring pattern in other, mature works by Peake— most notably in *Captain Slaughterboard* and in the *Titus Groan/Gormenghast* novels. There is a recurring fear/fantasy of parental death in Peake’s adult work, with its seed sown in this early work. The understanding of death in children happens between the age of four and nine, and with this understanding comes the realization that their world, which the child had till then known as a safe haven with his/her parents as protectors is subject to the same laws of mutability and destruction. The child then attempts to regress into the safety cocoon of an earlier stage of innocence by imagining the death of the father so that he/she becomes his/her own progenitor, thus ensuring his/her own immortality.

This motif is harped on repeatedly in the first novel, *Titus Groan*, almost from its onset. Responding to Flay’s news of the birth of the new heir, the curator, Rottcodd enquires if the current Earl was dying, ironically foreshadowing the latter’s death in the Tower of Flints (Peake 16). Later on, as Nannie Slagg approaches the mud dwellings in order to recruit a wet nurse for Titus, she reminiscences how on a similar occasion fifteen years ago when she had come to announce the birth of Fuchsia to the Bright Carvers, the latter had failed to hear her voice over a raging storm and had at first assumed that Lord Groan had died (Peake 67). The ceremonial language of the

⁴⁷ Peake, *Peake’s Progress*, 38.

christening ritual envelopes the infant Titus in both life and death. The address opens by naming him as “Life’s enterer” and closes by describing his death amongst his ancestors: “...until he dies across the Groan’s death-turret. And banners are ripped down from wall and buttress and he is carried to the Tower of Towers and laid among the moulderings of his fathers” (Peake 85-6). Among the voices that he is enjoined to hear are both that of the dead stones and rivers as well living birds and fishes, suns and changing moons and “leaves from trees that cannot keep their leaves...” (Peake 86) while Sepulchrave, in his delirious reverie during Titus’s first ceremonial breakfast contemplates his imminent death with the awareness of life eternal, using the same tree imagery from the sacred words of the baptism:

“...and in my annihilation there shall be consummation for he has come into the long line and is moving forward and the long dead branch of the Groans has broken into the bright leaf of Titus who is the fruit of me and there shall be no ending and the grey stones will be there always...” (Peake 315)

At the same time, he paradoxically links his own death to a rebirth, identifying himself as the child of Gormenghast: “...for there can be no ending to the owls whose child I am to the great owls whose infant and disciple I shall be...” (Peake 314).

Titus too is both the infant and the man, both life and death, both new and ancient, for “there was the history of man on his face” (Peake 88). And earlier in the novel, the author tells us that the face of the new-born Titus is as “old as the world, wise as the roots of trees” (Peake 73). In a manner of speaking, then, Peake transcends the patterns of his childhood to speak of the cyclical nature of the world and of life, imposing a mythical structure of immortality over the temporal death feared by the child.

The image of the death-in-life tree that Sepulchrave visualizes during his breakfast reverie is compared by François to the myth of Balder and the mistletoe that killed him: “The point in this

context is that the mistletoe is the ‘evergreen’, indestructible part of the mutability-ridden oak-tree: it symbolizes the ever-recurring revival of life from death.”⁴⁸ Even Prunesquallor, the first half of whose name suggests gardening and thereby an association with trees (one example of Peake’s Dickensian delight in nomenclature), is not free of this juxtaposition of life and death. Although as a doctor, Prunesquallor should be primarily associated with healing and is responsible, in his own words, for “fostering” the “organic life of the castle” (Peake 84), Peake nevertheless associates him with certain images of death and decay, however comical those images may be. The doctor’s teeth have either fallen or been diseased beyond repair, necessitating “two brand new rows of gravestones between his lips” (Peake 82) at the christening of the child whose birth he facilitated, where he comes dressed “in a cloth of death’s colour” (Peake 83). Doctor Prunesquallor in the *Gormenghast* novels is one of the three doctors that we find in Peake’s oeuvre, the eponymous title character in *Doctor Pye* being the other noteworthy one. The latter is also notably a missionary doctor, like Doctor Silver (in *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs*) who is an early prototype as well as like the author’s own father, Doctor Ernest Peake himself. But what Prunesquallor and Doctor Silver have in common are the features of a caring but inadequate protector, for Prunesquallor is indeed a substitute father-figure to both Titus and Fuchsia and exhibits, on a smaller scale the same life-in-death values that the Earl Sepulchre Groan does.

I must re-emphasize here that Peake’s own parents were a doctor and a nurse. Growing up in a country torn by political turmoil and to parents whose medical profession ensured a direct confrontation with the diseases and degeneration of the human body, the young Peake would be particularly sensitized to the idea of death. The story of Hugh Silver and the Umzibooboo Kaffirs

⁴⁸ Pierre François, “‘Godless Religion and Maimed Earldom in Titus Groan’, *Peake Studies* 9, no.1 (October 2004): 21.

is set in 1912, the year in which China became a Republic, and one can't help but wonder if his childhood amidst the stories of war and fighting in the trouble-torn country outside his safe walled compound had an effect on the young author's mind. Thus the desire for a secret place, a hidden place that we also note in his later work where the settings are often islands surrounded by the sea, or remote, isolated castles as in the case of Gormenghast which is isolated both geographically by mountains, the sea and marshlands, and architecturally in terms of high castle walls and a moat that surrounds the structure, but is also quite literally detached or hidden from the world by opting out of its existence. Once removed from this safety cocoon in *Titus Alone*, the hero Titus feels lost and disoriented, both physically as well as in terms of his place in the world. But this idea of a refuge is not simply found in the external structure of Gormenghast, but also within its walls, where Sepulchre finds refuge in his library, Gertrude with her birds and cats, and Cora and Clarice Groan- Titus's twin aunts in their Room with the Roots. The need for refuge is most importantly and noticeably depicted in Fuchsia, who literally builds a secret hideout in her attic:

I am quite alone, like I enjoy it. Now I can think for there's no one to provoke me here. Not in my room. ... Fuchsia is quite alright here. None of them knows where I go. Flay doesn't know. Father doesn't know. Mother doesn't know. None of them knows. Even Nannie doesn't know. Only I know. (Peake 62)

But this sense of security is illusory and short-lived and her secret is destroyed by the outsider, Steerpike who invades her private space just as he invades the ordered hierarchy of Gormenghast. Notably, even in such a wish-fulfillment story like *The Umzibooboo Kaffirs*, the young white chief's plan to build a secret hide-out never materializes, and the village of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs is ransacked and razed by the 'evil' Hottentots.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Peake, *Peake's Progress*, 41.

This of course makes sense if we consider the possible effect of the history of the child Emperor that Peake must have heard from his caretakers, and the impression it might have made on his young mind. If an Emperor, with all the military resources available to him could still not protect his fortified stronghold, what hope did a young boy such as Hugh Silver in a primitive village have? However, Hugh at least has the fortune of ultimately winning his war and reuniting with his family, while the characters in Gormenghast suffer fates that are closer to, and sometimes grimmer than that of the Boy Emperor. While Titus exiles himself from his ancestral home forever, his sister, Fuchsia loses her secret hideout, triggering a chain of events that leads to her losing her father, her freedom, her connection to her true self and ultimately her life. Even the adults in Gormenghast reveal something of the child's fear and the need for a secret safe space. Fuchsia's father, the Earl, who is specifically described as having "something of the infantile" (Peake 179) also loses his own safe haven. Although an adult, Sepulchre's child-like qualities can be evidenced in his emotional repression, and also in his self-identification before his death as a child. The loss of his secret, his library, hits him hard, leading to madness and death. The twins, who are clearly intellectually stunted creatures are banished from their own room, imprisoned by Steerpike, considered to be dead by the denizens of the castle and are eventually starved to death. The 'infantile' quality is shared by the Earl's sisters, Cora and Clarice, who too lose their personal sanctum, their magnificent room of roots.

The only person in the family who retains her sense of equilibrium is Lady Gertrude Groan. Lady Groan is not a child, but the Earth Mother incarnate, even though her brilliant mind is "purred to sleep" (Peake 416), keeping it in a child-like, unthinking state unless woken to cogitations by crisis. Nevertheless, her sanctum remains inviolate, and of all the characters in the castle, she is the most rooted to Gormenghast, to its instinctive cycle of life and death, symbolized in her

connections to birds that symbolize the unconscious in many fairytales, to cats — often associated with the underworld in myths, and to plant life which grows from the earth. She survives because in spite of accepting the law of Gormenghast, she becomes *more* than the castle and its rituals, as evidenced in her impatient irreverence during Sourdust's long speech at the christening of her son. Even though she accepts the Gormenghast ritual as the inevitable way of life, and views any defiance as treachery, she retains her instinctive qualities that allow her to think beyond what the rules decree if needs be. Thus she can spontaneously improvise a ritual-breaking walk among the cedars to quieten her crying infant after Titus falls from the Book of the Groan Law during the christening, even though the unprecedented interruption in the ceremony displeases Sourdust, the Master of Rituals to no end (Peake 93). One could argue that of all the characters including the true-blooded Groans and their servants and their masters of ceremonies, Lady Gertrude alone truly imbibes the spirit of Gormenghast, the life hidden in its stones and its rich soil that the likes of Sourdust and Barquentine invoke by rote. She is the White Goddess that the world has forgotten, and in the forgetting lies the malady of Gormenghast. This point shall be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis.

It is odd that in spite of being a castle, Gormenghast has no standing army, and its ancient armoury is as disused as the rusted weapons stored therein. This vulnerability corresponds to the various characters' lack of psychological armours as they fall to the machinations of Steerpike. This in part reflects the vulnerability of childhood, but unlike the young adventurer, Hugh Silver in Peake's childhood tale, these characters are granted no happy endings or happy reunions. And this is because the characters in Gormenghast, save Gertrude make themselves vulnerable by being stunted or repressed in various degrees. There is obviously some problem in Gormenghast that makes them so, and we shall try to discover what that is during the course of this thesis, but for

now we note that the historical design of defeat and banishment becomes in the Gormenghast novels a pattern of disconnection from the soul or the unconscious. Gormenghast offers no protection because in its emphasis on over-sophistication and rigidity, it has become disjointed from the world, the outer dwellings and from its own collective unconscious. Fuchsia, Sepulchrave and the twins die because they all allow themselves to be sundered from their instinctual lives which become the shadow that consumes them in the end.

Titus himself escapes the confines of Gormenghast to find his freedom but suffers from the vulnerability of independence that adulthood brings, but he eventually chooses to continue his journey forward to individuation by turning away from the luxury of infantile regression. His journey is different from that of his sister or his aunts or even his father for as the hero of the tale he must learn to integrate the conscious and the unconscious, and this is a quest that cannot be achieved within the limiting, splintered consciousness of Gormenghast that has failed to keep up with the times.

The third interesting detail in the story of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs is the gigantic tree with the massive trunk with a secret room that the young Hugh encounters in the forest,⁵⁰ and in that room a piece of paper on which something is written in a coded language. We never find out what is written in that paper, except that so-and-so have been looking for it, and they later send Hugh a big prize money for finding it. This rushed ending fails to justify the initial sense of mystery built around the piece of paper, and we can only suppose that the child author grew impatient with his project and wanted a quick resolution instead of continuing the narrative to unravel a mystery that he had himself created with considerable detail. One of young Mervyn's favourite books was of course R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, a work he illustrated in the course of his adult career, in

⁵⁰ Peake, *Peake's Progress*, 42.

which yet another young fatherless boy sets out on an adventure. Like Hugh Silver, Jim Hawkins too has to fend for himself in hostile territory, suggesting a clear inspiration for Peake's childish fantasy. So the idea of hidden maps and codes must have fascinated Peake as well, and he might have initially planned for Hugh to have a longer adventure. However, maps and secret codes for discovering a mystery are also familiar motifs in many stories, both mythical and fairytales, as are hidden places such as a tree with a secret room, and thus they have symbolic values in psychological terms. The image of a secret scroll in a secret underground room inside a fantastical tree has an almost dream-like quality and perhaps foreshadows the lost secrets of Gormenghast's forgotten, derelict underground tunnels, and the sense of a lost past that can no longer be deciphered. The chamber inside the tree with its roots deep inside the ground, and the underground maze of a castle both suggest the unconscious mind, and the knowledge hidden within.

The image of a huge tree also bring to mind the myth of the World Tree or Yggdrasil as well as the Biblical tree of life and death. In fact, there are quite a few references to roots and plant life in Gormenghast. Nearly two pages (Peake 75-76) are spent, in the build-up to the christening of Titus, in describing the gardener, Pentecost. Not only does the author describe Pentecost's groves and orchards at length, but he also describes Pentecost's working style in great details, despite the fact that Pentecost himself plays no part in the episode that follows. Neither is he a participant in any of the main incidents in the novels, and in fact he never appears again nor is mentioned after this chapter. But the physical description of his monk-like cowl with a knife hanging from a cord at his waist (Peake 76) brings to mind the mythical image of the 'priest in the

sacred wood'⁵¹. During the ceremony, Titus is enjoined to “hold the dark soil sacred that nourishes your high leaf-burdened trees” (Peake 94).

Apart from these, the other major reference to trees in the novels is the Room of the Roots that is the pride and joy of Cora and Clarice:

It was certainly a room of roots. Not a few simple, separate formations, but of a thousand branching, writhing, coiling, intertwining, diverging, converging, interlacing limbs... every one of these twisting terminals *hand-painted*.... The various main limbs and their wooden tributaries, even down to the minutest rivulet of root, were painted in their own especial colours... (Peake 63)

The effort invested in identifying every branch of the root from the base to the tip and painstakingly colour them in the hope that birds of every colour would come to sit on those branches reveals a latent desire for the instinctual life which is thwarted by the deadness of the tree. But the twins' petty, one-sided feud with Gertrude who they blame for stealing 'their' birds shows their lack of understanding of the truth. The dead tree thus becomes a symbol of Cora and Clarice Groan, and of their stunted minds, its brightly painted roots a commentary on the superficiality of its owners.

In Fuchsia's secret room in the attic, the centerpiece is a “great writhing root, long since dragged from the woods of Gormenghast mountains.... Polished to a rare gloss, its every wrinkle gleaming” (Peake 63). During the long walks around the castle that she takes up once her secret room is no longer secret, she collects mushrooms, roots and stones of various shapes and sizes, showing an indiscriminate love for forms and “the coloured things” that she bizarrely shares with her aunts and that is expressed in a more refined, artistic manner in the hands of the Bright Carvers.

⁵¹ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. A new abridgement from the second and third editions, ed. Robert Fraser (London: OUP, 2009). First published in 1890.

The artistic Bright Carvers themselves are nourished by the hard white flesh of the jarl root which comprises their main diet (Peake 69). The wet nurse, Keda who comes from the mud dwellings is given a gift of a root by one of her lovers, while the other brings her a stone from the Gormenghast Mountain, once again conflating the image of the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead. Nannie Slagg's smug advance towards the mud dwellings to fetch a wet nurse for Titus is halted by the startling sight of a cactus plant, the same plant that she recalls encountering fifteen years ago when she had made a similar journey for the newly-born Fuchsia (Peake 68). Titus's face as Keda sees him for the first time is as "old as the world, wise as the root of trees" (Peake 73). Sepulchrave collects pine cones for his son and Gertrude walks every morning in the lawns amongst the trees. Later on, after losing his library, the Earl has a brief period of madness before his descent into owl-consciousness where he attempts to rebuild his library by drawing shelves with twigs on the earth and filling them with pine cones instead of books. Keda finds peace in the shelter of the Brown Father whose brownness is that of the earth and the wood. Keda's daughter, The Thing is a wild child of Nature who leaps from tree to tree almost like a supernatural being. In *The Boy in Darkness* set on the night of the young earl's thirteenth birthday, we learn that one of the birthday rituals involve the planting of an Ash Tree sapling in a sacred grove. Like the Oak, the Ash is also often considered a prototype of the Yggdrasil.

Carl Jung calls the cosmic tree a symbol of the union of opposites in an age that is marked with a great schism between 'spirit' and 'matter': "...it is...the unconscious of the present-day man, who no longer feels at home in his world and can base his existence neither on the past that is no more nor on the future that is yet to be, should hark back to the symbol of cosmic tree rooted

in this world and growing up to heaven— the tree that is also man.”⁵² A disjointedness with the world is the predicament of the Groans weighed down by the dry ritual of a past that has been lost, each of whom tries to survive through an inner life, revealed in Gertrude’s reverie during the Breakfast scene: “...and the secret is to be able to freeze the outsider off completely and then he will be able to live within himself which Sepulchrave does in the wrong way for what use are books...” (Peake 312) While what the Countess proposes here is the other, opposite extreme of freezing out the matter completely in favour of the spirit, she is correct in her assessment of Sepulchrave’s method, which leans on intellectual abstractions and philosophical discourses rather than the raw, earthy vitality of his wife or the idealism and enthusiasm of the Poet (Peake 159). Jung seems to agree: “... [It is] only through an experience of symbolic reality that man, vainly seeking his own ‘existence’ and making a philosophy out of it, can find his way back to a world in which he is no longer a stranger.”⁵³

The vegetable world represents the sacred life of Gormenghast, the hidden sap running as the vital current that drives its soul, the key to its lost Eden. This is highlighted by Fuchsia when she conflates her personal inner sanctum, her attic which is the centre of her world with the mystic romanticism of a tree house: “I shall live *alone*. In a house, or in a tree” (Peake 113). What the young adventurer, Hugh Silver physically discovers in an exotic forest, the young but darker and more finely drawn Fuchsia only dreams or fantasizes about, having a deeper, intuitive appreciation of it than Hugh Silver does. Thus in Peake’s earliest work we can trace certain nascent ideas that attain greater symbolic value in his adult work.

⁵² Carl Jung, *Four Archetypes* (London: Routledge, 2012), 48-9. First published in 1969 (from Vol. 9, Part 1 of the *Collected Works* of C.G. Jung).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 49.

From the brief glimpses into Peake's childhood as recorded in his biographies, or even from the notes he left for a planned autobiography, and from the plot outline of *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs*, the impression we receive is of a lonely albeit richly imaginative childhood. Although the Peakes, Ernest and Amanda clearly loved him, they were perhaps too busy with the setting up of their mission and the smooth running of their hospital in a politically unstable country to have had much time to devote to their young son. This childhood anxiety perhaps unconsciously reveals itself in the repeated iterations that neither Fuchsia nor Titus have ever known affection, and not knowing it, do not really understand what they lack or long for: "Never having had either positive cruelty or kindness shown to her by her parents, but only an indifference, she was not conscious of what it was that she missed— affection" (Peake 211).

It has long been established by psychologists of course that the absence of either or both parents from the child's life during the latter's formative years often create a negative impact in the child's psyche, for the human infant possesses behavioral systems and symbolic structures that predispose him/her to form a bond with the father as well as the mother. The absence of the mother and the father figures can have a debilitating effect on the emerging personality, leaving it prone to fears and anxieties and hampering its adjustment to society. All these factors, I believe, contribute to the sense of utter abandonment and disconnection that becomes the primary experience for the readers as they journey through the mazes of Gormenghast: "Titus is seven. His confines, Gormenghast. Suckled on shadows; weaned, as it were, on webs of ritual: for his ears, echoes, for his eyes, a labyrinth of stone" (Peake 399). Titus is *suckled* on shadows because his parents are literally absent from his life. Even though Sepulchre and Gertrude are people belonging to two very different temperaments, a common trait that unites them is their inability to or disinterestedness in showing affection towards their children.

In the beginning of *Titus Groan*, Flay informs Rottcodd that the Countess has “hardly seen her new-born. Heir to Gormenghast. Doesn’t look at him” (Peake 14). Later in the day, after Nannie Slagg brings the baby Titus for the mother to see after he has had his wash, Lady Groan does not know what to do with the child and enjoins the nurse to bring him to her only when he is six (Peake 45). In the beginning of *Gormenghast* we are told that “She saw him seven times in seven years”, yet her “love for him is as heavy and as formless as loam” (Peake 403). It is only at moments of active crisis that she attempts to communicate or shows concern for her children, such as during the burning down of the library when she looks for Fuchsia in the smoke and lets Titus share the nest of the wood warbler at her breast. Twice in the second novel, *Gormenghast*, she reveals tenderness towards her son and daughter, and both are ironically moments of death. The first occurs when Fuchsia’s drowned body is laid out on the hospital bed: “The face of the Countess showed nothing, but once she drew the corner of the sheet up a little further over Fuchsia’s shoulder, with an infinite gentleness, as though she feared her child might feel the cold and so must take the risk of waking her” (Peake 768). The second comes a few pages later, when Titus slays Steerpike: “A kind of beauty had taken possession of her big, blunt features. That look which she reserved, unknowingly, for a bird with a broken wing, or a thirsty animal, was now bent upon the scene below” (Peake 798). As Titus falls into a fever, she spends her days sitting in a corner of his hospital room, but once he begins to regain consciousness, she leaves, having no idea what to say to him (Peake 800).

As for Sepulchre, he is literally a physically unavailable father, for he dies while Titus is still a baby. But while being devoured by owls might account for his physical unavailability in his son’s life, he had been an emotionally unavailable father even before his death, and even before his madness to both his children. Even the faithful Flay wonders at his not seeing his son

throughout the entire summer: “Thought he’d forgotten him. Should have seen the child long ago” (Peake 160). In fact, like his wife, he has virtually no emotional communication with anyone around him, and unlike her he does not even communicate with any other living beings such as birds or animals. He has virtually no relationship with his wife, his sisters complain about his negligence (ironically holding Gertrude responsible for it) and he is distant with his children, even when he seemingly makes an effort, such as gathering fir cones and washing them in rainwater for Titus to play with (Peake 178-9). The aforementioned is the only instance in the novel where he asks to see his son without the requirements of ritual, but he nevertheless fails to show any affection either through words or physical contact. In fact, Sepulchre does not even hold his son, instead asking Nannie Slagg to hold him up for him to see.

He had been childish in gathering [the cones]. Titus had not in any case derived any amusement from them.

... He was too proud and too melancholy to unbend and be the father of the boy in anything but fact; he would not cease to isolate himself. (Peake 179)

Yet the fact that he goes through the trouble of gathering the fir cones at all to please his son or to gather them himself rather than ordering a servant to do so shows an impulse towards affection that he is unable to express when he actually sees his son. This incapacity for emotional expression contributes to the Count’s sense of loneliness, his “inherent melancholy” (Peake 159) that he tries to smother through his love for books, and that pushes him into insanity once that solitary support system is gone. Almost as some sort of compensatory reaction, it is his madness that briefly brings him somewhat closer to his daughter, Fuchsia before the malady completely engulfs and destroys him:

Fuchsia swung her head up, and her eyes fastened upon her father. He had never spoken to her in that way — she had never before heard that tone of love in his voice. Chilled by the horror of his growing madness, she had yet been filled with a compassion she had never known, but now there was more than compassion within her, there was released, of a sudden, a warm jet of love for the huddled figure... whose voice sounded so quiet and thoughtful. (Peake 270)

Sepulchrave's emotional repression parallels the stunted intellect of his sisters who both have bodies that are physically paralyzed on the right side due to convulsions they suffered from when they were young like Fuchsia, leaving them "practically starved down the right side" (Peake 90). The physical paralysis suggests a psychological one, the right half of the brain representing intellect, consequently leaving the left, emotional side of it unbalanced.

This schism in the lives of the earl and his sisters and their shared "native depression" (Peake 159, 432) suggest an abusive, or at least neglected childhood and the emotional unavailability of their own parents, just as Sepulchrave himself fails to be a father to his own son and daughter. The twins specifically mention the term 'starved' with respect to their paralysis, suggesting a lack, if not of food then definitely of affection and attention. It is noteworthy that Fuchsia herself often skips her meals, growing bored with waiting for Nannie Slagg and nibbling on stale fruits and cakes from her hidden stash instead, and Mrs. Slagg is woefully inadequate and too distracted with self-pity to enforce proper nutrition on her young charge. Likewise, there is no mention of any tutor or schooling for her, although her brother is sent to a school with the other Gormenghast boys.

While the starved or abused or unloved child is a common narrative motif— Cinderella and Snow White being obvious examples, generally, "the fate of these heroes convinces the child that, like them, he may feel outcast and abandoned in the world, groping in the dark, but, like them,

in the course of his life he will be guided step by step, and given help when it is needed.”⁵⁴ The unloved step-daughter in a fairytale or for that matter an *Oliver Twist* or even a *Harry Potter*, despite their travails are sure to find some alternative adult guidance towards a happy ending in a world where they are valued and loved. This is something that is lacking in Gormenghast. There is no magic carriage to facilitate Fuchsia’s desired escape, no maps or wise advice to help Titus navigate his confused path through the mires of the Groan Law. Moreover, in the traditional narratives, the step-parent or the abusive adult is always drawn as a negative, evil figure, which allows the reader to view the world in binaries, leading to a satisfactory resolution in the defeat of the evil figure. But the adults of Gormenghast, be it Sepulchre or Gertrude or Mrs. Slagg are not evil or hateful, but simply inadequate. They are, due to whatever repressive complexes within their own psyches incapable of emotional connections with other human beings, whether adults or children, or when they are, as in the case of Prunesquallor or Flay, they are still too overwhelmed by the inherently repressive system to even conceive of going against it. Even Barquentine who comes quite close to being monstrous is at the end of the day the product of the same emotional repression that makes him a dysfunctional adult with a history of a neglected childhood and lack of affection. As a result, the children are lonelier than any fairytale hero, without anybody to help them.

According to psychological studies, insufficient affection and emotional stimulus from parents might lead to the growth of a schizoid disposition in the child, with symptoms such as emotional aloofness and withdrawal from social relationships. We see this in Titus when he is unable to articulate a relationship with the Thing, instead possessing her without consent, and later in his failed relationships with Juno, Cheeta and Black Rose, the woman he rescues from the

⁵⁴ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Vintage, 2010), 24.

Under-River. In fact, it may be argued that Titus shows signs of some of the same symptoms of melancholia as his father, Sepulchrave as they both are the victims of the neglect and breakdown of familial relationships that seems to be the norm in Gormenghast. That parental loss or neglect in early childhood may result in dysfunctional adults has been suggested by psychologists. Studies of adults with early parental loss shows that they are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders, and use maladaptive coping strategies including increased levels of self-blame, self-medication, and emotional eating.⁵⁵

Almost all of these can be seen in Sepulchrave, except instead of emotional binge-eating, he barely eats at all. Moreover, the Father archetype is associated with both the static principle of rational thought and reasoning as well as the dynamic principle of creative action. Both of these are utterly missing from the life of Gormenghast, leading to a changeless, stagnant suffocating state of existence. Peake's fictitious castle society runs along the rigid, conservative dictates of a fixed hierarchy, all of which are attributes of the masculine principle, but devoid of its rational, dynamic quality. The Logos of Gormenghast is thus the father archetype gone wrong, cut off from its life-spring. It is no wonder therefore that Sepulchrave seeks comfort in the philosophical thought collected in his library, and plunges into insanity when that is taken away from him.

The emotional availability of the father figure also facilitates "the child's separation and individuation process"⁵⁶ and its adaptation to the external world. In Jungian thought, the father archetype is responsible for the cultural integration of the child: "the inner father activates the need

⁵⁵ Beverley Lim Høeg et al, "Maladaptive coping in adults who have experienced early parental loss and grief counseling," *Journal of Health Psychology* 22, no. 14 (2017): 1851-1861.

⁵⁶ Edythe M Krampe, "Inner Father," *Fathering* 1, no. 2 (June 2003): 137-8.

to belong in a drive for empathic relatedness with others...⁵⁷ Not only does Titus grow up without a father, his relationship with his mother too is distant, thus denying him even a secondary father image that may be in similar circumstances mediated by “the mother’s affective, nonverbal relationship with him”⁵⁸— a bond which is entirely lacking in the case of Sepulchrave and Gertrude who are as distant from each other as they are from their children.

Titus thus fails to settle not only within the confines of Gormenghast but also in the city in spite of having been offered physical and emotional shelter by other people. And as the author’s outlines for the fourth novel, *Titus Awakes* (which was later completed by his wife, Maeve Gilmore) reveal, Titus is destined to travel from place to place, from people to people, repeatedly failing to find a home for himself anywhere. The father represents authority, power, reason, leadership and protection, and growing up without a father, Titus it seems is always persecuted and always vulnerable. It is not surprising then, that the castle of Gormenghast has no concept of soldiers or other defensive machinery. Not simply Sepulchrave, but any other father figures that the novels offer— the doctor, the headmaster or even the more virile Muzzlehatch in *Titus Alone* all lack concrete agency or authority and are ultimately ineffectual protectors. Both the doctor and the headmaster love him, feeling sorry about a young lively child bound by the iron-clad rules of Tradition. But they can do no more than offer to play a game of marbles with him on the prison floor— when Titus is locked up for a misdemeanor against the Groan Law, or comment on the unsuitability of the fort as a place for a child: “There was a catch in the Doctor’s voice. Free tomorrow, he thought. Free tomorrow. Would the child ever be free tomorrow?” (Peake 522) Compassionate as they are, these adults have little power to act on behalf of the child. Titus or

⁵⁷ Krampe, “Inner Father,” 144.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 140.

Fuchsia have no fairy godmother to magically transform their world, no kind, supportive dwarves in the forest and no wise old wizard who can guide them towards freedom or hand them the tools to do so.

The patterns of a childhood adventure thus becomes a much darker tale of a dismal, lonely world where children suffer in a cycle of unending inevitability as they grow aware of the change and destruction that no adult can protect them from. The story thus offers very little in the way of a satisfying happy ending, and very little of the sense of adventure that a Hugh Silver or a Jim Hawkins may indulge in. At the same time, unhappy as the children are in Peake's novels, there is hardly any emotional expression of those feelings as one might find in a novel by Charles Dickens (another of Peake's favourite authors whose works he illustrated) and this distinctively uncomfortable air of emotional repression becomes a defining characteristic of Titus Groan's journey, one that repeatedly prevents him from forming stable relationships later in his adult life.

This realization that grown-ups did not necessarily know any more than children was something against which she had fought. She wanted Mrs. Slagg to remain the wise recipient of all her troubles and the comforter she had always seemed, but Fuchsia was growing up and she was now realizing how weak and ineffectual was her old guardian. (Peake 210)

However, there is a fourth point to consider— one that is perhaps more obvious in the adventures of Hugh Silver than in the experiences of Titus Groan, and that is the subject of British imperialism. Hugh Silver's perception of both the Umzibooboo Kaffirs and the Hottentots reflect the white boy's innate sense of superiority — the Africans are either barbaric and cruel, or simple and good, so simple, in fact that they unanimously agree to elect a white child to lead a bunch of more experienced adults. Margery Hourihan writes,

The European elite have had a lively sense of their own difference and superiority to others from early times, and one function of the hero tale has been to express this in dramatic

form. We have noted Odysseus's contemptuous account of the Cyclopes as 'fierce and uncivilized' (Homer 1946: 144), a people who had no laws and did not know how to govern themselves. But it was the discovery of the New World and the advent of imperialism that provided Europeans with the most striking examples of 'uncivilized' peoples, the most vivid contrasts to themselves, the most dazzling demonstrations of their superiority. As the conquest and appropriation of the New World (and of Africa and Australasia) proceeded, stories in which morally upright European heroes out-fought and outwitted 'savages' proliferated.⁵⁹

Hugh's return to England at the end of his adventure with the Umzibooboo Kaffirs then is not simply an uprooting to an unfamiliar country, but also a loss of this taken-for-granted white privilege, for in England, he is just another boy amongst others, just as the Chinese Emperor is forced to become just an ordinary citizen outside the walls of the Forbidden City. This would also have been the experience of the young Mervyn when he left China as a boy to go to school in England. Biographical anecdote suggests he didn't do too well in school except perhaps in the classes of his art teacher, Matthew McIver and his English teacher, Eric Drake. Winnington writes:

Coming from China, Mervyn had a lot to get used to— and a lot of learning to catch up on... so the journey to the school and the signboard, 'To Eltham College', stuck in his memory; that and the dreaded moment when his parents drove away.⁶⁰

In fact, Peake's failure to work led to McIver actually having to defend him from being turned out in a staff meeting.⁶¹

Mervyn's transition however was probably easier than that of another English boy in China decades later, J.G. Ballard, who details his own oriental childhood experience in the autobiographical *Empire of the Sun*. Ballard was caught bang in the middle of the Second World

⁵⁹ Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997), 129.

⁶⁰ G. Peter Winnington, *Mervyn Peake's VAST ALCHEMIES: The Illustrated Biography*, 54.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

War. In his book, he records his experience of the years between 1942-1945, at a time when the Allies were losing, when from a pampered white boy amongst lesser mortals he was reduced suddenly to a street urchin, and then to a prisoner. Even after the war ended, the world was no longer the same, and his parents, who “had been through their own war.... seemed older and far away⁶².” And like Mervyn, the boy Jim Ballard too was sent away to England: “He stepped on to the gangway, conscious that he was probably leaving Shanghai for the last time, setting out for a small, strange country on the other side of the world which he had never visited, but which was nominally ‘home’.”⁶³

Mervyn, Jim Ballard, the Chinese Emperor and Titus all follow a pattern that in some ways runs both parallel and in opposition to the journey of the fairytale hero. The fairytale hero leaves home to make his fortune in the wide outside world, finding fame and wealth in the process, and also becoming a person of importance, usually a king, from the position of an underdog such as the youngest prince or the village idiot. This is, for instance, also the journey of Bilbo or Frodo Baggins who trade a quiet, respectable life in the Shire for an adventure in the more dangerous but also more exciting and rewarding world beyond its borders. The emperor and Titus however leave home and its attendant power and prestige to go out into a world where they are ordinary like everyone else. All of them must deal with this change from being special to ordinary. The experience that permeates to the readers when reading about Titus is therefore one of diminishing, a harrowing sense of being lost without the definite promise of a quest that a proper fairytale offers, such as a treasure, a princess, a monster to slay or a kingdom to save. Reading Peake is therefore unsettling and slightly unsatisfactory as far as narrative expectations are concerned. On the other

⁶² JG Ballard, *Empire of the Sun* (London: Flamingo, 1994), 350.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 351.

hand, Peake and Ballard return home from a strange land, leaving behind a world that had given them some measure of power and prestige. As Ballard ruminates on the eve of his departure to England: “only a part of his mind would leave Shanghai. The rest would remain there forever, returning on the tide like the coffins launched from the funeral piers at Nantao.”⁶⁴

This disappearance of an ideal world, of the irreversibility of change and loss is a theme that highlights both the historical events in China that might have lighted Peake’s unconscious childhood imagination, but in the Gormenghast novels they become almost a leitmotif, an intrinsic structural design that is woven into the very mood and fibre of its world. Everything in Gormenghast is lost or forgotten, vanished in the recesses of time, and this idea of an irremediable vanishing of a once glorious past is introduced early in the first novel, when Peake speaks of the Bright Carvers: “They were all-but forgotten people: the breed that was remembered with a start, or with the unreality of a recrudescence dream. The day of carvings alone brought them into the sunlight and reawakened the *memory of former times*” (Peake 10, emphasis mine).

While used to describe the Bright Carvers, this brief commentary somehow seems very apt for Gormenghast itself. The physical dereliction of the latter, it’s mostly forgotten and unused tunnels and the obsessive rituals that can no longer be explained all point to a place or a world out of time, a past that is irrevocable and a present that is out of sync with the world. Falling out of time and space, Gormenghast thus becomes timeless, a place of myth, fairytales and dreams like childhood, or, as Bruce Hunt describes it: a “spacious warehouse of dreams.”⁶⁵ And Peake, who never returned to China after leaving it as a boy of twelve would perhaps indeed remember the

⁶⁴ Ballard, *Empire of the Sun*, 351.

⁶⁵ Bruce Hunt, "Gormenghast": Psychology of the 'Bildungsroman,'" 1116. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake’s *The Gormenghast Novels*.

country of his birth similarly through the timeless vision of dreams and nostalgia. ‘Unreality of a recrudescence dream’ thus becomes a defining phrase for the castle and the life that unfolds within it, for much of the action that happens within and around it is indeed dream-like.

Gormenghast as a Dream

One of the main difficulties in establishing Gormenghast in a concrete reality lies in the many gaps in information that exist despite the creator’s intricately detailed visual construction. As with the opening section detailing the bonfire ritual of the Bright Carvings whose origin or significance is no longer remembered, the theme of oblivion or forgetting permeates the atmosphere of Gormenghast. The Earl performs rituals such as climbing up a certain staircase on a certain date or drawing a half-moon on an iron cupboard, even though the meanings behind those rites are forgotten, Swelter attempts to sing an old, sad song from a hundred years ago which he then forgets to sing (Peake 26), Flay does not remember the guardian who first brought him to Gormenghast, Fuchsia, as she tries to divine the meaning behind a formation of seven clouds finds that she has forgotten the rhyme that would have given her the meaning and her secret rooms in the attic are a museum of forgotten relics. The Bright Carvers have a forgotten history, including the identity of their greatest Carver whose statue of a horse and a rider stands in the square. Barquentine, master of ritual after the death of his father, Sourdust, remembers only belatedly that he once had a wife, and possibly a son.

The castle itself, with its forgotten, derelict tunnels and abandoned towers is a monument to oblivion. Copp points out how Peake dangles potential symbolic signifiers such as the repeated use of the numbers seven or two: seven clouds, seventy-seventh earl, seventeenth earl who instituted the traditional greeting between the members of the castle and the Bright Carvers, Steerpik’s age at the onset of the first novel (he is seventeen), Titus’s age at the beginning of the

second (he is seven), the picture of the twenty-second earl that Fuchsia has in her attic, the christening that is held after twelve days, but “like the unintelligible ritual that rules their life, the key to meaning has been lost.”⁶⁶ And yet, in spite of these lacunae, Gormenghast- both as a physical reality as well as a metaphysical entity embodying the Groan Law and Ritual is such an overwhelming presence in the life of its inhabitants that they fail to conceive of a life beyond it. “There is nowhere else,” Gertrude tells Titus when the latter announces his intention to leave at the end of the second novel (Peake 807).

Gormenghast seems to exist in a bubble beyond space and time so much so that its denizens are not even aware of a world beyond. With “those tracts of country that stretch on every hand, in the North to the wastelands, in the South to the grey salt marshes, in the East to the quicksands and the tideless sea, and in the West to knuckles of endless rock” (Peake 238), Gormenghast comes across as a self-contained, self-sufficient microcosm. When in *Titus Alone* the eponymous hero reaches the city, we find that the denizens of the outer world are not even aware of Gormenghast’s experience. And yet, for all its exclusivity, there are characters who are supposed to have come from ‘outside’ of Gormenghast. Gertrude herself, for instance is not of the Groan blood, a fact that her sisters-in-law, Cora and Clarice like to reiterate at every chance they get. And yet, if she is not from the family, and the Earl isn’t allowed to mix with the commoners of Gormenghast beyond a certain age, then where did she come from? Prunesquallor is an outsider who is somewhat tolerated within the Groan circle because of his medical expertise. The servants, Swelter and Flay have both been in Gormenghast as ‘man and boy’ for about forty years at the time of Titus’s birth at the opening of *Titus Groan*, suggesting that they both came into Gormenghast from somewhere

⁶⁶ Robert Copp, “Secret Gods: Epic Revelations of the Aesthetic Imagination”, MA Dissertation at Department of English, Concordia University, 1989. National Library of Canada, Canadian Theses Service, 87.

else. Likewise, Steerpike at the opening of the story is new to the castle. The question naturally arises, where do they come from? And do they not have family beyond the castle borders? But this question is never addressed or answered, not even in suggestions. The only outside with which the castle has a sort of tenuous relationship is the mud-dwellings belonging to the Bright Carvers.

However, there are several problems in assuming that the ‘outside’ that these characters come from may have anything to do with the outer-dwellers. First of all, although called the outer-dwellers, and while certainly living outside of the stone walls of Gormenghast, the Bright Carvers are pretty much a part of the fabric of Gormenghast, their entire lives literally revolving around the observance and fulfillment of the most important of all the Groan rituals. Second, the outer-dwellers are hereditary carvers belonging to a society as rigidly hierarchical as that of the inner castle itself, a hierarchy that limits even personal choices such as the choice of spouse and the right of a widow over her late husband’s art. It seems unlikely that such a society would permit a change in profession or social status by allowing its members to become, their own terms, one of the *Castles* (Peake 69). Third, it is clearly stated that the contact between the inner and outer worlds are limited, and strictly regulated. Only the chosen three carvers every year are allowed to walk on the ramparts of the castle on full moon nights of alternate months. This is re-stated when Titus chases the Thing before the Flood, not out of any ritualistic need but out of free, individual desire:

What he did know was that the sin to cap all sins would be for any member of the castle, let alone its rightful sovereign, to have *the remotest association* with an Outer Dweller- for the earl of Gormenghast to go in search of a daughter of that squalid cantonment and a bastard child at that. He knew *from his mother downwards to the most obscure of her menials* the conception of any such happening would be equally revolting. (Peake 723. *Emphasis mine*)

The interaction between the castle and the mud-dwellings is such an unorthodox concept that Nannie Slagg feels guilty about going to meet them even when she has a perfectly legitimate and necessary cause, which is picking a wet-nurse for the newborn Groan heir (Peake 66).

There does seem to be an exception to this in the case of Pentecost, but considering the traditional structure of both societies, it is likely that the position of the gardener is traditionally given to one of the Mud Dwellers, just as the wet nurse for infant Groan children is also sourced from amongst them. Yet the question of the origins of characters like Gertrude or Flay or Steerpike who occupy far greater space and importance in the novels is never even mentioned except for the perfunctory information that they came from some undefined outside.

That the connection between the castle and the dwellers of the mud huts is tenuous at best, held together only by the string of ritual is repeatedly emphasized wherever and whenever the two come into any kind of contact. The very first page of *Titus Groan* tells us:

Very little communication passed between the denizens of these outer quarters and those who lived within the walls, save when, on the first June morning of each year, the entire population of the clay dwellings had sanction to enter the Grounds in order to display the wooden carvings on which they had been working during the year” (Peake 9. Underlining mine).

Saving this exception of the day of carvings, and the latitude permitted to the most peerless, there was no other opportunity for those who lived within the walls to know of these ‘outer’ folk. (Peake 10. Underlining mine)

But where then do the Countess and the doctor and the Head Chef and Lord Groan’s first servant come from? Where is this mythical outside from where Steerpike arrives to wreak so much havoc into the life of the castle? And if indeed these characters have family or friends beyond Gormenghast, why then is there no communication with the homes they have left behind? Flay, when turned out by the Countess, becomes a wild man in the surrounding forest, for to be written out of Gormenghast is to cease to exist.

Further, seeing as there are no lines of communication between Gormenghast and the world, how do they arrive to Gormenghast in the first place? How does Sepulchrave marry Gertrude and why are there no marriages for his sisters? Who are the poets and philosophers from Sepulchrave's library? Are these literary creators former denizens of the castle itself or do their works speak of a world beyond? What are Gormenghast's sources of income? How are the servants and the lavish meals and regal clothes and jewelry paid for? And why have the people of the City never heard of the place with all their espionage gadgets and technology? As Jung says, "Of all psychic phenomena the dream presents perhaps the largest number of 'irrational' factors... and is therefore less transparent and understandable."⁶⁷ Despite the massive amount of details spent in the description of Gormenghast and the rigid assurance of its "main mass of stone", it remains an untouchable dream replete with unanswered questions and factual gaps.

The 'gorm'⁶⁸ in Gormenghast, which means 'heed' or 'attention' suggests qualities of the mind, the second half of the name lending a ghostly tenor to it. Etymologically then, the name Gormenghast suggests a disturbed mindscape. It is a common feature in Peake's writings to depict people in terms of places and places in terms of human features, or, as Winnington puts it in *Inside the Mind of Mervyn Peake*, to "spatialize the contents of the mind."⁶⁹ In Act II of his play *The Wit to Woo*, for instance, a character called Kite speaks of the luxury of wandering through his "labyrinthine skull"⁷⁰ to hear the sound of his brain. In the poem *London, 1941*, on the other hand

⁶⁷ Carl Jung, *Dreams* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 70. First published by the Princeton University Press in 1974. Extracted from Volumes 4, 8, 12 & 16 of the Collected Works of C.G. Jung.

⁶⁸ "Gormless," *YourDictionary*. www.yourdictionary.com/Gormless . From Middle English 'gome' from Old Norse 'gaum'.

⁶⁹ G. Peter Winnington, "Inside the Mind of Mervyn Peake," *Etudes de Lettres* Series vi, Vol 2, no.1 (1979): 99-106.

⁷⁰ Mervyn Peake, *Peake's Progress*, ed. Maeve Gilmore (New York: Overlook Press, 1981), 282-3.

the writer describes the war-ravaged city of London as a woman with a head “From which the plaster breaks away/Like flesh from the rough bone, is turned/ Upon a neck of stones.”⁷¹ Within the Gormenghast novels, characters’ minds are often given architectural qualities. Steerpike, for instance has an “ordered mind like a bureau with tabulated shelves and pigeon-holes of reference” (Peake 137) while the melancholic Sepulchre with the help of his books and drugs creates “within his skull a tallow-coloured world of ghastly beauty” (Peake 160). The doctor’s restless brain where thoughts like people move around has a “long shelf at the back... that was nearly empty” (Peake 365). Irma Prunesquallor, on her first meeting with Bellgrove wonders if she had “unwittingly lifted some hatchway of her brain and revealed to this brilliant man how cold, black, humourless and sterile was the region that lay within” (Peake 597). Winnington suggests that in these novels, Peake “is writing out the contents of his mind, discovering the torturous ways of his imagination and sharing with his characters the labyrinthine recesses of his mind.”⁷² Towards the climax of the second novel, Titus, Flay and Prunesquallor follow Steerpike along “a maze so labyrinthine as to suggest that the builders of these sunless walls had been ordered to construct a maze for no other purpose than to torture the mind and freeze the memory” (Peake 698). And yet, this world, “unfamiliar in its detail— new to them” is nevertheless “unquestionably of the very stuff of their memories” (Peake 694). Finally, in the beginning of the third novel, *Titus Alone*, Gormenghast itself is given a voice, and by default, a mind: “Come out of the shadows, traitor, and stand upon the wild brink of my brain” (Peake 811). Peake’s teacher, Eric Drake reminds us that since Peake spoke Chinese as a child, he might have consciously or unconsciously recalled the language while naming ‘Gormenghast’, the first two syllables of which are Chinese, meaning

⁷¹ Ibid., 164.

⁷² G. Peter Winnington, “Inside the Mind of Mervyn Peake.”

“every door.”⁷³ This lends a kind of universal or archetypal tenor to the work, for Gormenghast then becomes the site of humanity’s collective thoughts and dreams.

There are numerous references to dreaming in the novels, phrases like ‘dream-like’ or ‘unreal’ recurring at regular intervals. As Steerpike climbs over the rooftops of Gormenghast, “the trials of the day had about them the unreality of a dream” (Peake 104). Keda reminisces about the day her husband died: “I could not understand the burying... It was all a dream” (Peake 151). When she returns to her people, the evening seems “electric and unreal”: “...yet perhaps, thought Keda, this *is* reality and my past life has been a meaningless dream” (Peake 183). As she watches her lovers fight to their deaths, she tells herself that the scene before her ‘was not *real*— yet” (Peake 222). At Sourdust’s burial, Fuchsia wistfully imagines that everyone was really “kind and beautiful, and she had seen them only through the black net of a dream she was suffering” (Peake 265). On the day of the earling, Rottcodd on finding the castle empty imagines that “he was dreaming that he had left his hammock” (Peake 391). Steerpike wanders through the labyrinthine tunnels “with a dream-like motion” (Peake 698) and Prunesquallor, in a startlingly accurate dream watches the drowning of Fuchsia and the chthonic rat shadows of a flying spectre of Steerpike “filling the landscape of his midnight brain (Peake 553). The life of Gormenghast seems so far removed from time and place that the magistrate in *Titus Alone* almost speaks for the readers when, questioning the existence of the castle he asks Titus: “Do you dream at night? Have you lapses of memory? Are you a poet? Or is it all, in fact, an elaborate joke?” (Peake 876) Even more telling are the lines that follow Titus’s passionate outcry at this aspersion: “It was the voice of someone quite convinced of his own truth— the truth in his head” (Peake 876).

⁷³ Eric Drake, “Lost Archives,” *Mervyn Peake Review* 4 (April 1977): 3-12.

The mythical transformation of the author's childhood memories, and the timeless, dream-like quality of Gormenghast leads us to an examination of mythic and fairytale elements in the novels, for it is in those that we find the patterns of examining the realms of the mind, and because "archetypal stories originate... through individual experiences of an invasion by some unconscious content, whether in a dream or in a waking hallucination."⁷⁴ This is what we're going to explore in greater details in the next chapter.

⁷⁴ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairytales* (Boulder: Shambala, 1996), 24.

Chapter Two

The Symbolic Content in Gormenghast

O string the arrogant ribs with spider-twine
 Torn from those webs that hold the murderous arms
 Of thorn-crazed boughs together, that a gust
 May pluck the resonant threads to a white rune
 Of memory, a music of fled forms,
 An ancient cadence from the ancient dust.⁷⁵

In this chapter we continue to examine the dream motifs in Gormenghast, exploring how these subconscious elements contribute to the archetypal, symbolic tone of this world. We especially examine the pattern of the diseased kingdom or wasteland within the structure of Gormenghast, identifying the motifs of divine kingship, sacrifice and rebirth within the narrative. We also examine these themes in the novella, *Boy in Darkness* as a sort of subverted fairytale set within the Gormenghast world which exhibits some of the same qualities of disease, degeneration and forgetfulness as the Gormenghast novels do. We discover that although the narrative progression in these works parallel the patterns of traditional fairytales or folktales, they eventually fail to fulfill those patterns, leading to a sense of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In this chapter we examine these repeated patterns of failed integration and try to arrive at a cause behind the same.

Dreams and visions have inspired literature and art from the earliest ages, for they carry within them the depth of psychic insight or energy that one may not have access to in the conscious state of the mind. For this reason, some of humanity's earliest stories, our myths and fairytales are also products of dreams: "For one finds that many dreams present images and associations that are

⁷⁵ Peake, "A Reverie of Bone," in *Peake's Progress*, 259.

analogous to primitive ideas, myths, and rites... [such images being] an integral part of the unconscious, and can be observed anywhere.”⁷⁶ Thus, the internal processes of the mind are externalized in the form of narrative and characters, embodying “the cumulative experience of a society”⁷⁷ by the means of certain familiar patterns. Despite the gaps in the narrative, and the dreamlike quality of its world, it is possible to discern in the Gormenghast novels these same familiar patterns found in myths and fairytales, for the story told here is an archetypal one, although mediated through and qualified by Peake’s individual imagination and experience. To understand the nature of Gormenghast and the journey of Titus Groan, we must therefore understand these patterns.

In *A Short History of Myths*, Karen Armstrong speaks of ‘dreamtime’ that the indigenous people of Australia experience during sleep or in moments of visionary experiences. This ‘dreamtime’ is timeless and ‘everywhen’, forming a “stable background to ordinary life, which is dominated by death, flux, the endless succession of events and the cycle of the seasons.”⁷⁸ Through the mediation of dreaming, everyday activities like hunting, weaving, eating, fishing etc. become sacred activities performed by the archetypal ancestral figures of their dreams. Approached in this manner, myth then is not so much about a theological code of life but a way of life in itself that elevates the mundane to the sacred and connects man’s everyday experiences to the spiritual realm. “At its best, ritual is a series of physical acts that expresses in condensed form one’s relationship to the inner world of the unconscious.”⁷⁹ Ordinary activities thus are transformed into “active,

⁷⁶ Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” in *Man and His Symbols* by Carl G. Jung et al., 32.

⁷⁷ Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, 44.

⁷⁸ Karen Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 9.

⁷⁹ Robert A. Johnson, *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2009), 103.

dynamic symbols”⁸⁰ or rituals on which the proper functioning of the community depends. This, we find is the state of the Gormenghast society where every castle stone is held sacred and every activity at every moment is guided by ritual. Or in other words, “Gormenghast is an imaginative re-creation of the age-old Centre or Sacred Mountain ... a manifestation of the sacred to the human beings inhabiting the place.”⁸¹ True to this archaic notion of the eternal sacred, the inhabitants of the castle hold a collective, unshakeable faith in the unchangeability of the world, represented in the person of the Earl of Gormenghast and in the unbroken line of male heirs who stand for this changelessness. As Flay, the Earl’s first servant triumphantly proclaims: “The child is a Groan. An authentic male Groan. Challenge to Change! No *Change*, Rottcodd. No Change!” (Peake 15)

The awareness of change is a constant underlying sentiment in J.R.R. Tolkien’s saga of Middle-earth, the inevitability of it creating a sense of melancholy as the light fades from the golden woods of the elves, with the distant and unreachable Valinor remaining as the only haven of permanence. But while the hearkening back to a lost world evokes songs and laughter and beauty in Tolkien, the permanence on offer in Peake is stilted and joyless, as evidenced in the conversation between Flay and Rottcodd that follows after the former informs the latter of the birth of the heir, and the joy, where expressed — as in the kitchens of Gormenghast is vulgar and repulsive, so that even Flay, the staunchest supporter of “this time-hallowed revelry” (Peake 24) feels “the atmosphere close[d] around him” (Peake 21). Far from inviting the readers into a nostalgic reminiscence of lost glory, Peake thus creates a world that is repressive, emotionally inhibitive and claustrophobic.

⁸⁰ Johnson, *Inner Work: Using Dreams and Active Imagination for Personal Growth* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2009), 103.

⁸¹ Pierre François, “Godless Religion and Maimed Earldom in *Titus Groan*,” 9.

Although the setting of Gormenghast can be described as quasi-medieval, in terms of its rituals, it reflects a more ancient worldview in which the divine and the mundane are inextricably linked, and the sacred belongs, not to any supernatural or metaphysical realm but to the realm of the everyday and the ordinary, and thus the very stones of the Gormenghast castle are held sacred by its denizens, and life within the castle must be lived in strict accordance with the dignity of this sacredness: "...the sacred spirit of tradition implied by the daily manifestations was understood by all"(Peake 50).

From the kitchen menials to the professors, the aloof Rottcodd and even the sometimes heterodox in thought Prunesquallor, all accept the absoluteness of this iron law of the stones. This sacrosanct quality is not simply invested in the stones, but also in its titular ruler, the Earl of Gormenghast who is equated to the castle itself. "To have asked him of his feelings for his hereditary home would be like asking a man what his feelings were towards his own hand or his own throat" (Peake 46). In the liturgy of the baptism, the new heir is addressed as "a tiny weight that was Gormenghast" (Peake 81) and as "Gormenghast's untarnished child-shaped mirror" (Peake 85). The fact that the first novel is called *Titus Groan* though Titus is barely part of the action whereas the second novel which depicts his coming-of-age journey as the young earl explores his individuality is titled *Gormenghast* seem to reaffirm this inextricable relationship between the castle and the Groan male.

The inter-relationship between the ruler and his kingdom was a common feature in primitive societies where the king was the divine ruler of his people, his individual physical body becoming a representation of the body of his kingdom. In the myths of these societies, the physical health of the king's mortal body is a marker for the health of his kingdom, and therefore the ruler must be periodically killed or sacrificed, only to be rejuvenated in the form of the new king in

order to revivify the kingdom. This is the myth of Osiris or Adonis or Tammuz or of the Fisher King and the Wasteland, repeated in various stories throughout the ages. When Sepulchrave goes to his death knowing that the Groan line lives on unbroken through his son Titus, we know he is reaffirming this ancient pattern.

This pattern of heroic sacrifice/death is often repeated and reinterpreted in literary fantasies. Aslan sacrifices himself to save Edmund, only to be reborn in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, Gandalf sacrifices himself in the mines of Moria and Aragorn braves the risk of death to face the Dead Army at Dunharrow. In recent times, JK Rowling's Harry Potter goes willingly to his death in order to save his friends, and Rick Riordan's twenty-first century Greek demigod, Percy Jackson travels to the realm of Hades to save his mother and stop a war and later on, fights his way through Tartarus to save the world. All of these choices are made with courage and nobility, leading to triumphant returns and some form of victory. The readers worry for these heroes, grieve for them at their fall and eventually cheer for them in victory.

What Peake depicts however is not heroism but psychosis, provoking an entirely different reaction in the discomfited readers. Sepulchrave's 'sacrifice' is born of his madness, or rather of his psychological regression into a chthonic state. He goes to die in the Tower of Flints because he comes to identify himself with the totemic archetype of the owl. It is only in this regressed state that Sepulchrave can recognize the sickness that pervades his kingdom and thus seek to heal it through self-sacrifice, through a fatalistic identification with the archetype. Peake's depiction of this incident evokes anxiety, but also unease and horror as the author hints at primal, subterranean, pagan mysteries. Nevertheless, despite the difference in treatment, we recognize the pattern so far as the familiar story of a diseased kingdom where the old king is sacrificed to facilitate the ascent of a new king on the throne, signifying the beginning of a new era. Outwardly, this is the pattern

of *Titus Groan* which begins with the birth of the new heir and ends with his earling. However, this does not provide a satisfactory resolution, for though the death of the old earl facilitates the ascension of the new, the earling is simultaneously paralleled by the ascension of the villain, Steerpike, who rises from his lowly position of a kitchen servant to that of the apprentice of Barquentine, the new Master of Ritual. Nothing thus is resolved by Sepulchre's sacrifice. To understand the reason behind this, we need to examine the nature of Gormenghast's illness, and the roles of both Titus and Steerpike within it.

Gormenghast as a Diseased Kingdom

Generally speaking, if we examine fairytales, the myth of the Wasteland is always presented in terms of some problem within the kingdom, a bewitchment or curse, a monster or beast plaguing the people, or an illness of the king or the princess that nobody can cure, or even an illness that affects the whole kingdom. The solution is brought about by an external element, a hero or questing knight who comes from outside the kingdom who through his bravery or cleverness or both saves the kingdom, marries the princess and generally becomes the new king. A second pattern is that of the promised child who suffers through various conspiracies and dangers before making a triumphant return to restore his kingdom. Tolkien's Aragorn fits this second pattern, as does the legend of Eärendil the Mariner, destined to return to save the elves and men of Middle-earth from the machinations of Sauron and Morgoth respectively.

In Peake's *Titus Groan* novels, there is an amalgamation and reinterpretation of both these motifs. Titus is the promised child, Steerpike is the outsider and for the course of the first two novels, their journeys run almost parallel to one another. Steerpike's ascent through the Gormenghast hierarchy, metaphorically depicted through his climb along the castle's rooftops is

triggered by the birth of the seventy-seventh earl. Titus's Earling at the end of *Titus Groan* on the other hand is brought about by Steerpike's action of burning the library, which leads to Lord Groan's madness and subsequent death. In this respect, one might argue that although Titus and Steerpike are presented as binaries, or opposites, they represent essentially complimentary aspects of the same impulse. Both are iconoclasts who defy the established order of Gormenghast, Steerpike insidiously so, while Titus's rebellion is more open, and one might say more heroic, though in the eye of Gormenghast they are both equally treacherous, Titus even more so, for he himself is Gormenghast, the living symbol of its Iron Law: "It was no pure and naked contest between the House of Groan and a treacherous rebel, for the seventy-seventh Earl was, by his own confession, something perilously near a traitor himself" (Peake 782). One might suggest that the presence and actions of Steerpike are essential to release Titus's latent heroism, and for his eventual decision to leave Gormenghast. There is even something similar in the way they both explore the underground tunnels of Gormenghast. They are both, as Hugh Brogan points out the same, "solitary boy, carving out his destiny for himself"⁸²— an image that recurs regularly in Peake's oeuvre, whether it be the *Titus Groan* novels or *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs* or his illustration of Jim Hawkins from *Treasure Island*. In effect, then, Titus and Steerpike are both parallel impulses that arise from the unconscious in response to the disease of Gormenghast.

The story of Gormenghast begins in a familiar style. A long-awaited prince and heir is born, leading to joyful celebrations in the kingdom. But amidst the celebration, we find one jealous malcontent, Steerpike, who quite like the uninvited thirteenth fairy refuses to participate in the collective happiness. In terms of Jungian analysis of patterns in fairytales, we recognize a

⁸² Hugh Brogan, "The Gutters of Gormenghast," 1052. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake's *The Gormenghast Novels*.

problem in the collective consciousness, namely a lack of integration. This malcontent seeks the destruction of the kingdom, becoming the manifestation of the curse that plagues it. He causes the death of the ruler, provokes the circumstances leading to the exile of the loyal servant, Flay, and usurps a position of authority by killing the incumbent, Barquentine, all to further his own personal ambition for power. In fairytales, the evil witch or troll who curses the kingdom always comes from the fringe, the outside, and his/her actions reflect the desire of unintegrated elements in the unconscious seeking participation in the life of the collective consciousness. The story that follows from this point is expected to depict the growth and adventures and heroic exploits of the chosen prince who will in time prove himself to be an able ruler by defeating the evil force.

However, while Steerpike is an individual representation of the lack of integration in the castle, we soon realize that a sense of division and disharmony pervades the entire outer and inner worlds of Gormenghast. This dissension exists between the world of the castle and that of the outer dwellers whose “mean dwellings... swarmed like an epidemic around its outer walls” (Peake 9), thus enhancing the disease imagery that pervades this world. Within the castle, Rottcodd, the curator of the hall of the bright carvings is disconnected from the life of the castle, so much so that he isn’t even aware of the birth of an heir, or the death of the Earl or the crowning of the new one. Between the chef, Swelter and Flay, first servant of Lord Groan, there exists a murderous feud in spite of their shared loyalty to the castle and to the House of Groan, just as social relationships outside the castle among the Bright Carvers are marked by jealousy and distrust, and as in the case of Rantel and Braigon, even violence.

In fact almost every relationship in the Gormenghast universe is dysfunctional, whether it be the bond between children and parents, exemplified in Fuchsia’s and later Titus’s lack of relationship with their parents or the relationship between siblings as with the Prunesquallors or

the earl and his twin sisters. In this the sickness of the kingdom reflects the sickness of its ruling principles, highlighted by the physically, emotionally and intellectually incompatible marriage between the earl and the countess. The dysfunctional relationship between Sepulchrave and Gertrude suggests an estrangement between the Logos and the Eros principles of the Gormenghast society, for —

...if we take the king as representing a central and dominant symbolic content of collective consciousness, then the queen would be its accompanying feminine element— the emotions, feelings, the irrational attachments to this dominant content...a feeling style [that influences] how people relate to one another.⁸³

In fact, the relationship between the ruling couple of Gormenghast is so bad that even sex has become an embarrassing obligation, a reluctantly performed duty that is no longer required after the birth of the heir, Titus (Peake 159). Thus the ruler of this kingdom is not physically impotent like the Fisher King, but in a manner of speaking, the birth of his son renders him ‘impotent’ since his virility is no longer necessary.

But the true disease of Sepulchrave, one that has plagued him even before the birth of his son is that he is ‘sick at heart’, and this sickness has led to a physical illness that is revealed in his disinterest in food and a lack of libido, but in essence, the sickness that ails Sepulchrave and symptomatically his kingdom is his melancholia that springs from the disjointed nature of his world and his own isolation from the cosmos, a sickness that Jung finds to be the typical predicament of the rational, civilized, scientific modern man.⁸⁴ The disease of Gormenghast lies

⁸³ von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairytales*, 54.

⁸⁴ Jung, *Approaching the Unconscious*, 85.

in its spiritual dissociation from the past, no matter how rigidly its tradition may be enforced, for the mythology of Gormenghast has been forgotten.

History and anthropology teach us that a human society cannot long survive unless its members are psychologically contained within a central living myth. Such a myth provides the individual with a reason for being.⁸⁵

This could be why so many of our fantasy tales tend to hark back to an ideal image of the past, whether it be the quaint Englishness of Hogwarts in Rowling's *Harry Potter* books or the nostalgic medievalism in Lewis' Narnia or Tolkien's Middle-earth.

Tolkien, in fact deals with the subject of the forgotten past repeatedly in his work. In his essay on *Beowulf*, he remarks on how the Anglo-Saxon poet of the epic manages to give it a unique character by "using the materials... preserved from a day already changing and passing, a time that has now forever vanished, swallowed in oblivion..."⁸⁶ This mood of nostalgia and forgetfulness seeps through his own magnum opus. Much of the glory of Middle-earth is already past when we encounter the characters of *The Lord of the Rings*. The tales of the Ents and the lost garden of the Entwines have passed into obscure songs, and the Ents themselves have fallen asleep, forgetting speech. The wise Galadriel has become the feared Lady of the Woods because the friendship between men and elves has been forgotten by most and the hobbits "are only a little people in old songs and children's tales..."⁸⁷ and even the hobbits themselves have forgotten much of their own history, now remembered only by Tom Bombadillo, the wise man of the woods.

⁸⁵ Edward F. Edinger, *The Creation of Consciousness: Jung's Myth for Modern Man* (Toronto: InnerCity Books, 1984), 9.

⁸⁶ J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," in *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, by Seamus Heaney, ed. Daniel Donoghue (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), 129.

⁸⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 424. First published in 1954-55.

Boromir says on the fate of the Ring: “If ever such a tale was told in the South, it has long been forgotten.”⁸⁸ In their article, ‘A Mythology for England’, Hostetter and Smith remark on how Eärendil the Mariner is derived from the Anglo-Saxon poem *Crīst* “in order to recover for England something of the great Story of Eärendel that once must have been told,”⁸⁹ a story that was already remembered only in fragments at the time the poem was composed. *The Lord of the Rings* is thus not simply a story about defeating evil but also one about history and record-keeping, and the reader is often reminded that Frodo’s journey to Mordor is a continuation of the tale begun by Bilbo, to be completed later by Frodo himself and then by Sam. The repeated references to Bilbo’s book, old songs and tales, and the author’s preoccupation with detailed family trees reveal a desperate need to connect with one’s roots, to dig through the relics of the past to seek a validation for the less glorious present.

While far more spatially expansive, Middle-earth, like Gormenghast has its fair share of ruins, notable amongst those being Minas Morgul, the Tower of Sorcery which was once the beautiful Minas Ithil, the Tower of the Rising Moon. But if the general sentiment towards the decay in Gormenghast is indifference, in Middle-earth, the sentiment is hope:

The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken;
A light from the shadows shall spring.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 237.

⁸⁹ Carl F. Hostetter, Arden R. Smith, “A Mythology for England,” *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 21, no. 2 (1996), 282.

⁹⁰ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 241.

In spite of the general forgetfulness, there are those who remember history, such as Elrond, Galadriel, Gandalf, Bombadilo and Treewise. When Aragorn reveals his name to Theoden's DoorWarden, he seems to have "come on the wings of song out of the forgotten days."⁹¹ Faramir and his men turn west in remembrance of the lost Númenor before meals, and although the healing herb, 'athelas' or 'kingsfoil' is only "a doggerel... garbled in the memory of old wives,"⁹² the king returns and restores his kingdom as the White Tree of the old kings springs to life again. Despite the decay, there is hope of rejuvenation.

In Peake's fictional universe, while the rhetoric of the ritual is obeyed by all to the last letter, the meaning behind it is lost. Ritual is not simply a code of action, but properly followed has an emotional content, for ritual is nothing more and nothing less than the performance of the mythic story connecting mortal man to the transcendental experience. It is a mimesis of the 'divine life' through which fragile, mortal men can fulfill their potential.⁹³ The sacred stones of Gormenghast thus become symbolic of the petrification of its inner life. Marie-Louise von Franz writes of the Catholic Church:

Whenever the ritual becomes an autonomous, habitual action that is thoughtlessly applied, contact with the unconscious is broken off too much; then it becomes a purely formal, mechanical affair. It becomes antireligious, in a sense. It prevents one from being immediately gripped by a religious experience. It literally cuts the Holy Ghost out of the Church.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 500.

⁹² Ibid., 847.

⁹³ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 6.

⁹⁴ Marie-Louise von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales: Studies in Jungian Psychology by Jungian Analysts* (Toronto: inner City Books, 1997), 92.

Although not demonstrably Christian, something similar has happened in Gormenghast where the inflexible ritual has ceased to mean anything beyond itself. We can observe the vestiges of a once emotional experience in the actions of the followers of this code:

‘A heavy day, the ninth... always a heavy day.’
A great tear rolled down Sourdust’s cheek threading its way over the crumpled service....
By not so much as the faintest sign or movement had Sourdust suggested that he was under emotional stress. (Peake 49)

And in fact, emotional stress is impossible, for like every other ritual in Gormenghast, the reason behind the supposed ‘heaviness’ of the ninth day has been forgotten. Rituals are based on Laws of Similarity or Likeness⁹⁵ to give man an experience of the spiritual or the ancestral, but here, the original has been forgotten, reducing the imitation to action without meaning. “It was not certain what significance the ceremony held, for unfortunately the records were lost, but the formality was no less sacred for being unintelligible” (Peake 230-1).

Forgetfulness seems to be the state of being in Gormenghast, where ritual is divorced from mythology. Thus instead of providing a doorway for the mortals “to the timeless world of the ‘everywhen’”⁹⁶ it becomes rather the thing people need to survive by means of an alternative inner life. Sepulchre finds such a life in his books and Gertrude in her cats and birds and plants. This is thus a code of rites that offers no creation myth, no afterlife, no guidance to cope with one’s inner anxieties and no ecstatic revelation beyond the limitations of the temporal.

François suggests that in the Gormenghast universe Peake creates “a social microcosm that need not look *elsewhere* to imbue human existence with meaning, for meaning is *everywhere*, in

⁹⁵ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 26.

⁹⁶ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 10.

the physical world and in every mind, in the Castle stones and in every mortal's knowledge that the social order is sacred"⁹⁷ but I would argue that not only are there enough implicit hints in both *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* of a loss of meaning suggested through the recurrent motif of a 'forgotten past', but this loss or split from the divine is what defines the malaise of Gormenghast. And it is because of this forgotten 'Fall' that the Tower of Flint housing the totemic night owls can be seen only in blasphemous terms for daring to lift its craggy stone finger heavenwards (Peake 9) and away from the castle, even though in ancient civilizations heights in general and towers specifically stood as representations of the divine.

This split between the material and the spiritual planes is in fact indicated in the very beginning, in the epigraph to the first novel, a quotation from John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*:

*Dost thou love picking meat? Or woulds't thou see
A man in the clouds, and have him speak to thee?*

This passage from Bunyan foreshadows not simply the fragmented condition of Gormenghast, but also the central division that characterizes most modern religions, and especially the Abrahamic faiths— which is a division between the material and the spiritual planes, symbolized in the story of Man's Fall from Eden. But while 'meat' suggests the pleasures of physical life, gluttony being one of the seven deadly sins prohibited in the Bible, food is also an important element in interpersonal and familial relationships and thus holds a sacred ceremonial role in society. In primitive societies where man has a closer relationship with the natural world and views himself as a part of

⁹⁷ François, "Godless Religion and Maimed Earldom in *Titus Groan*," 24.

it, the hunting, killing and partaking of animals are deeply religious activities governed by the solemn observances of rites and taboo.⁹⁸

In the few scenes that feature food in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, it thus becomes a metaphor for the breakdown of both spiritual and social life in the castle. The first of these appear early on, in Chapter Nine of the first novel on the morning after the birth of Titus, featuring the new father, Sepulchgrave at his breakfast table laden with a fantastic array of food that Peake describes in terms well worthy of comparison with one of Tolkien's elven feasts. In a scene reminiscent of the novel's opening lines from Bunyan we find the Earl wasting away in his melancholia as the combustibles grow cold beneath:

...the painted ceiling where cherubs pursue each other across a waste of flaking sky. There must be about a thousand of them all told, interweaving among the clouds, their fat limbs forever on the move and yet never moving, for they are imperfectly articulated. The colours, once garish, have faded and peeled away and the ceiling is now a very subtle shade of grey and lichen green, old rose and silver.

Lord Sepulchgrave may have noticed the cherubs long ago. Probably when a child he had attempted more than once to count them, as his father had done, and as young Titus in his turn will try to do; but however that might be, Lord Groan had not cast up his eyes to the old welkin for many years. Nor did he ever stare about him now. (Peake 46)

If indeed as Lady Macbeth had said, "...the sauce to meat is ceremony"⁹⁹ then Sepulchgrave cannot enjoy his meat because he has lost the ceremonial meaning of life, and therefore the nourishment he fails to derive from the food is not simply physical but also spiritual. On the day of Titus's Christening for which Swelter prepares such visually striking and delectable confectionary, the spirit of the ceremony is tainted by violence between him and Flay and by the petty jealousies of Cora and Clarice. On other occasions, the food brought by Nannie Slagg for Fuchsia is often found

⁹⁸ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 14.

⁹⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Arden Shakespeare: Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Walton-on-Thames: Thomson Learning, 2004), 90.

to be growing cold and left uneaten. Yet another meal that notably highlights the effect of ritual in enforcing social, physical and emotional inhibition in Gormenghast occurs during Titus Groan's First Breakfast which is marked by an absolute lack of conversation, presided by "the loveless, didactic voice of Barquentine" while the "lavishly spread" breakfast becomes a "wasted meal", "for no one passes anything along the table" (Peake 306-7). These joyless feastings are a far cry from the nostalgic English breakfasts of C.S. Lewis's Narnia novels or the homely warmth of the hobbit meals or the sense of hope, sustenance and fellowship evoked by elven bread in Tolkien.

In contrast to these meals within Gormenghast, the meal that the exiled Flay offers to Titus in his forest cave or the paper bag of barley sugar that Fuchsia slips to Titus during the latter's imprisonment in the Lichen Fort depict warmth, succour and human contact, even though these meals occur strictly outside the castle's ritualistic framework. Clearly, the life of Gormenghast drains its inhabitants of the possibility of spiritual or emotional fulfillment. In fact, emotions and instincts are suspect elements in Gormenghast, which is why Sepulchre is mistrustful of his wife's instinctual vitality (Peake 159) and Flay, the taciturn loyalist of the stones disapproves of happiness as it contains "the seeds of independence" (Peake 18). The joy that is exhibited by the castle servants at the birth of the heir is a matter of form and compulsion rather than genuine feelings (Peake 18).

Ironically enough, once exiled to the forest, away from the corridors and halls of the castle, Flay discovers within him "a new sensation, this interest in phenomena beyond ritual and obedience" (Peake 348), a happiness in the textures of plant life and the beauty of sunsets so that he almost feels guilty of being a heretic. The forest in fairytales is a region of the unconscious, being separated from the conscious sphere of the kingdom. As a space of archetypal insight, wisdom and impulse, it is often in the forest that the hero meets the wise old man or the evil witch

who pushes him towards integration. Thus free from Gormenghast, Flay begins to retrieve some of those instinctual, human qualities that Gormenghast represses. This same repressive quality of Gormenghast causes Sepulchrave to turn away from the cherubs in the ceiling of the breakfast hall as he stares at the ball of jade at the end of his silver rod of office (Peake 46). The rod and the sphere joined together makes for an interesting symbol— the rod standing for direction, the sphere for the self or the soul with the possibility of free movement. "...the ball is [also] a symbol of the godhead. 'God is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere'."¹⁰⁰ This sphere is permanently bound to the guiding principles of the rod, which in its simplest form of the shepherd's stick allows for an onward orientation. But in case of the Groan sceptre, all movements become impossible since Gormenghast itself is stuck in a stasis of changelessness, thus negating the possibility of the autonomy of the soul. Sepulchrave staring at this staff of office, away from the cherubs in the ceiling which once called to his spirit of wonder, and away from the fabulous assortment of life-sustaining food on the table becomes a metaphor for the decaying, stratifying quality of the Groan lore. The sceptre is also a phallic image, suggesting the rigid masculinity of Gormenghast life, estranged from its feminine counterpart. Since the king in myths or fairytales is "the one individual in the tribe, its life centre,"¹⁰¹ the earl's melancholia becomes symptomatic of the condition of his kingdom.

This repression of the soul creates the loneliness that every character in Gormenghast suffers from. Sepulchrave seeks respite in philosophy, Prunesquallor in his strange, sometimes forced, even painful laughter that appears often as sound to fill silences rather than as a result of joy or humour, while his sister, Irma Prunesquallor and her husband Bellgrove, the Headmaster of

¹⁰⁰ von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 39.

¹⁰¹ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1991), 23.

the castle school try to convince themselves of being in love in a strange parody of the mismatched marriage of the royal couple. The fact of Sepulchrave's dependence on opium and other narcotics to deal with his depression also hints at a repressed longing for meaning, for "addiction in general... is a longing for an ecstatic religious state because life is dreary, meaningless and boring..."¹⁰²

Another work where the question of spirituality and the soulless practicing of rules comes up is the novel, *Mr. Pye*, an intriguing novel where the eponymous protagonist, a Christian preacher doesn't really believe in the spirituality he preaches to others and is terrified when confronted with the truth of such an experience. The fragmentation between the angelic and the demonic that drives the evangelist mad reflects "Peake's deep mistrust of the Christian division of body and soul" and its "propensity to negate instinctual nature."¹⁰³

Unlike *Mr. Pye*, the religious symbolism in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* has more of pagan rather than Christian connotations, although comparisons could be drawn between the daily detailed ritual activities delineated in the Groan Ritual and the calendar of the Catholic Church. The earl's name, 'Sepulchrave', a play on the words 'sepulchre' and 'grave' marks him as a god of death like Osiris, thus emphasizing the association with the myth of the dying god. Gertrude herself carries strong associations of a primitive earth goddess of fertility and death, her association with cats linking her to the mythical figures of Freya and Bastarte. The figure of twelve, which is the number of days that passes between Titus's 'advent' to his Christening is a common number

¹⁰² von Franz, *The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption*, 31.

¹⁰³ Pierre François, "Mr Pye: an Ovidian Curse for a Dichotomized Evangelist," *Peake Studies* 6, no.2 (1999):

found in fairytales and is associated with the solar principle¹⁰⁴ and the four animal figures who perform the initiatory mask on the occasion of his tenth birthday recall the four sons of Horus. The repeated emphasis on vegetation, stones and the sun or the moon, both during Titus's christening and later during his earling recall pagan creeds signifying a transcendence of the temporal, the stone representing endurance, the tree and the rising sun or waning and waxing moon revealing a miraculous regeneration in a world of flux: "Trees, stones or heavenly bodies were never objects of worship in themselves but were revered because they were epiphanies of a hidden force that could be seen powerfully at work in all natural phenomena."¹⁰⁵ Fairytales and quest stories are thus replete with images of dreaded, mysterious forests where the heroes battle monsters, confront temptations and receive wisdom. But while the forests of Middle-earth are the last repositories of this secret magic, holding their own against the machinations of Saruman and Sauron, the Groan Law pays only lip service to this natural order, following the written code to the last letter, as evidenced in Barquentine's rage when the infant Titus throws away his necklace of snails and his stone and ivy during his earling, but the ritual has lost the hidden epiphany of the 'changelessness' that it so ardently declaims.

This rigid adherence to a calendar of rites also reminds us of the intricate system of rules and taboos once followed by the 'Black Tai' families of Southern China,¹⁰⁶ as well as of the Chinese Emperors who had to follow a minutely detailed code of conduct, including the food to

¹⁰⁴ von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 66-7.sc

¹⁰⁵ Armstrong, *A Short History of Myth*, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Berthold Laufer, "Totemic Traces among the Indo-Chinese," *The Journal of American Folklore* 30, no. 118 (1917): 415-426.

be eaten or robe to be worn on a specific day, all of which was done with the goal of balancing the spirit or 'Tao', or in other words to maintain the poise between opposing elements.

What is striking in this Chinese variation is that it is completely psychological. It's not the physical well-being of the emperor or what he does. Physically, he had no duties. The emperor in China was not supposed to govern, to give orders or do anything. He had to speak a little and to keep all the rules but to speak as little as possible and mainly attend to his own inner balance.¹⁰⁷

Like the earl of Gormenghast, the Chinese Emperor, right up to the time of Mao had to follow a calendar of rituals specifying ceremonies, food, clothes to be used on specific dates akin to the calendar of Gormenghast. During droughts or floods or other disasters in the kingdom, it was assumed that the balance had been ruptured, and the Emperor was expected to reform the calendar in order to bring back the 'Tao' in harmony, when the spirit world was observed to be in disharmony with the physical one.¹⁰⁸ In Gormenghast, where even thoughts of change are considered to be blasphemy, this sign of disharmony appears through the person of Steerpike who fails to participate in the communal celebration at the birth of the heir. Intruding into the social sphere of Gormenghast, this outsider disrupts the ritual framework of the castle by bringing in forceful change, albeit in a negative manner.

In a way, Steerpike represents everything that is wrong with Gormenghast. Repeatedly described as the 'cerebral beast', 'skewbald beast' or 'piebald beast', he is the perfect manifestation of performance without feeling, an exact imitation of an artist without being one (Peake 159), representing a ruthless cerebral efficiency devoid of emotion that negates his humanness. Ann

¹⁰⁷ von Franz, *The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 23.

Yeoman in her essay on the character points out the significance of Steerpike using a series of mirrors to spy on characters: “Steerpike’s mirrors imply not the inner imaginative process of self-reflection” but rather “he gains knowledge and power through studying the surface or ‘mirror image’ of others. His concerns are material and mimetic... born of his cold, calculating logic”¹⁰⁹ that is bereft of emotion. At the beginning of the second novel, we are told: “If ever he had harboured a conscience in his tough narrow breast he had by now dug out and flung away the awkward thing...” (Peake 404-5). His monstrous, non-human quality is further highlighted in the repeated emphasis on his paleness and on his association with shadows: “It was more like the shadow of a young man, a shadow with high shoulders, that moved across the whiteness, than an actual body moving in actual space” (Peake 406). As the shadow, he provides the impetus for the heroic action of Titus, for by removing Sepulchrave, he removes the Logos principle thereby facilitating the activation of the heroic impulse. “In psychological language, white and black have to do with the remotest depths of the unconscious, where it becomes an almost abstract, pure structure with no human feeling.”¹¹⁰

Yet, Steerpike is the product rather than the cause of the invisible malaise that plagues Gormenghast, for he is only able to rise in power by manipulating those who are already victims of Gormenghast’s systemic emotional repression: Fuchsia Groan and her aunts, the Twins. The role of Gormenghast’s toxic emotional environment in its own downfall is hinted at in a curious manner in the section preceding the Burning of the Great Library where Gertrude reads a story about a promised prince to her cats. The prince “with stars for his eyes and a new-moon for his

¹⁰⁹ Ann Yeoman, “The Cry of a Fighting Cock: Notes on Steerpike and Ritual in *Gormenghast*,” 1133. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake’s *The Gormenghast Novels*.

¹¹⁰ von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 49.

mouth” is clearly Titus, and the story of this prince being locked up foreshadows the locking of the library door, but the villain here is the dreadful “Dwarf with brass teeth” (Peake 232), which anticipates the yet-to-be-introduced Barquentine rather than the pale and lanky Steerpike who actually sets up the burning. Thus in a larger sense, the locked-up prince of the story becomes a metaphor for Titus who must sacrifice his individual freedom to the Law of Gormenghast under the merciless judgment of the new Master of Rituals. And indeed, Barquentine in his single-minded devotion to the observance of rituals is a perfect example of a soulless fanatic: “No individual Groan of flesh and blood could awake in him this loyalty he felt for ‘*Groan*’ the abstraction— the symbol” (Peake 354), his “merciless and stony intolerance” devoid of heart (Peake 405) becoming the catalyst that awakens in the boy Titus a desire for escape and adventure.

A parody of Barquentine is presented in the figure of an old, unnamed master in Chapter Thirteen of *Gormenghast* who professes a great disbelief in the real, physical world, and in the spiritual value of symbols, the April lamb being merely a lamb in April and the Castle merely a barren image while it is in “Death’s amazing kingdom” that one can find the real sensations of life (Peake 455). While the Master of Ritual does not speak of an afterlife, what the two have in common is a negation of the inner meaning of symbols and the upholding of a particular set of values over the actual feelings and sensations of life and the old man’s death by fire when an irate young disbeliever throws a candle on his beard foreshadows the death of Barquentine himself in a similar manner.

Fire is an interesting symbol in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*. The first novel opens with a short history of the Bright Carvers and the annual bonfire in which their carvings are burned. This curious rite, another of those traditions whose significance have been forgotten but that is observed with all solemnity seems to have been drawn from several resources. The vibrant

forcefulness of the animal carvings may recall the life-like animal carvings of British Columbia, believed in stories to be containing the spirit of the animal depicted.¹¹¹ Frazer speaks of the medieval peasant tradition of kindling bonfires on certain days of the year prevalent all over Europe that often involves the practice of burning ‘effigies’ in these fires, “or a pretence is made of burning a living person in them; ... [suggesting] that anciently human beings were actually burned on these occasions”¹¹²— usually a straw-man representing ‘Death’ or ‘the Witch’ or ‘Judas’. In Gormenghast too, the idea of sacrifice is hinted at in the custom that requires the Earl to be present at the time of burning and “bow his head as if in pain” (Peake 10). The fictional ceremony takes place on the first day of June, placing it neatly between the vernal and summer bonfires celebrated in early May and end of June respectively, both of which were traditionally associated with keeping death and the dark side of the collective unconscious at bay. Commenting on the bright carvings, Watney speaks of the Chinese carvings of Taku Road as possible inspiration¹¹³ while Sutton draws an interesting parallel with the ‘Hevehe’ masks of the Elema tribe of the Gulf of Papua¹¹⁴ which are, like the Bright Carvings ritually burned after a periodic celebration. As in many ancient cultures, the ‘Hevehe’ masks were meant to represent ancestral spirits, the people wearing them representing not their individual selves but those ancestral spirits who participated through the ceremonial dancing into the collective consciousness of the community, the dance and the subsequent burning symbolizing some sort of compensatory action for the psyche. Moving along similar lines, Winnington speaks of a Spirit Way in China, a road

¹¹¹ A.A. Goldenweiser, “Totemism, An Analytical Study,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 23, no. 88 (1910): 222.

¹¹² Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 709-10.

¹¹³ John Watney, “Introduction” in *Peake’s Progress*, 17.

¹¹⁴ David Sutton, “Folkloristic Elements in the Titus Trilogy,” *Mervyn Peake Review* 5, Autumn (1977), 10.

lined with massive stone statues of generals, mandarins and real and mythical beasts to guard the spirit of a dead emperor journeying to his resting place that Dr. Ernest Peake came across while travelling from Henchow to Canton in December 1901, and points out that “the sculptures in the Hall of Bright Carvings are seen [in *Titus Groan*] ‘in narrowing perspective like the highway for an Emperor.’”¹¹⁵ All these parallels suggest that the Bright Carvings are linked with the archetypal ancestral wisdom of ‘dreamtime’. Like the Elema dancers wearing the ancestral masks, perhaps the three carvers chosen to walk the castle ramparts too embody the totemic/ancestral spirit their sculptures represent.

But a more prominent use of the fire imagery can be observed in mapping the trajectory of the rise and fall of Steerpike. Steerpike’s first leap to power occurs when he physically climbs over the Gormenghast castle and lands in Fuchsia’s attic. But the leap that makes him one of the movers and shakers in the castle hierarchy as well as changing the power set-up itself through the replacing of Sepulchrave by Titus and of Sourdust by Barquentine occurs when he arranges the burning of the Great Library. His next leap to greater power also makes use of fire as he burns Barquentine to death. But this time he himself cannot escape from the flames as a dying Barquentine drags him along, and Steerpike is forced to jump into the waters of the moat to save himself, nearly drowning in the process. Although he manages to climb up the ladder once again, becoming the Master of ritual himself, as we learn later, “The fire had burned a part of him away. Something of him was drowned forever in the waters of the moat” (Peake 703). The near-death experience engenders the seeds of a madness that eventually overwhelms his rational thoughts when facing Titus in the Flood, leading to his death in water. We have here a symmetrical pattern of fire, fire and water, and water.

¹¹⁵ Winnington, *Mervyn Peake's VAST ALCHEMIES*, 32.

Both fire and water happen to be important motifs in Chinese fairytales. The trigram of fire, 'Li' appears in hexagram 30 of the I-Ching, representing:

...order, not in a rational sense as we would see it, but as an orderedness of nature. The whole logos side in the Chinese civilization, the whole idea of 'order', is not about an order imposed by human consciousness onto nature, but rather of order that human consciousness deduces from nature... an order that is completely contained in the mystery of nature.¹¹⁶

Seen from this perspective, we can say that the social order that Steerpike disrupts by burning the library is a product of an over-bright collective consciousness. Not simply that, but "the trigram Li means, 'to cling to something,' 'to be conditioned,' 'to depend or rest on something.'"¹¹⁷ If we consider the fire in Gormenghast to represent Steerpike, then Steerpike himself as well as his actions are conditioned and engendered by the castle itself. Ironically enough, the fiery Steerpike meets his end through his own opposite— like Fuchsia, he drowns in the waters of the unconscious. The library itself stands for the intellectual rational Logos of Sepulchre that he uses as a shield against the instinctual vitality represented by his wife, Gertrude. If we view Steerpike as an impulse that arises out of the unconscious in reaction to the disconnected consciousness of Gormenghast, then the burning becomes nature's compensatory act by which change is affected within Gormenghast.

The I Ching for water, on the other hand is 'K'an' which is associated "with dark passion and with the dangers of a passionate nature, with the dynamic, creative aspects of the unconscious ... and all its terrible closeness to the instincts and passions."¹¹⁸ Notable here is von

¹¹⁶ von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 105.

¹¹⁷ Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes*, trans. by Cary F. Baynes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 356. First published in 1950.

¹¹⁸ von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 103.

Franz's use of the terms 'danger', 'dark' and 'terrible'. The shadow is made up of the hidden aspects of the consciousness, and when repressed long enough, these aspects take on a dark life of their own, sometimes overpowering the conscious ego, as Robert Louis Stevenson memorably demonstrated in *Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde*. "If it accumulates more energy than our ego, it erupts as an overpowering rage... or... a depression or an accident that seems to have his own purpose."¹¹⁹ This last reaction can be observed in the fates of both Sepulchre and his daughter, Fuchsia. While the Earl's habitual melancholia is turned to madness that drives him to his bizarre self-sacrifice in the Tower of Flints, Fuchsia's passionate and creative nature, thwarted by the rigid consciousness of Gormenghast eventually overpowers her in a death-by-water.

Like Fuchsia, Steerpike too suffers a drowning, though unlike Fuchsia, he survives. In the process of burning Barquentine and getting burned himself and then nearly drowning in the castle moat, Steerpike creates a curious temporary fusing of 'fire below water', an image that von Franz tells us is depicted by Hexagram 64 of the Chinese I Ching, also known as 'Wei Chi' or 'before completion'.¹²⁰ Since water naturally flows downward, this supposed harmony of fire under water can't be sustained for long, leading to only greater separation and disharmony that can only become a catalyst in the path towards eventual completion when Titus ritually stabs Steerpike on water in the moonlight (Peake, 797). The death of Barquentine gives Steerpike greater power over the young earl, thereby accelerating the hostility between the two and giving the latter the momentum to exercise his heroic impulse. When Steerpike does meet his end, it is because the dark repressed passions of the 'K'an' have overpowered him, his sense of self-preservation over-ridden by "some primordial power.... For an arrogant wave had entered him and drowned his brain in black,

¹¹⁹ Robert A. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow* (Sydney: HarperOne: HarperCollins, 1991), 4.

¹²⁰ von Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 106.

fantastic water” (Peake 795). Steerpike’s death thus reveals the dangers of an over-sophisticated cerebral nature divorced from emotions and instincts, for the instincts rise to overpower the rational self: “The brilliant Steerpike had become a cloud of crimson” (Peake 796). As an imitative rather than an emotive character, he is consumed by the performance of the ‘arch-fiend’. As Hindle says, “he is the consummate actor whose character, in the end, takes over his personality.”¹²¹ In this Steerpike mirrors the fate of the intellectual Sepulchrave who too is overwhelmed by a primordial identification with the archetype of the sacrificial king, as well as the suicide fantasy of Fuchsia who is thrown off-balance, quite literally by a too deep play-acting as the romantic, heartbroken heroine who falls to her death from her window. Like both of these characters, Steerpike’s “ambition [as well as life] is sabotaged by a resurgence of the ‘irrational imperative’ as Milan Kundera terms the archetypal.”¹²² Since a divorce from the instinctive life is the nature of Gormenghast itself, the fate of Steerpike or Sepulchrave could very well be the fate of Titus himself if he chose to stay back as the earl of Gormenghast. Titus’s victory over Steerpike raises him to the stature of a legend, posing a real danger of falling into an archetype like his father or his rival, for like Sepulchrave’s dying god and Steerpike’s ‘arch-fiend’, the ‘hero’ too is an archetype that can overpower the self.¹²³

The link between Titus and Steerpike is also further hinted at in a curious scene leading up to their climactic conflict. While the christening liturgy of Gormenghast connects the Groan line and especially the male Groan to the symbol of the life-in-death tree¹²⁴ (Peake 86), the same

¹²¹ Hindle, “Elysian Fields, Hadean Glooms: Titus Goran’s mythical quest,” 11.

¹²² Yeoman, “The Cry of a Fighting Cock: Notes on Steerpike and Ritual in *Gormenghast*,” 1141.

¹²³ von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairytales*, 52.

¹²⁴ Discussed in previous chapter. See pages 26-27.

symbol is used by the author to describe Steerpike in an image that foreshadows his death. Right before he is followed into the labyrinths by the trífecta of Flay, Titus and Prunesquallor leading to his unmasking and condemnation, Steerpike is seen by Flay in the early hours of dawn to be leaning against a thorn tree: “His body and the back of the head were glued together as though he and the tree had grown up as one thing from the ground” (Peake 685). The description recalls the image of the King of the Wood waiting beneath the tree with a sword, to murder or to be murdered.¹²⁵ This sacrificial image also parallels both the crucifixion of Christ and the hanging of Attis or Odin. In this instance, Steerpike as the opposite of the divine ruler that is Titus, embodies the negative god image: “monarch of darkness like Satan himself” (Peake 785) or an instrument of what von Franz calls “God’s darkness” that is reflected in “destructiveness so cold and inhuman and demonic, and concomitantly so ‘divine’”¹²⁶ because it is ‘not human’, especially in destructive acts such as murder. The motif of the death by tree, such as was practiced by the pagan Germanic people therefore is not simply a ritual sacrifice but a balancing of the demonic, ‘god-like’ act committed by the overreaching human. “The primitive says that if a human being acts as though divine, then he suffers the fate of a god, is treated as a god and hanged, killed, or dismembered, and so on.”¹²⁷ Seen in this context, the Gormenghast law that decrees that Steerpike must die by the long knives for an act of murder committed by a long knife (Peake 777) thus attains an added significance.

It may be proposed that the journey of Steerpike parallels a negative alchemical progression beginning from the paleness of his skin (albedo) to the red mottled patches on his face from being

¹²⁵ Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 11.

¹²⁶ Marie-Louise von Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairytales* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), 41-2.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

heated or burned by fire (rubedo) to the brilliant glow of the torch-lights on the water surface, making it look like “a solid floor of gold” (Peake 778) upon which he finally dies. Since “the process of psychological development is analogous to the stages in the alchemical transformation of base matter into gold,”¹²⁸ this journey also becomes a commentary on Gormenghast’s collective consciousness. As a negative transformation, this golden quality however remains confined to the surface, rendering the water surface almost opaque and thereby failing to shed light on what is underneath the water, thus reflecting the surface brilliance of the Gormenghast rhetoric that is devoid of spiritual clarity. As the Shadow archetype of this surface brilliance, Steerpike is rejected by the castle hierarchy at the onset. Flay orders him to return to the kitchens and then literally locks him away to keep him from causing trouble in a sort of physical enactment of psychological repression. But just as the Shadow finds insidious outlets of expression, Steerpike climbs his way out through the vulnerable points of Gormenghast’s stony rigidity— its women— Fuchsia, Irma, Clarice and Cora. And in the course of this journey from unwanted kitchen boy to the Master of Ritual to eventual Enemy, the repressed Shadow manages to make its presence felt in the consciousness, forcing it into a compensatory action against its rigid ritualistic life: “He had, furthermore, an overweening pride that saw in this concentration of the castle’s forces a *tribute* to himself. This was *no part of the ritual* of Gormenghast. This was something *original*” (Peake 775, emphasis mine).

Thus when Titus kills Steerpike, he does so not as the seventy-seventh earl of Gormenghast dealing out justice but as “the First— a man upon a crag” falling upon not a traitor but the “symbol of all things tyrannical— Steerpike the cold and cerebral beast” embodying all the tyranny and

¹²⁸ Marie-Louise von Franz. *Alchemy: An Introduction to the Symbolism and the Psychology* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980), 12.

soulless rigidity of Gormenghast itself (Peake 788-9). Where the fairytale seems to fail the expectation of the story is in Titus's continued dissatisfaction even after the kingdom is restored, which begs the question if it has been restored at all. And this pattern of unfulfilled redemption is repeated again and again throughout the course of Titus Groan's journey.

Unredeemed Wasteland in *Boy in Darkness*

Steerpike is not the only cerebral 'beast' encountered by the young Titus in his journey to adulthood. Such intellectual efficiency as found in Steerpike is also observed in the figure of the Lamb in *Boy in Darkness*, the novella which depicts the adolescent protagonist (who despite being unnamed is clearly Titus¹²⁹) undertaking an initiatory journey into the Underworld/Wasteland.

On the night of his fourteenth birthday, Titus, enraged by the tiring sequence of rituals escapes from his castle home and is led by a creepy pack of yellow-eyed dogs to cross a river into a strange land where he falls asleep on landing. He wakes up the next day and encounters a pair of half-beast men— Goat and Hyena who both want to take him to their lord, the mighty Lamb. The Lamb orders his minions to prepare the feast of transformation as he intends to transform Titus into his true animal form, as he had done to Goat, Hyena and others who had failed to survive. However, through some quick thinking on his feet, Titus is able to distract the Lamb and kill him.

¹²⁹ "At one time my husband had had the idea of writing stories of episodes in the life of Titus hero of his three of his novels, which do not take place in his books *Titus Groan*, *Gormenghast* and *Titus Alone*.... Though the boy in *Boy in Darkness* is assuredly Titus Groan, he does not call him so by name." - Maeve Gilmore, "Foreword" to *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories*, by Mervyn Peake, (London: Peter Owen, 2007), 17-18.

On being stabbed, the Lamb is revealed to have been nothing but “a complete emptiness devoid of bones and organs” enclosed in a mass of “dazzling curls” of wool¹³⁰.

Boy in Darkness is structured neatly as a fairytale. In this novella, the hero, after a coming-of-age ceremony makes a journey into the cursed kingdom/underground, slays a monster and releases its prisoners from enchantments. Yet the sense of completion or satisfaction that we derive from the expected happy endings in traditional fairytales or stories of mythic quests is oddly lacking in this work. Although the monster is slayed and the boy-hero saved from the grotesque metamorphosis, the sense of disharmony, disconnect and division that unsettled the readers in the beginning remains even though Goat and Hyena are restored to their human forms. So what was Peake trying to achieve in this strange, discomfiting tale and why does it end the way it does?

The animal-human form held a strange horrifying fascination for Peake. This fascination takes a humorous bent in nonsense rhymes such as ‘Aunt and Uncles’¹³¹ where he imagines various relatives in animal forms while it becomes a more sinister theme in two other uncanny short stories, *Same Time, Same Place*¹³² and *The Weird Journey*¹³³. Winnington in his discussion of animals in Peake’s work points out that the lack of speech in animals was seen in the past as a sign of their soullessness.¹³⁴ Consequently, half-beast creatures in his works, such as the Yellow Creature in *Captain Slaughterboard* are denied the faculty of speech.¹³⁵ In *Boy in Darkness*, the animal-men

¹³⁰ Mervyn Peake, *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories* (London: Peter Owen, 2007), 91.

¹³¹ Mervyn Peake, *A Book of Nonsense: The Centenary Edition* (Chicago: Peter Owen, 2011), 67-71. First published in 1972.

¹³² Peake, *Boy in Darkness and other Stories*, 131-144.

¹³³ Ibid. 95-102.

¹³⁴ G. Peter Winnington, *The Voice of the Heart*, (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2006) 94.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

speak, for they are human beings bewitched into the animal form, a familiar enough fairytale motif, but the transformation has indeed robbed them off their humanity. This loss of soul is highlighted in the Goat's inability to recognize or understand the tears in the boy's eyes as the latter begins to cry due to hunger and exhaustion: "His eyes are full of bits of broken glass.... It reminds me of something. What is it...?"¹³⁶

This forgetfulness of course links this blighted Wasteland/Underworld to Gormenghast itself as moved by the tears he can't identify, the Goat is compelled into an exercise of lost remembrance: "Can you remember far enough?... We were, you know, my sweet Hyena, we *were* once¹³⁷." But despite this longing for a former state of being, Goat or Hyena cannot really remember what they were, but only that they were "different."¹³⁸ As a dream-vision¹³⁹ (the novella was originally subtitled 'The Dream') or a fairytale designed within the broader fairytale world of Gormenghast, the land of the Lamb thus reflects the same rift from the soul and repression of the unconscious that characterizes the society of the castle: "For the world had forsaken the mines, and time had forgotten them."¹⁴⁰

Alice Mills suggests that rather than as an embodiment of pure evil, the Lamb works in fact as an agent of truth, for the degradation he causes to his victims result in revealing their true nature. The Goat was always a cowardly lickspittle, the Hyena was always a bully, and thus by bringing out their true natures, the Lamb performs almost a prophetic function, as it were: "Like

¹³⁶ Peake, *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories*, 63.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 63-4.

¹³⁹ Maeve Gilmore, 'Foreword' to *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories*, 17.

¹⁴⁰ Peake, *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories*, 74.

the mythic Greek prophet Tiresias, the Lamb has supernatural insights into the human psyche though he is physically blind.”¹⁴¹ She goes on to add that the victims’ failure to survive is due to their inability to face the truth of their natures while the Lamb’s physical vulnerability is not necessarily an indictment of his evilness. However, I would argue that this is an incomplete analysis, for while the inner beast may be a part of the individual psyche, a fragmented identity can hardly be labelled as the truth. Moreover, the author clearly states that Goat and Hyena had survived as long as they had due to “their general coarseness of soul and fibre”¹⁴² which makes their dehumanization less intolerable to themselves than those who had failed to withstand this splinter of matter and mind, with “the brain running away too sharply from the body, or the body leaping like a frog in search of the brain.”¹⁴³ And yet even these two surviving henchmen are more than the beasts they have become, underlined in their ruminative longing for the forgotten past and their fascination with the Boy.

The Lamb’s mission is in a way similar to that of Doctor Pye, both try to reform their islands through a singular emphasis on only one extreme of a binary. While the Lamb focusses on the bestiality inherent in every human, the missionary stresses solely on a rather sanctified version of Christian goodness, leading to a schism within himself. “Like the Lamb of ‘Boy in Darkness’, Mr Pye wants to re-form the stone island of Sark and its inhabitants.”¹⁴⁴ As the death of the Lion-Man and the Gazelle-Man in *Boy in Darkness* and the parodic wings and horns in *Doctor Pye* show, like the Jungians Peake clearly believed that the ideal human existence was not

¹⁴¹ Alice Mills, *Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 187.

¹⁴² Peake, *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories*, 69.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Winnington, *The Voice of the Heart*, 361.

in a fragmented identity but rather in a striving towards wholeness. Rather than a prophetic vision of the truth, the Lamb's blindness then reflects his limited, single vision, much like Blake's Urizen.¹⁴⁵ This loss of vision is a product of his own loss of humanity: "We only see what we understand; and we are thus very nearly blind. But total blindness is reserved for those whose vision is functional."¹⁴⁶ This functional vision that Peake speaks of is no different from the "vision of a dog"¹⁴⁷ and is thus immune to the inherent beauty in an ordinary object, such as the yellow chair against a blue wall that becomes a masterpiece in the hands of Van Gogh.¹⁴⁸ This is true of the Iron Law of Gormenghast where the meanings behind symbols are lost. Gormenghast thus observes a day in honour of the poet in keeping with tradition but fails to appreciate poetry, the Master of Ritual being far more invested in the truancy of the young earl than in the poetry being recited at the event. The Lamb's 'vision' allows him to see the bestiality within every human being degraded by him, just as Steerpike has the ability to understand his victims' vulnerabilities. But having no 'human' quality himself, the Lamb detests but does not quite understand humanness and therefore fails to 'see' why his creations do not survive. Like Steerpike's mirror-system, the Lamb's vision too is limited.

The divine lamb is of course one of the enduring symbols in Blake's *Songs of Innocence*,¹⁴⁹ symptomatic of a deluded, naïve faith in the rightness and fairness of the world. This same

¹⁴⁵ William Blake, "Vala or the Four Zoas" in *William Blake: A Selection of Poems and Letters*, ed. Jacob Bronowski (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 132.

¹⁴⁶ Mervyn Peake, "The Artist's World," *Peake Studies* 12, no.2 (2011), 5. Originally aired as a radio-talk entitled 'As I See It', broadcast by the BBC on 29th April, 1947, 5.00pm-6.00pm.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ William Blake, "The Lamb" in *William Blake: A Selection of Poems and Letters*, ed. Jacob Bronowski, 28.

righteous world is revealed in the *Songs of Experience* to have been nothing but a scam that the church and others in power use to manipulate the innocents into obedience. The utter nothingness that Peake's Lamb is revealed to be attains new meaning in the light of these perspectives. It should be mentioned here that Peake uses the figure of the lamb in another place in his fiction, during the initiation masque in *Gormenghast* to celebrate Titus Groan's tenth birthday where it appears as one of the four animals in a dance that mixes "a strong strain of the ridiculous" (Peake 661) with "godlike rhythms... of such a nature that there were few present who were not affected as by some painful memory of childhood" (Peake 662). "This Lamb," Peake tells us, "was a mass of pale golden curls" with an expression of "unspeakable sanctity. However it moved its head— whatever the angle ... there was no escape from its purity" (Peake 660-1). Commenting on the excessive antics of this figure, François comments that Peake uses the lamb in the masque to satirize "the detrimental effect of the myth of non-instinctual goodness on our capacity to resist evil."¹⁵⁰ The suggestion of an inverted church ritual in *Boy in Darkness*, with the mines becoming a reverse, negative cathedral— apart from recalling the underworld aspects of the psyche is also a similar commentary on the anti-instinctual nature of institutional religion that demands compliance by overriding all natural impulses and free will. This is exactly also the nature of the Iron Law of *Gormenghast*, and the sort of obedience that Barquentine demands from the young earl.

As the bewitched kingdom that mirrors *Gormenghast*, the possible redemption of this Wasteland then should signal some change within *Gormenghast* itself. Like Steerpike in *Gormenghast*, Titus here as an outsider is the agent of this change. What is rather curious is that

¹⁵⁰ Pierre François, "Stasis and Rebellion in *Gormenghast*: Part I — Stasis," *Peake Studies* 10, no.3 (2007): 11.

the language Titus employs to manipulate Goat and Hyena is strikingly similar to the one employed by Steerpike when dealing with the Twins or with Fuchsia.

On meeting Fuchsia for the first time in her attic, Steerpike claims to be an adventurer with the knowledge of strange distant lands: “Today I saw a great pavement among the clouds made of grey stones, bigger than a meadow. No one goes there. Only a heron” (Peake 122). Similarly, the Boy announces to Goat and Hyena: “I am a courier from another world.”¹⁵¹

Steerpike manipulates Cora and Clarice by playing on their feeling of having suffered an injustice, of having been supplanted by Gertrude in their rightful positions of power and glory and riches, of the supposed indignity of having no footmen and only one insolent servant, thus coaxing them into revenge with promises of golden thrones of queens should they succeed (Peake 198-9, 225). Likewise, the Boy promises to make these beast-men kings, offering them “hope and wild revenge,”¹⁵² weaving wild fantasies about “the shape of their golden thrones, and the number of their slaves and a hundred other things...” to awake “in their bodies the ulcer of insurrection.”¹⁵³ Not just Titus, but even the Goat and the Hyena mirror Steerpike who is both the toady who insinuates his way to power and bullies people into doing his bidding depending on the situation. This draws all four characters—the cursed Goat and Hyena, the villain Steerpike and the hero Titus into an unsettling parallel.

The unease inspired by this novella is primarily caused by the subversion of the trope of human to animal transformation, to be found quite often in fairytales. A character, usually a prince or a princess, but sometimes a sibling of the main character is cursed to become an animal or a

¹⁵¹ Peake, *Boy in Darkness*, 88.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

monster or an ogre. The regression symbolizes a gap between the conscious civilization and its unconscious animal impulses and the curse is broken either by love, or by defeating the evil entity/Shadow who put it on, and the story ends in a joyful celebration of the rejuvenation.

But though Titus succeeds in slaying the Lamb, there is no redemption or harmonious integration of the realms at the end of this story, even though the beast-men, Goat and Hyena are restored to their human shapes. “They did not talk to one another; they did not talk to the Boy. Nor he to them.”¹⁵⁴ Despite the apparent breaking of the spell and the defeat of the tyrant, there is no sense of any real shift in the consciousness, nor is the malaise of forgetfulness dispelled, for “by the time the boat touched ground on the far side his adventure had melted from his mind,”¹⁵⁵ hinting at what the readers of the novel already know, that the events of this journey/dream will have no healing effect on Gormenghast.

There is one other trope that jars our reception of this story. The anthropomorphic animal is a familiar concept in both fairytales and literary fantasies. Those animals may be evil, such as the wolf in ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ or the dragon imprisoning the princess in countless tales or the spider Shelob in *The Lord of the Rings*, or they may represent friendship and hope, as in the birds Cinderella sings to while doing her chores, or even a sort of higher wisdom or a connection to natural order as is the case with Shadowfax, the horse ridden by Gandalf without halter or reins in *The Lord of the Rings*. But Goat and Hyena are neither pure evil, nor are they innocent or spiritual. With their pettiness, fears and violence, they behave like human beings, and that is what makes them truly monstrous.

¹⁵⁴ Peake, *Boy in Darkness*, 92.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 93

It can be suggested that the evil that permeates this island-mine is not the Lamb himself, who is revealed in the end to have been literal emptiness. The real evil here then is an absence, signified by the absence of blood in the Lamb, which nullifies the possibility of redeeming this Wasteland through the Grail. The bloodlessness and whiteness of the Lamb relates him to the pale Steerpike whose forehead “shines like a bloody iceberg” (Peake 530). Richard West states that in reversing the traditional expectation of whiteness with innocence and purity, Peake manages “to challenge our Western cultural conditioning and force us to look carefully at the pattern of symbolism within the story¹⁵⁶...” Whiteness is also associated with the trolls in Nordic fairytales who are often depicted in terms of unnatural whiteness, frost or bloodlessness, having no life-force of their own. Blood is a symbol of vitality, of life-force, and the bloodless Lamb as king represents the condition of his kingdom where the human-beasts can’t survive due to the lack of vitality: “they had all died at one stage or another in their transmutation for lack of some ingredient, some necessity for survival...”¹⁵⁷

François identifies this ‘necessity for survival’ as “a strong life instinct, a strong Eros¹⁵⁸”, something that is literally drained out of the humans in contact with the Lamb, as for example in the case of the Lion who suffers “the draining of the heart’s blood, drop by drop”¹⁵⁹ before collapsing with a roar. And this brings us to the crux of the strangeness of *Boy in Darkness* and as later discussions will prove, of the *Titus Groan* novels themselves. The Eros or life instinct as François calls it comes from the feminine principle, which is completely missing in *Boy in*

¹⁵⁶ Richard C West, “Mervyn Peake’s Shorter Fiction,” *Peake Studies* 1, no.3 (1989), 29.

¹⁵⁷ Peake, *Boy in Darkness*, 70.

¹⁵⁸ Pierre François, “‘Boy in Darkness’: From Parody to Satire,” *Peake Studies* 13, no.3 (October 2013): 31.

¹⁵⁹ Peake, *Boy in Darkness*, 70.

Darkness. There is no queen in this kingdom, no princess or even a witch. Thus what seems unsatisfactory in this story from the perspective of the traditional expectations from a fairytale is not as Mill argues the unsatisfactory evilness of the Lamb. Rather, what discomfits us arises from the absence of the feminine in this novella which only hints at a masochist, homo-erotic tension between Goat and Hyena. In the words of Luisella Ciambezi, “Gormenghast is a land without love,”¹⁶⁰ and so is this nightmare dreamscape within it. This brings us to the other fairytale structure within Gormenghast, this one located within the context of the novel, that of Fuchsia as the Princess in the tower.

The Problem of the Unresolved Anima: Fuchsia and the Thing

While the land across the river in *Boy in Darkness* does not have a female figure, Gormenghast has several, notably Gertrude, her daughter Fuchsia, Nannie Slagg, Keda, the Thing, the Twins and Irma Prunesquallor. If the events in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* map the respective journeys of Steerpike from kitchen-boy to ‘arch-fiend’ and of Titus from infant heir to monster-slaying legend, or as Peake suggests, from birth to manhood and freedom, they are equally about Fuchsia’s tragic journey from adolescence to womanhood and death.

In a world that is characterized by its fanatic obsession with form and its utter lack of imagination, Fuchsia Groan looks for meaning in the shape of clouds and in her art. Suffering the same dissociation between the Logos and Eros as her brother, she too shows signs of a heroic impulse in her desire to be free and young, youth representing the contradiction to everything that is old and moribund in the Law of Gormenghast. But the role she chooses for herself is a passive one: “I shall live *alone*. Always alone. In a house, or in a tree.... Someone will come then....

¹⁶⁰ Luisella Ciambezi, “The Desecration of Rituals in Gormenghast,” *Peake Studies* 3, no. 4 (1994): 17.

Someone from another kind of world— a new world— not from this world, but someone who is *different*, and he will fall in love with me at once because I live alone...”(Peake 113).

Given that Steerpike literally climbs into her room through her window, the pattern looks eerily similar to well-known tales such as ‘Rapunzel’.¹⁶¹ But Steerpike unfortunately for Fuchsia is no rescuing prince but only playing at being one. This he does by systematically manipulating and exploiting her vulnerabilities in order to bewitch her into a relationship that ultimately sunders her from her life-force. This malicious bewitching thus recalls the pattern of another traditional fairytale— the story of the princess in ‘The Shoes Were Danced to Pieces’¹⁶² in which the princess travels into a strange kingdom through a hidden door in her bedroom to dance with the troll with whom she has entered into a negative communion. In the common version of this tale, the princess passes the silver and gold kingdoms to meet the troll in the third, diamond kingdom. In a reverse parallel, Fuchsia climbs upward through three connected attics where she first meets Steerpike.

François points to Peake’s use of moonlight “like a hoar frost on the Tower of Flints” and concludes that “Peake’s *topos* really appears to be the lunar underworld, which is closely akin to Dante’s *Inferno* which is ‘all ice.’ In the context of a *nekya*..., all normal assumptions about space are overturned”¹⁶³ and Sepulchrave’s upward climb in the tower is thus really a descent into the deepest level of Gormenghast’s psychological space. Using this theory of reversals, we can also argue that Fuchsia’s upward climb into her attics is also a descent into an underworld realm, and her refuge in this underworld hideout is necessitated by the condition of the upper world which

¹⁶¹ Margaret Hunt, trans., *Grimm’s Household Tales Vol.I*, introduced by Andrew Lang (London: George Bell & Sons, 1884), 50-53.

¹⁶² Margaret Hunt, trans., *Grimm’s Household Tales Vol.II*, introduced by Andrew Lang (London: George Bell & Sons, 1884), 179-181.

¹⁶³ François, “Godless Religion and Maimed Earldom in Titus Groan,” 24.

has abandoned or at least neglected her. Thus the discovery of this world provokes the fear of “her soul... thrown naked to a world that could never understand” (Peake 119). Or in other words, the troll succeeds in bewitching the princess because the conscious world has already repressed her, and thus Fuchsia becomes involved in a sort of negative communion with Steerpike. The attics are later replaced by one of Steerpike’s secret rooms whose doors are hidden from the rest of the castle where Fuchsia, like the bewitched princess of the story makes her clandestine nocturnal visits (Peake 677). There is a suggestion of the inverted, bewitching nature of this communion in the poem she writes and scratches out: “How white and scarlet is that face,/Who knows, in some unusual place/The coloured heroes are alight/With faces made of red and white” (Peake 665). Usually, a fairytale following this pattern ends with the death of the troll at the hand of the hero, and the bewitched princess is saved. But in this case, although Steerpike is killed by Titus, the latter fails to rescue Fuchsia. Copp suggests that Fuchsia turns to Steerpike out of desperation born of thwarted love, and that “her love for her brother is slightly incestuous,”¹⁶⁴ a reading which may be validated by her sense of betrayal when she discovers Titus with his foster-sister, the Thing.

The wild, uncivilized daughter of Keda, the Thing is the object of Titus’s anima pursuit throughout the course of the second novel, right up to the moment when he has her in his arms, and noticing the smallness of her face “the first wild virgin kiss that trembled on his lips for release died out... he knew that there would be no climax” (Peake 736). A minute after this, the girl is burnt up like dry leaf by a stroke of lightning, for as an almost animal-human figure, she is incapable of human companionship.

A story of a prince/hero slaying a troll usually includes the rescue of a princess; likewise fairytales generally end with a happy, harmonious integration of all the kingdoms and a union with

¹⁶⁴ Copp, “Secret Gods: Epic Revelations of the Aesthetic Imagination,” 97.

the anima. The ending of *Gormenghast* achieves only part of this goal by bringing about a sort of unity between the Castle and the Outer Dwellers, driven by necessity. But as a hero, Titus not only fails to rescue Fuchsia, nor does he achieve any sort of union with the anima. The Thing who had remained the outcast throughout the events of *Gormenghast*, is ultimately killed, suggesting an incomplete and temporary harmony. In an essay titled ‘Gormenghast, A Censored Fairy-Tale’, Pierre-Yves Le Cam suggests that although *Gormenghast* “is marked by fairytale isolation¹⁶⁵”, Peake censors “the traditional grace and beauty”¹⁶⁶ of the fairytale by creating a prince and a princess who are characterized by ugliness, the latter being a physical marker of the fact that all the love-stories in these novels end in “disastrous conclusions.”¹⁶⁷

Thus at the end of the second novel, there has only been a temporary spatial shift in the location of *Gormenghast* necessitated by the effects of the Flood. There are hints of a physical rejuvenation— repair works are undertaken, and “in the spring corn was grown on the higher and less water-logged slopes” but Titus grows “more and more restless” at “the monotony of the eternal encampment; the eternal castle and the eternal ritual” (Peake 802). The Poet, in becoming the new Master of Ritual, has merely substituted the rhetoric of poetry with the rhetoric of ceremonies “whose sacredness appeared to be in inverse ratio to their comprehensibility or usefulness” (Peake 802). But ritual is more than rhetoric. As Ciambezi points out: “The formal elements of ritual are —a) repetitive formulas and gestures; and b) fixed places and occasions with symbolic meaning.”¹⁶⁸ *Gormenghast* has an abundance of formulas and occasions, but a complete negation

¹⁶⁵ Pierre-Yves Le Cam, “Gormenghast, A Censored Fairytale,” *Peake Studies* 5, no. 2 (1997): 25.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Ciambezi, “The Desecration of Rituals in *Gormenghast*,” 17.

of meaning. Characters “are linked by their meaningless acceptance of these ceremonies” rather than by “any emotive participation”¹⁶⁹ or in other words, the ‘feeling’ or Eros principle. The joyless cycle that Titus feels driven to escape in the end is “the result of an arid, senseless adhesion to form”¹⁷⁰ without any meaningful transcendence.

The Exiled Wise Old Man

Like the Poet, another figure who is completely ineffectual as a repository of the castle’s symbolic life is its curator, Rottcodd. What is interesting in Peake’s narrative pattern in the first novel, *Titus Groan* is that the story begins and ends with a character who plays no role in the events of the novel. Although *Titus Groan* opens ostensibly announcing the birth of the heir, Peake devotes his first pages not to the prince himself, but to a character who appears only once more at the end of the narrative, observing from a distance as young Titus is crowned the seventy-seventh earl of Gormenghast. This is Rottcodd, the custodian of the Hall of Bright Carvings, the repository of Gormenghast’s most important ritual and of its ancestral wisdom.

Rottcodd is an interesting example of the many gaps of coherence in the narrative of Gormenghast. It is said he enters the Hall of Bright Carvings at seven every morning and leaves at nine in the evening but has no contact with the other denizens of the castle, his existence in the novel seemingly ceasing outside this hall. What then is his role in the novel? He is seen, as already mentioned, only twice in the novel— on the day of advent and on the day of the crowning, playing no role in the action in either instant.

¹⁶⁹ Ciambezi, “The Desecration of Rituals in Gormenghast,” 18.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

The lack of explanation for Rottcodd's time outside the hall of the Bright Carvings finds an interesting parallel in a Sandman short story written by Nancy A. Collins titled 'The Mender of Broken Dreams'.¹⁷¹ In the story, the mender of broken dreams spends his days repairing dreams, but has no memory of his time either before he enters the hall in the morning, or after he leaves it in the evening. We discover later it is so because the Mender himself is a dream. The most striking element in this story is the intricate details and vibrant colours used to describe the dreams, rendering their descriptions as visually evocative as the bright carvings that Rottcodd watches over with such proprietorial pride. Since Collins' story comes much later than Peake's; we do not really have any concrete grounds of comparison between the two. However it is difficult to pass up the chance to note the uncanny parallels between the two old men, both in charge of a hall of dreams, a space that is more or less abandoned by other characters. Whereas Collins' mender is categorically involved with the actual tangible dreams of human beings, seeing as he belongs in a story about the lord of dreams, Peake approaches the subject in an oblique manner. The carvers themselves are half-forgotten, dream-like, and the bright carvings, with the brilliant hues and forms contrasting sharply with the drab physical reality of their makers are the products of their lifelong passion, manifestations of their creative dreams.

An interesting word that Peake uses with respect to the carvers and their art is "recrudescent" (Peake 10). The Bright Carvers and their art represent a dream that have been settled, diminished and forgotten, only for it to return every year in ritual fashion. And indeed, beyond the annual hue and cry of the Bonfire day, the bright carvings, their makers and their

¹⁷¹ Nancy A Collins, "The Mender of Broken Dreams," in *Sandman: The Book of Dreams* ed. Neil Gaiman, Ed Kramer. (New York: HarperTorch, 1996), 301-318.

caretaker are relegated to the peripheries of collective memory by the castle denizens, once more to become the contents of forgotten dreams.

The figure of Rottcodd also brings to mind instances of a couple of active imagination or ritualistic roleplays from Carl Jung's childhood. In his memoirs, Jung speaks of his childhood ritual in which he kept a carved manikin in a box that he kept hidden on a beam in the vicarage attic. At intervals, he would visit the manikin to present him scrolls written in a secret language so that the latter could have a secret library in his attic retreat.¹⁷² His identification with this figure brought young Jung a sense of security in an otherwise lonely childhood heightened by an indifferent father and an invalid mother.

In yet another adolescent fantasy, Jung imagined a fortified castle on a rock rising out of a lake as its home. In the tower of this castle a much older and wiser version of Jung conducted alchemical experiments, converting air into gold through "a venerable and vitally important secret of nature which had come to me I know not how..."¹⁷³— a secret that he kept hidden from the townspeople and the council of elders. Jung came to view this old man, remote from the world and from ordinary society as his number 2 personality, while the boy who was his parents' son and went to school was his number 1 personality. A possible parallel here can be drawn between Rottcodd and this Personality No. 2— the wise old man who lives at the top floor of a castle ringed by a moat much like Gormenghast) and engages in alchemical explorations. The similarities are uncanny. Like Jung's schoolboy and old man, Titus and Rottcodd lead distinct, separate, we might as well say exclusive lives that never bring either of them into the other's path, except on the one occasion when Rottcodd observes the ascension of the new earl. The specificity of the two events

¹⁷² Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 34. First published in 1962.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 87.

that brings the secluded Rottcodd into the perception of the readers is what lends an archetypal tenor to the character and makes the comparison with the Swiss psychologist's childhood fantasy plausible, despite the fact that the latter's *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* was first published in German in 1962, whereas *Titus Groan* was originally published in 1946. Not only does Peake begin his novel with Rottcodd, using him as a medium to announce the birth of the heir, but we also observe him at the end, watching the procession as it returns from the earling ceremony at the lake. (Peake 393-395). Thus Rottcodd is used by the author at two critical points of change, despite the fact that the character never appears anywhere in the rest of the novel. Nor is he ever seen to interact with Titus Groan (who himself has a very small presence in the novel named after him) or with Steerpike or Gertrude or any of the main characters except for that single, awkward conversation with Flay that occurs at the beginning. Rottcodd's impression of the earling day is endowed with an eerie vague quality—the white cats of Gertrude swarm over every single turret, suddenly vanishing and appearing below on the ground, and the curator's sight of the procession itself is initially blurred due to his long-sightedness, till he removes the glasses he wears (Peake 392-93). All of this heightens the sense of incoherent mystery and dream-like quality that pervades the novel.

However, Jung's old man and Rottcodd differ from each other at two very crucial points. Whereas Jung's Personality Number 2 is involved in active alchemical explorations to understand the recesses of the mind, Rottcodd spends his days sleeping. Secondly, Jung's schoolboy is aware of the old man as a part of himself, whereas there is no indication anywhere in the novel that Titus ever even meets Rottcodd. By the time we meet Rottcodd again at the end of *Titus Groan* he has been completely forgotten, quite like the dream-like carvings he watches over, emphasizing the recurrent theme of forgetfulness. Part of Rottcodd resents being forgotten, but he also realizes that

he had wanted to be forgotten: “He could not have it both ways” (Peake 393). Never having welcomed human interactions in the first place, Rottcodd reveals “an aloofness or a nervousness” of nature that is “startled” by unexpected appearances of other human beings (Peake 12), showing symptoms of a schizoid nature, once again a possible result of parental neglect.

Carl Jung himself had a schizoid disposition, result of a childhood loneliness that he shared with both the creator of Gormenghast and its denizens. Part of Jung’s alienation resulted from an estrangement from his father on the question of unwavering religious belief that the latter wanted to impose on his son and which the former resisted: “I now found myself cut off by the Church and from my father’s and everybody else’s faith.”¹⁷⁴ While we do not know much about Mervyn Peake’s psychological disposition, and while by all accounts from his biographers his relationship with his parents were perfectly cordial, the “need to create a citadel in which to hide from the world is characteristic of people with a schizoid disposition.”¹⁷⁵ There may not be a specific religion in Gormenghast, the ancient stones themselves constituting a sacred law that its denizens adhere to. But the question of conflict between unquestioning faith in dogma and the need to experience an inner spiritual life is a major force in the novel, responsible for Sepulchrave’s melancholia in the beginning and leading to Titus’s rebellion later. Peake himself repeatedly questions organized faith in his poetry. He also parodies the Catholic Mass in *Boy in Darkness* and his fictional treatment of missionaries are ambiguous at best. Doctor Silver, the character modeled on his father in *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs* is powerless to act in a crisis, necessitating the young boy to win his own war and the pious and slightly overbearing eponymous hero of *Doctor Pye* is horrified when his faith manifests as something deeper than the abstractions

¹⁷⁴ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 64-5.

¹⁷⁵ Anthony Stevens, *Jung: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 7.

he is fond of spouting. The conflict between faith as dogma and as transcendent experience was thus something Peake felt strongly about, in common with Carl Jung.

In Jungian interpretation, Rottcod's character could be viewed both as a symbol of the Self as well as the Wise Old Man. The name 'Rottcodd' also suggests an exaggerated inversion of the word 'doctor'¹⁷⁶ which is apt considering his potential as the custodian of "those symbols of the aesthetic imagination's sensual spirituality"¹⁷⁷ to be the spiritual healer of Gormenghast. But the other connotation of his name is a 'rotten cord' which highlights the cessation from the past that the castle suffers from. This cessation is reflected in the curator being almost forgotten by the castle: "Could it be that, for more than a year he had seen no living soul?" (Peake 396) His hall is isolated, separated from the general life of Gormenghast and the vaunted bright carvings he watches over with such pride is equally forgotten by all once the annual ceremony is completed. Rottcodd himself does not derive any great wisdom or ancestral insight from the works. Thus unlike a Gandalf or an Elrond or a Tom Bombadilo who as custodians of history are able to help Tolkien's heroes with their superior awareness and understanding, the curator of Gormenghast is a passive bystander who has no role in the events that unfold in Gormenghast, nor is he ever depicted dispensing any advice to anyone. Rottcodd's aloofness and passivity negates the possibility of reconnecting with the past of Gormenghast.

Moreover, Rottcodd spends most of his time sleeping, suggesting a state of repressed unknowing, highlighted by the fact that he is clueless about even the most important events of Gormenghast society such as the birth of an heir, the death of the Earl and the crowning of a new

¹⁷⁶ "During WWII, the word 'doctor' was written on the windscreen of Peake's father's car; seen from inside it read 'rotcod'. The character who bears the name may well reflect the attitude of Peake's father, who had been a medical missionary." (Winnington, *The Voice of the Heart- the Working of Mervyn Peake's Imagination* 2006, 53).

¹⁷⁷ Robert Copp, "Secret Gods: Epic Revelations of the Aesthetic Imagination," 92.

ruler. This disconnect is reflected in the Carvers themselves who are plagued with the curse of fleeting beauty and bitter rivalries, highlighting the breakdown of normal social relationships. Rottcodd himself is not only unaware, but also unsocial, estranged particularly from the feminine gender: “Rottcodd was unmarried. An aloofness and even a nervousness was apparent on first acquaintance and the ladies held a peculiar horror for him” (Peake 12).

This is a recurrent pattern in *Gormenghast*, reflecting its crystallized patriarchy. Sepulchrave is estranged from his wife, whose instinctual vitality or life-force he is deeply suspicious of (Peake 159). And the Master of Ritual, Barquentine can barely recollect that he once had a wife whom he likely drove mad through neglect (Peake 610). The disharmony ailing *Gormenghast* is thus symptomatic of a deeper problem, which is the negation or subduing of the feminine principle.

All the women characters in these novels are victims of this negation. Titus’s aunts, Cora and Clarice, and his sister, Fuchsia— all daughters of *Gormenghast*, suffer tremendous neglect which ultimately result in their deaths. Each of them die as a result of their negative communion with the shadow character, Steerpike who is given the chance to gain his power through these women only because *Gormenghast* stifles their creative impulses. Even a character as imaginative as Fuchsia has to ultimately drown in the water of unconsciousness while the aunts are forgotten and starved to death. This is also the case, though in a lesser degree and depicted in a comic fashion, in the character of Irma Prunesquallor who ends up making, like the Groans, an incompatible and unhappy marriage. The Thing, Titus’s foster-sister who is a free, instinctive creature outside the perimeter of *Gormenghast*’s social structures is nevertheless killed by a sudden lightning strike after being subdued by the male Titus, while her mother, Keda, despite being a rebellious, free-

spirited woman who asserts her right to love and choose ultimately jumps to her death, unable to withstand the norms of patriarchy.

While Gertrude, Fuchsia and Nannie Slagg sort of form a triumvirate of the Matron, Maiden and Hag over the male heir of Gormenghast, their role in the castle is more or less limited. Gertrude, the Countess is depicted as a powerful woman, perhaps more capable of taking command than her husband, as evidenced in the christening episode and later during the Flood and in organizing the pursuit of Steerpike. We know that she has an innate quality for leadership, with a personality authoritative enough to stand up to the tyrannical Master of Ritual when she wants, powerful enough for even Steerpike to be wary of her. Yet, generally speaking, she has very little role to play in the life of the castle, or in the life of her son. She is an outsider in Gormenghast, but something about Gormenghast makes her lose touch with that outer-world, and she regresses deep into her inner world of animal and plant life. Interestingly, the mother figure in the third Titus Groan novel, *Titus Alone* also has divine associations, at least in her name, 'Juno'. And although she assumes a more proactive role in Titus's life than Gertrude, she too ends up being neglected and rejected. The very concept of Gormenghast, with its hard stone tenets, jutting rock towers and the arrowhead-like prongs of the iron crown is essentially male, and Eros, the creative, life-giving force of the Mother has very little scope to function in this crystallized patriarchy. As a result, the masculine principle itself is crippled, resulting in an overall repression of the symbolic life of the people, a repression which spills over into their stagnant physical and emotional life.

This is the theme we shall explore in greater details in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

The Repressed Feminine in the Titus Groan Novels

HEART

What is that against the sky,
Saffron coloured, huge and lonely?

MIND

Peace my heart, for it is only
The cold moon.¹⁷⁸

In this chapter, I shall examine in depth the place and role of the feminine in Gormenghast. By the feminine I don't simply mean the women of Gormenghast— although they do occupy a significant portion of this chapter— but also the Eros principle or the emotive, irrational element of the collective psyche that has been systematically repressed by the dominant, intellectual Logos principle in Gormenghast. This affects not only interpersonal relationships but also people's ability to lead healthy, harmonious lives that is beneficial to the collective.

I begin the chapter by making a short, general summary of the patriarchal social order of Gormenghast in which women are traditionally relegated to the sidelines, reflected in its general tendency towards male intellectual self-sufficiency coupled with a distrust and disdain of feminine wisdom. This imbalance between the male and female energies also affects the men themselves, which is our next area of discussion. This is followed by a discussion of "The Cave", an unpublished play where Peake traces western civilization's progressive alienation from the 'Anima Mundi' or the feminine principle. I argue that this pattern of the masculine rejection of the Goddess figure may also be found within the world of Gormenghast, and try to establish this by an

¹⁷⁸ Mervyn Peake, "What is That against the Sky?" in *Collected Poems*, ed. RW Maslen (Manchester: Fyfield Books: Carcanet Press, 2008), 71.

examination of both its Ritual as well as the symbolic language and imagery employed by the author in his depiction of the female characters. I then look at the depiction of some of the female characters in the Gormenghast novels— Gertrude, Fuchsia, Keda, Nannie, Irma, Cora and Clarice Groan and Keda's daughter, the Thing— focusing both on how they are treated by the events and social structures within which they are situated, and also on how they are treated by the male characters around them. In case of both the men and women of Gormenghast, we find that the alienation from the feminine principle creates the situation that enables a villainous figure like Steerpike to act and manipulate these characters to serve his ambitions.

Picking up from my inference from the previous chapter, we shall discuss how the generic repression of women in these societies transcends the sphere of individual relationships, or even the physical boundaries of Gormenghast, suggesting a collective split in the psyche, a rupture between Logos and Eros that is symptomatic of a deeper malaise in the contemporary world order. It is this deep-seated stasis of Gormenghast that makes integration impossible, both for the characters and for the collective psyche, making it paramount for Titus Groan to make his own path free from the rigid Ritual of his ancestral home. We conclude the chapter with a brief comparative discussions of Flood narratives and the role played by Gormenghast's apocalyptic Flood in Titus's heroic journey towards integration and in search of a new identity.

Crystallized Patriarchy in Gormenghast

Although Gormenghast may appear to be a fantastical setting dislocated from reality, the socio-political structure of the Gormenghast society is an identifiably traditional and conservative one. The key positions of power and importance all belong to men, the women, including the formidable Countess being largely defined by their relationship to the men. The political authority resides in the male head of the family, the earl of Gormenghast. Daughters do not inherit, necessitating the

Earl Sepulchrave and Countess Gertrude to maintain a sexual relationship only for the sake of producing a male heir, despite the fact that their marriage is so devoid of compatibility that the Earl finds this forced intimacy an embarrassing obligation.

One might argue that fairytales in general depict a patriarchal world order, and this order is cemented by traditional fantasy, but what fairytales always stress upon is the harmonious union between the masculine and the feminine, something that is missing in Gormenghast. In Tolkien, the world created is one of male heroism, but the presence of the feminine as a source of wisdom and joy and guidance pervades the work. Galadriel and Celeborn are equal partners as rulers in Lorien, and the former is clearly given more importance by both the visitors and the subjects themselves. Likewise, the forest outside the borders of the Shire is protected equally by Tom Bombadilo and Goldberry. In the other elven kingdom of Rivendell, ruled by Elrond, the absence of a Queen is compensated by the presence of the princess, Arwen. The only kingdom completely devoid of feminine presence is Gondor, with no mother and no sister, and not only is the ruling family a dysfunctional one, but its head, Denethor dies in a manner that is somewhat similar to Sepulchrave's in *Titus Groan*— a ritualistic sacrifice driven by insanity. Even C.S. Lewis who reveals a more misogynistic attitude in his depiction of the witches and in the final banishing of Susan Pevensie from Narnia allows for more benevolent and soothing feminine figures such as Queen Lucy and Ramandu's daughter. While not challenging the accepted roles of women in the socio-political domain, figures such as these help to bolster the idea of women as sources of comfort and emotional guidance, and even wisdom— an idea that would soothe not only a collective consciousness affected by the violence of two world wars, but also reassure the deep-seated veneration for the goddess in the collective unconscious. This is clearly not the case in Gormenghast.

All positions in Gormenghast are passed from father to son, and where a son is unavailable, the incumbent grooms a male apprentice as his successor (Peake 260). Thus Sourdust is succeeded as Master of Rituals by his son Barquentine, who in turn is succeeded by his presumed apprentice, Steerpike. Likewise, the Curator, the Poet, the Chef and the Head Servant are all men. In fact, apart from Nannie Slagg, Keda and the old woman who serves tea to the twins on Steerpike's first visit to them, Peake hardly ever mentions a female servant in Gormenghast. Even the scene of drunken revelry in the kitchen to celebrate the birth of an heir depicts only men and boys. Outside of these mostly ritualistic or serving positions, the two other important social roles within the castle's orbit are both performed by men, the doctor, Prunesquallor and the headmaster, Bellgrove. The school that Titus goes to has only male teachers and only male students. Girls receive no formal education, which is testified by the fact that Fuchsia, who is around fifteen at the time of Titus's birth and has an obvious inclination for reading and writing nevertheless has no writing device except charcoals, and an often poor grasp over spelling, as evidenced in some of the notes she scrawls on the walls of her room.

This order of life is reflected even in the Outer Dwellings, in the rigidly oppressive male hierarchy that leaves no scope for female agency in matters of marriage or ownership of property. Even when a woman such as Keda chooses to rebel against this order by asserting her own right to her body and her emotions, her rebellion turns out to be futile as she is ultimately defeated by the male codes of honour and conquest. Thus although she proclaims her desire to live and love, and even though she defies society by selecting her own lover, her lovers themselves choose to duel to death, finding their worthiness in physical prowess and a male code of honour rather than in the woman's preference or feeling. In the event, Keda is left with nobody at her side, her desires ultimately unfulfilled.

In her book, *The Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption*, Marie Louis von Franz draws a comparison between societies that are purely male-driven and those that are more female centric. The former shows “a tendency towards a hierarchy. It is very often purely intellectual... (or rather) very objective. There are no subjective considerations.”¹⁷⁹ The woman’s world in comparison is much more flexible and subjective, but as an isolated extreme, it too exhibits detrimental traits-

Instead of a hierarchy and aggressive fighting, you have a malicious playing of tricks, whispering against each other, playing spider tricks on each other... Naturally the power thing goes on, but it is played with a weapon of poison, not with brutality or aggression. It’s done with needling and little jealousies and so on.¹⁸⁰

In Gormenghast, both these worlds exist, but the feminine remains heavily repressed by the dominant male order and thus lurks in the forgotten, shadowy corners of the castle, in the neglected resentments of Sepulchrave’s sisters, in the childish anger and dissatisfaction of his daughter, the whining complaints of Nannie Slagg or in the hysterical obsessions of Irma Prunesquallor. It is noteworthy that Steerpike’s methods, though ruthless, aren’t generally directly ‘aggressive’ but rather depend on the ‘tricks’ he pulls by manipulating and whispering and playing on those jealousies and insecurities of the women he uses to serve his ends. Although he carries a rather phallic sword-stick for show and uses it to impress Fuchsia and even, in one instance, to suggestively tickle the Aunts, it is in Prunesquallor’s store of ‘poisons’ that he shows interest. As the Shadow arising from the split between these two worlds, Steerpike turns the repressed feminine into his weapon. This imbalance between the male and female principles thus affects the women

¹⁷⁹ von Franz, *The Cat*, 29.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 30.

of Gormenghast, leaving them vulnerable to neglect, emotional abuse, repression and manipulation as a consequence.

On the other side of this equation are the men of Gormenghast who do not fare much better as far as their emotional lives are concerned. Titus, for instance is often treated less as a person in his own right, his status as the only living male Groan taking preponderance over his individual desires. His principal tormentor in this respect, Barquentine spends more than half of his life within the confines of a little room waiting only for the event of his father's death at which point he would be required to assume his responsibilities as the next Master of Rituals. It is nowhere hinted that he suffers any grief at Sourdust's death, or that they had even met in several years, nor does he appear to have or ever had had any sort of relationship with his own offspring, for he cannot even recollect with certainty if his child was a boy or a girl or if they are alive at all (Peake 610). As the custodian of its law and sanctity, Barquentine in fact reveals the inadequacies of Gormenghast in their worst forms, revealing the utmost split from Eros and the narrowest possible single-vision approach to life:

Power without love becomes brutal.... Fanaticism is always a sign that one has adopted one of a pair of opposites at the expense of the other. The high energy of fanaticism is a frantic effort to keep one half of the truth at bay while the other half takes control. This always yields a brittle and unrentable personality.¹⁸¹

Outside of his official role, Barquentine is thus incapable of holding even the most tenuous of relationships with any other human being, which explains his self-exposed exile during the years of his father's tenure. His loveless nature had driven his wife to madness and an early death, and he fails to muster even the personal loyalty that is expected within such a hierarchical system for

¹⁸¹Johnson, *Owning One's Own Shadow*, 89.

the Groan males, Sepulchrave and Titus. Barring the sisters, Cora and Clarice, the Master of Ritual is possibly one of the most stunted characters in the first two novels, and as in the twins' vacuous expressions or Sepulchrave's paleness, Peake makes this lack physically visible. As Desmond Mason writes, Barquentine's "atrophied sexuality is apparent in both his withered stump and his dry crutch."¹⁸²

As a keeper of histories and traditions in charge of an orphaned heir, Barquentine might be compared with Elrond who similarly loses his wife and brings up a fatherless Aragorn, but he has neither the wisdom nor the compassion of the latter. Sepulchrave's illness does not elicit sympathy or sorrow from him. If anything, Barquentine is enraged by what he sees as the irresponsibility and betrayal of Sepulchrave's disappearance, an anger made even more unpalatable to the reader who knows the grisly details of the latter's sacrificial suicide. As for the infant Titus, he remains merely a troublesome tool that the Master of Ritual needs to bend into shape, rather than a fatherless child who might need adult male guidance. The utter incapacity of empathy in Barquentine makes him one of the most unlikeable character in the novels, surpassing even the fiendish Steerpike who after all charms both his victims and the readers with his quick wit and cleverness.

Barquentine is not the first Master of Ritual depicted by Peake who is utterly devoid of empathy. His father and predecessor in the job, Sourdust may have had a less abrasive personality than his son's, nevertheless he seems to have been every bit of a negligent, indifferent father as the latter, and equally unavailable emotionally. In the breakfast scene where we first meet him, a distraught Sepulchrave clearly in need of companionship manages to break his habitual reticence to ask: "Sourdust, have you heard about my son?" But his companion is too obliviously bent on

¹⁸² Desmond Mason, "Atrophied Sexuality in Gormenghast," *Peake Studies* 4, no. 2 (1995): 33.

running the rituals according to clock to notice: “Sourdust, with his eyes on the clock, had not heard his lordship’s question. He was making noises in his throat and chest, his mouth working at the corners” (Peake 50).

Peake refers to Sourdust as the Librarian in the early sections of the novel, therefore implying that the Master of Rituals was intended also to be the custodian of wisdom and cultural history, but neither Sourdust nor his successor, Barquentine ever show any intellectual or empathetic abilities beyond a factual mastery of a vast set of meaningless rules. Nevertheless, they are revered by the others for their role as the guardians of Gormenghast’s sacred traditions. But the collective emotional stunting, a characteristic of the castle as a whole and especially evident in Sourdust and even more so in Barquentine leave them both incapable of even recognizing the lacunae in their personal lives. In fact, so far as Barquentine is concerned, people in Gormenghast do not have personal lives. For him, Titus Groan, the seventy-seventh earl is no more an individual person than the Grey Scrubbers in the kitchen who are well-nigh indistinguishable from the walls and floors they spend their lives scrubbing. That Titus continues to assert a great deal of individuality from the moment of his earling as an infant is something that irks the fanatical Master of Ritual: “The young earl was too much himself. It was as though the child imagined he had a life of his own apart from the life of Gormenghast” (Peake 609).

What is interesting is, despite creating a thoroughly unpleasant, unlikeable character, Peake offers us a brief insight into his mind just before his death. Sitting in his hovel of a room, deliberating on the rebellious young earl and the efficient but dangerous Steerpike, Barquentine is unconsciously led, first to a vague recollection of his wife and child, and then into reminiscing on an unhappy childhood where he experienced mocking and bullying and even possible physical abuse, without receiving any adult comfort or protection. Sourdust, ever obsessed with the tomes

of the Groan Law was likely as neglectful as a father as Barquentine has been in his turn. Barquentine's inability to care about Sepulchrave or Titus therefore is partially a result of the very structure of Gormenghast's social life. This life, of which he is a guardian, prioritizes formalities over individual concerns, almost completely annihilating the personal and the private in the process. Thus Barquentine's perpetual state of violent and enraged fanaticism is also partially fueled by his own repressed childhood with unavailable parents.

But a repressed childhood, as we have already discussed in Chapter One, is in itself also a characteristic of the Gormenghast order. From the few examples provided in the novels we find that Gormenghast doesn't seem to support healthy parent-child relationships. Sepulchrave and Gertrude, for instance, in spite of their polar opposite temperaments are both equally inept in communicating with their children, and this has clearly been the case in Barquentine's family as well. Gormenghast thus perpetuates an eternal cycle of emotionally malnourished children who grow up to be stunted adults leading to more neglected childhoods.

The most fascinating detail of Barquentine's rumination of the past occurs right before his reverie is disturbed by Steerpike, in what turns out to be a fatal, final encounter. While remembering his wife, Barquentine recalls "how, as she wept, she would, hardly knowing that she was doing so, make paper boats... a navy of grief and madness" (Peake 610). A couple of paragraphs later, right after his reflection on his unhappy childhood, Barquentine engages in the exact same activity, and Peake's use of language here is significant: "Picking up a piece of paper he began to make a boat but he did not know what he was doing" (Peake 611), revealing not only the potential for the 'madness' he had hated in his wife and which he had judged as treason in Sepulchrave, but also a deep buried grief that has not quite been quenched by his obsession with the castle ritual, or by the fear-mixed respect his position has earned him.

Peake's use of the image of the paper boat is significant here. The boat, as a womb-shaped vessel is one of the archetypal feminine symbols, and a tool of communication through the uncharted waters of the unconscious. In the collection of Chinese fairytales edited by Dr. Richard Wilhelm, Niang Niang, the Queen of Heaven is said to be a Taoist goddess of the sea, and of ships and seamen.¹⁸³ Thus the boat becomes the symbol of hope and renewal in the Flood myths of various civilizations where the Flood itself becomes a sign of shift in the collective consciousness. This is especially pertinent since Gormenghast experiences its own mythical Flood towards the end of the second novel; an event we shall explore in depth later in this chapter. But what is extremely interesting is that this symbol of renewal makes its first appearance in *Gormenghast* with Barquentine, a character who in his fanaticism becomes almost the symbol of the castle's moribund deadness, suggesting a cycle of life and death that needs to start again. The word 'Barquentine', interestingly means a sailing ship with three masts, "with only the foremast square-rigged and the remaining masts rigged fore and aft."¹⁸⁴ Also notable here is the fact that his brief unguarded descent into madness comes right after the smug self-assertion that while he was bullied in the past, he is now "feared and hated" (Peake 610). Despite his conscious beliefs, Barquentine thus reveals not only a longing for emotional acceptance but also an unconscious affinity towards the repressed Eros, symbolized here in his neglected, mad wife as well as in the paper-boat that connects him to her. Fittingly, his death happens through fire and water— fire the symbol of a consciousness that's become too bright to be contained, and the water of the unconsciousness wherein he ultimately sinks.

¹⁸³ Richard Wilhelm, ed., *The Chinese Fairy Book*, trans. Frederick H. Martens (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1921), 61.

¹⁸⁴ Lexico Dictionaries. Accessed January 6, 2020. <https://www.lexico.com/definition/barquentine>.

Naturally, the only character who can hold off against the kind of rigid male objectivity symbolized by both Sourdust and Barquentine is Countess Gertrude, who despite being equally rigid about upholding the Groan traditions can be dismissive on occasions about the formers' bullheaded insistence on cumbersome procedures. The first instance of this flexibility of temperament occurs during Titus's baptism, when she ignores Sourdust's dismay at the interruption in the ceremony and proceeds to take the crying infant for a stroll in the gardens (Peake 93), casually directing the congregation to follow her. The second memorable incident occurs in the second novel of the trilogy when Titus goes missing from the ceremony to honour the Poet, and Gertrude directly confronts Barquentine by forbidding his criticizing her son in public: "My son is no chattel that you can discuss, Barquentine, with your pale lieutenant.... The occasion will proceed. Find a substitute for the boy from the tyros' benches" (Peake 536).

What both these incidents reveal is not only Gertrude's ability to stand up to powerful, obstinate, dominating men used to having their ways by the sheer force of her personality, but also a talent for finding solutions by adapting the requirements of ritual to the needs of present reality, something that is almost unthinkable in Gormenghast. The tragedy of Gormenghast of course is that Gertrude does not use her power nearly enough, and remains content to let her brain sleep as she accepts the hegemony that snuffs the life out of both her husband and her daughter and eventually compels her son to leave.

While Sourdust and Barquentine are extreme examples of male rigidity, Peake also creates other, more sympathetic male characters who are slightly more capable of emotional reactions, but are nevertheless inhibited from expressing or even admitting those emotions by the very air of repression that Gormenghast evokes, as in the case of Sepulchrave Groan in whom the separation from the anima leads to a general lack of vitality or in the case of Doctor Alfred Prunesquallor,

whose good intentions are rendered ineffective despite his commendable intelligence and perceptive powers.

The character of Alfred Prunesquallor, as mentioned before is the second doctor in Peake's fiction, the first being Dr. Silver in *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs*. Although *The Umzibooboo Kaffirs* is a very different kind of work as compared to *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, Dr. Silver shares with Lord Sepulchgrave the quality of an absentee father figure in the sense that he is absent through most of the travails undergone by the tale's boy-hero, Hugh Silver. This role of an ineffectual paternal figure is also fulfilled to some extent by Prunesquallor. Although he is technically not a father to Fuchsia or Titus, the doctor is one of the few adult characters in the novels who demonstrate concern and affection for the Groan children and is treated by both, as well as by Gertrude as a dependable figure in times of crisis. With the poet remaining mostly off-stage as it were, and Sepulchgrave dying early, Prunesquallor is also Gormenghast's main representative figure of the male intellectual life as Gertrude is of feminine instinctual life. Like both of these men, and in fact almost all the men depicted in Gormenghast save Headmaster Bellgrove who marries Irma, Prunesquallor exemplifies the life of male solitude, free, as far as possible of feminine influence. As a quasi-replacement to Sepulchgrave and as a man of science, the doctor shares with the former earl the same trait of distrust as well as disdain of the feminine- be it the Countess' earthiness or his sister's repressed sexual frustration expressed through a hysterical self-obsession. Yet, in spite of their apparently polar opposite attributes, Alfred Prunesquallor and his sister Irma do share a couple of things in common— a certain taste for refined household upholstery, for one, but more importantly their loneliness which leads to a shared tendency towards verbosity. In case of the sister, Irma, this merely takes the form of a determined repetition: "Have you done anything? Have you? Have you?" (Peake 143). This trait

makes her sound tedious at times, hysterical at others, and perhaps reveals a deep unconscious anxiety resulting from years of being unheard and ignored.

But it's in the more intellectual brother where this quality becomes a pronounced long-windedness, a compulsive need for words so that the doctor seems at times to be almost afraid of silence. That silence is probably inside his own head, created by the disconnection from one half of the collective psyche. Johnson says: "All language is a mandorla; a well-structured sentence is of this nature. That is probably why we like to talk so much; good talk restores unity to a fragmented world."¹⁸⁵ Well-constructed language is "immensely healing and restorative."¹⁸⁶ The fact that the doctor is incapable of simple speech suggests a search for that same elusive wholeness that his books or his masculine 'cleverness' cannot offer. Yet his language is plagued by that same imbalance of the psyche that ails Gormenghast, disguised in his instance by (an often forced) humour. The best example of this compulsive need is during the library fire scene when the rapidly depleting oxygen supply in the room and the influx of smoke has made speaking, or even breathing difficult, and yet, the doctor's choice of rhetoric to communicate the simplest of instructions is as follows:

My very good woman,... my very dear Slagg, convey his minute Lordship to the door that for some reason that is too subtle for me to appreciate remains shut. Why, in the name of Ventilation, *I* don't know. But it *does*. It remains shut. Take him nevertheless, my dear Slagg, to the aforesaid door and place his infinitesimal head at the keyhole (surely *THAT'S* still open!), and even if you cannot squeeze the child right through it you can at least give his Lordship's lungs something to get on with. (Peake 241)

¹⁸⁵Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 102.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 104.

Apart from the impracticality of using so many words in an emergency, that too involving a severe lack of oxygen, the technical problem with this speech is that the core verbs are heavily outweighed by elaborate tangential phrases and digressing commentary. “A correct sentence says that the subject equals the object and annuls the quarrel between the two. The split inherent in duality is thus healed.... Human speech is more effective if it relies mainly on verbs.”¹⁸⁷ This simple efficiency is missing from the doctor’s speech.

Prunesquallor’s verbs, and consequently his meaning are both lost in the lengthy intellectual detour he undertakes. As a result, the slow-witted and already scared Mrs. Slagg misconstrues the doctor’s words as an instruction to squeeze the baby Titus through the keyhole and more precious time and air is lost in attempts to convince her to get the needful done. His sister, Irma, although treated as foolish and hysterical through most of the first two novels does offer one rather accurate analysis of her brother’s character: “You have a brain, Alfred. I have never denied it.... But it is undermined by your insufferable levity” (Peake 142). It seems almost as if the doctor is incapable of direct communication. Another good example of this occurs during the episode by the lake just before the earling. While watching the raft-builders prepare for the coronation of the new earl, Prunesqualor tries to ask Mrs. Slagg about her husband but is unable to do so without breaking his exaggerated sense of ‘finesse’ and ‘crudeness’. The excessive emphasis laid by the doctor on these qualities is the hallmark of a society so taken up with sophistication and manners that communication at a basic level is rendered almost impossible. It is perhaps also telling of the state of the society’s compartmentalized collective psyche if a woman being asked a simple question about her husband is deemed impolite, a state that reflects equally on Prunesquallor and Nannie Slagg. It is Fuchsia who finally asks the question, causing the doctor

¹⁸⁷Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 104.

to exclaim: “The direct approach...God bless my circuitous soul, we learn... we learn” (Peake 364). At the same time, this levity of language is something that Prunesquallor seems to use as a defense mechanism to protect himself from emotional entanglements. This is reinforced by the fact that he is able to discard this ‘circuitous’ manner at will when necessary. The few times he uses simple language, his voice losing its “facetious vapidness” (Peake 427), he is usually speaking with either Titus or Fuchsia, both of whom he is emotionally attached to, or with Gertrude on matters pertaining to the risks to Gormenghast.

The sad part of this is, despite the shared loneliness, the Prunesquallor siblings fail to communicate with each other, emotionally or intellectually and this leads to consequences for the whole castle. In the section quoted a few lines above where Irma complains about her brother’s levity, the former is trying to convince her brother of hearing footsteps outside her room. Typically, he ignores her, not only offering Steerpike a chance to support her and thus charm his way in, but also by ignoring the possibility of his sister’s truth, he fails to realize that Steerpike was the only person who could have had the opportunity to go upstairs in that particular situation and is thus far more dangerous and ambitious than he appears to be. In a way, both brother and sister are thus victims of Steerpike who plays on their respective needs for companionship. Irma is bowled over by Steerpike’s maleness and his flattery whereas Alfred is knowingly, despite recognizing him as a “diabolically clever little monster” (Peake 138), intrigued by his cleverness. Thus he finds a place in the Prunesquallor household which leads him to the next stage in his upward climb through the castle hierarchy.

In the end, the doctor, in spite of all his rational leanings and cleverness fails to challenge the oppressive nature of Gormenghast, despite recognizing its oppressiveness and imprisoning nature for both Titus and Fuchsia (Peake 522, 549). Despite having “a mind of his own” and

holding “positively heterodox opinions regarding certain aspects of the Castle’s life” his faith in the Groan Law is as ‘blind’ and ‘pure’ (Peake 368) as those of narrower intellectual capacities. The result of such faith devoid of belief and essence is ennui which he masks beneath a fatuous wit. Intellect when divorced from the instinctual life becomes limited and ineffectual. Thus Prunesquallor’s intellect, while serving a practical purpose in the form of his medical knowledge fails to avert any of the disasters that befall Gormenghast and its denizens. Despite the numerous clues that point to a single culprit, the doctor fails to act on them. Even though he plays a part in the final unmasking of Steerpike, it is accomplished mainly through the action of Flay who returns to Gormenghast compelled by his love for Fuchsia as well as his hatred for Steerpike. Emotion thus seems to be more effectual than intellect.

As for Flay, first servant of Gormenghast and of Lord Sepulchre at the beginning of *Titus Groan* and an exile by the end of it, such conflicts between faith and mind are irrelevant. Flay is as much of “a traditionalist of the old school” (Peake 404) as Barquentine. But at the same time, he also provides an interesting contrast to the latter, for he is bound to his master not simply out of a loyalty to the Gormenghast Ritual, even though he is one of the most loyal of its servants, but also by a personal affection that he feels not only for Sepulchre but also for Fuchsia and later, Titus: “... his angers when the Law is flouted are uprisings of a hot loyalty that blinds him, and not the merciless and stony intolerance of the cripple” (Peake 404). Thus he is assailed by a personal sense of betrayal as he is temporarily removed from the earl’s presence right after the birth of Titus:

Mr. Flay was rather hurt about the whole business, and he very much wanted Lord Groan to know this, and yet at the same time it was very difficult to think of a way in which he could actually communicate his chagrin to a man quite as sullen as himself (Peake 39).

In a society that is in general distrustful of individuality and individual affection, Flay, despite his loyalty is able to note (though not express) not only the fact that the countess has not looked upon her newborn son (a sentiment of mild censure that he shares with Nannie Slagg and Prunesquallor who express similar thoughts elsewhere) but also the fact that the earl himself has not seen his son for months: “Had the summer to see his son in... Should have seen the child long ago” (Peake 160). Also interesting is his opinion of Barquentine whom he disapproves of as a person yet recognizes his commitment to the Groan Law: “Barquentine, also was a bitter pill to swallow, but Flay realized at once the traditional rightness and integrity of the old man” (Peake 261).

One might even venture to suggest that this conflict between a natural distrust of individual happiness born of long social conditioning and the individual emotional attachments that he forms in spite of this distrust is what drives Flay’s character and in a way also drives the narrative. The very first piece of action in *Titus Groan* is the first servant knocking at the curator’s solitude, driven by the former’s emotional exuberance at the birth of Titus, “when his dour nature had been stirred so violently that he had found himself itching to communicate his enthusiasm to another being” despite his personal disapproval of individual happiness (Peake 16). This joy, that he is even unable to properly justify or express drives him first to disturb the curator’s sanctuary and then to visit the kitchen where he is noticed, and then followed by Steerpike. His sense of hurt at being rejected as the Earl’s companion at such a critical juncture, compounded with an almost desperate need for a companion leads him to indirectly introduce Steerpike to the upper echelons of Gormenghast society, and his anger— another emotional reaction— at the kitchen boy calling the newborn Groan infant ‘ugly’ pushes him to lock him up in a room, which leads Steerpike to escape and land up in Fuchsia’s attic from where he begins plotting and scheming his way to the top of the social order.

Thus in a very bizarre way, Flay throughout this episode might be said to be acting as the archetypal Wise/Wicked Old Man who directs and guides the hero in fairytales. Steerpike becomes the hero in this reverse narrative, who feeling the need for an adventure escapes from home (in this case the kitchen) and is guided along the way by Flay who indirectly helps him to find his path to the princess. This is a role Flay reprises years later when, as the literal ‘old man in the woods,’ he meets a truant and lost Titus in the forest and offers him food and direction. Franz says, “Jung defines the spirit/Old Man as the active power of the unconscious which invents and arranges or orders images... the spirit... is that in the unconscious which makes dreams.”¹⁸⁸ This throws an interesting light on Flay’s character, especially when we recall that our first encounter with him happens through the eyes of Rottcodd who as the Keeper of the Bright Carvings is the repository of ancestral wisdom and dreams. As the ‘active power’ in the collective unconscious that is Gormenghast, Flay thus acts as an unwitting catalyst for the very ‘change’ he detests, an action that is in its turn propelled by the conflict created by the emotional repression and alienation from the feminine within the collective psyche.

Despite his loyalty to tradition, and his defining of his own existence by Gormenghast, Flay offers an interesting contrast to the more radical Barquentine. Flay’s reaction to finding Titus outside the castle is to feed him and then send him home, Barquentine’s reaction is to lock him up in prison. Both old men see Titus as the symbol of Groan law inseparable from the ancient castle stones, but Flay, unlike Barquentine, nevertheless also sees the child behind the symbol. His fierce love for the Groan children and his potential for an instinctive life, augmented by his woodland exile enables him later to guide Titus’s path through the subterranean mazes into the belly of the beast, as it were, and like Gandalf in the mines of Moria, he sacrifices himself in pursuit of the

¹⁸⁸Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 28.

monster. But while the mines are only the way through for Gandalf, who eventually guides his friends to victory and later to the blessed realm beyond, the closed vision of Gormenghast ensures that Flay fails to guide Titus any further in the latter's desire for freedom.

Nevertheless, the forest exile allows Flay to become, if not more expressive at least to be more open to the beauty of a universe beyond the requirements of custom. Thus the same Flay who could not appreciate the vividness of the wood carvings in the opening chapter of *Titus Groan* surprises himself by being moved by the colours of sunset after his banishment to the woods.

He was discovering more and more in this new and strange existence, this vastness so far removed from corridors and halls... that gave rise in him to a new sensation, this interest in phenomena beyond ritual and obedience—something he hoped was not heretical in him—the multiformity of the plants and the varying textures in the barks of trees, the varieties of fish and bird and stone. (Peake 347-8)

Flay's fear of being heretical arises out of a collective schism in the consciousness. Gormenghast is so far removed from the divine feminine that even an appreciation of it seems strange and sacrilegious. As Clarissa Pinkola Estés says in her seminal work, advancement of civilization causes a corresponding distrust of and separation from the wild instinctual energies of nature: "It's not by accident that the pristine wilderness of our planet disappears as the understanding of our own inner wild nature fades."¹⁸⁹

Reverence to the feminine is, according to Robert Graves, the chief subject of all poetry, and the poet himself a priest to the Goddess: "The theme... is the antique story... of the birth, life, death and resurrection of the God of the Waxing Year; the central chapters concern the God's losing battle with the God of the Waning Year for love of the capricious and all-powerful Threefold

¹⁸⁹ Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (London: Rider, 2008), 1.

Goddess, their mother, bride and layer-out”¹⁹⁰— an eternal tale where the poet himself is the God of the Waxing Year, his Muse the Goddess and his ‘other’ the rival.¹⁹¹ As a druid-like figure in communion with the cyclical essence of life, the poet was held in honour in the Celtic courts such as in ancient Ireland where he sat beside the king at the table and shared the privilege of wearing six colours in his robe with none other than the queen herself.¹⁹² The poet of Gormenghast, by the rules of tradition is accorded this apparent status or position, but is never seen during any of the pivotal castle ceremonies except the one that is specifically observed for him. Nobody cares about his poetry, nor is he able to share it with others. When unobserved, he writes odes to that great mystical feminine power of Gormenghast, invoking the ‘Beauty’ who is also his ‘Love’ to come to him through the castle battlements. But despite the passion in his poetry, he fails to communicate his vision the moment his solitude is disturbed:

The face reverted instantaneously to the soulless and grotesque mask which Steerpike had first seen and which during the recitation had been transformed by a sort of inner beauty. It had coloured, the parchment of the dry skin reddening from the neck upwards like a piece of blotting —paper whose corner has been dipped into red ink (Peake 108-9).

Loss of communication is symptomatic of the greater disease of Gormenghast, the fractures in its psyche that affects all spheres of its conscious life. Whereas Tolkien’s men flourish in ‘fellowship’, Peake’s men suffer as lonely islands.

¹⁹⁰ Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 20. First published in 1948.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., 18.

The poet, in his state of rapture is able to access a secret reserve of inner beauty that has been drained out of the general castle life, but he, like the other men of Gormenghast suffers from the same affliction that prevents the sharing of that solace with others. Naturally, he is the preferred intellectual companion of the similarly aloof Lord Groan. However, just as Sepulchrave has a distrust for his wife's "heavy, forceful vitality" (Peake 159), he has a similar distrust of the poet's idealism: "But in the Poet there was an element of the idealist, a certain enthusiasm which was a source of irritation to Lord Sepulchrave, so that they met only at long intervals" (Peake 159). This suggests that perhaps the poet has a reserve of innate soulfulness that the earl lacks, but nevertheless, he isn't able to access that source well enough to transform the stagnant social order of the castle through poetry, nor is he even able to conceive of such a possibility. The nature of Gormenghast is such that its denizens, even the latently creative ones such as the poet are too far conditioned by the dogmatic iron laws to be effective. Thus the annual celebration to honour the poet in Gormenghast becomes an exercise in tediousness where the audience fails to connect or show the remotest interest in the poetry being recited on stage, and the Master of Rituals is far more invested in the observance of forms rather than the spirit of poetry. In fact, so far as it is possible for a fanatic such as Barquentine to be blasphemous with respect to the demands of the Ritual, it is this particular ceremony that he holds in particular disdain: "...it is only once a year... that the Poet is honoured.... Why, the lice in my beard alone know..." (Peake 529)— holding it only because the rules demand so. And the poet himself approaches this public recitation in a rather formal manner, revealing none of that trance-like ecstasy that Steerpike had observed in him while scaling the walls of the castle. It is of no surprise then that the end of the second novel, he becomes far more successful in his new role of Master of Rituals than he ever was as a Poet.

Steerpike himself, incapable of wonder, or love, or poetry, is a product of this crystallized patriarchy, arising out of the shadows of the castle kitchens to gradually work his way up the consciousness of Gormenghast. In a way, his climb across the roofs of the castle suggests the repressed shadow rising up into the consciousness, a negative embodiment of all that is missing in the conscious culture of the society. Like the witches and trolls of fairytales, what Steerpike seeks is to be part of the consciousness: “Give me daylight” (Peake 31) — is what he initially begs of Mr. Flay. Having found his way upwards, he manipulates Fuchsia Groan, Irma Prunesquallor, Cora and Clarice- literally every woman he encounters to further his rise. The only exceptions to his manipulative scheming are the Countess who is too foreboding, and Nannie Slagg who is too old and unimportant. This manipulation is made possible because the oppressive structure of patriarchy creates the scope for these women, hungering to be felt loved and important, to be manipulated. An expert politician, Steerpike steps in to fill up the void created by Gormenghast.

The lack of libido in Sepulchrave, the crazed, ruthless fanaticism of Barquentine, Prunesquallor’s obsessive need to laugh at his own often forced attempts at humour all suggest a deep inner void created by the absence of the feminine principle in the general castle life. Coursen writes: “The ‘moods’ of men, even depression and deep melancholy, can be attributed to their divorce from the feminine-in-them, the principle that fertilizes the male ego.”¹⁹³ The portrayal of such a disconsolate life deprives the reader from what Tolkien claims to be two of the main functions of fantasy— ‘Escape’ and ‘Consolation’.¹⁹⁴ The stilted life of Gormenghast is not the result of any curse or external manipulations, nor the evil wrought by an ogre but rather the

¹⁹³ H.R. Coursen, *The Compensatory Psyche: A Jungian Approach to Shakespeare* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 86.

¹⁹⁴ J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories.” In *Tree and Leaf*, J.R.R. Tolkien (np: HarperCollins, 2013), 758. Kindle Edition. Originally published in C.S. Lewis ed. *Essays Presented to Charles Williams* (London: OUP, 1946), 38-89.

purposeless, joyless living is the very product of the crystallized patriarchy that is the essence of Gormenghast. This counters Tolkien's assertion that in 'Faerie', "one cannot conceive of a house built with a good purpose— an inn, a hostel for travelers, the hall of a good and virtuous king—that is yet sickeningly ugly."¹⁹⁵ Peake refuses to create an ideal realm conceived of a desire that is more beautiful than reality. Instead, he thrusts the readers into a fantastical but oppressive castle that has none of Tolkien's Gaelic charm, despite the mystery and dark beauty of its subterranean passages.

Bereft as the men of Gormenghast are as victims of the system, what sets the women at a further disadvantage is the fact that even in a place like Gormenghast that is almost defined by its dysfunctional relationships, the women are still lonelier than the men. Unlike the women, at least some of the men share some sort of relationship, however rudimentary, with each other. Sepulchrae has an intellectual compatibility with the Poet, despite their difference in taste. He also shares a kind of mutual emotional dependency, albeit never expressed, with Flay, his servant. Titus finds father-figure/friends in both Prunesquallor and Bellgrove while the other teachers at the school share the easy camaraderie of colleagues. The students, including Titus are allowed the privilege of childhood friendship. But the women are denied even such habitual relationships with each other. In contrast to the men, there are no comparable instances of female friendship in the novels; Gertrude, Fuchsia and Irma are all depicted as solitary figures. The Countess finds emotional expression through her birds and cats. Fuchsia and Irma, while very different in disposition from each other are both terribly lonely characters who become gullible victims of Steerpike's manipulations.

¹⁹⁵ Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories," 823.

The two female relationships that *are* presented to the readers offer neither emotional nor intellectual solace. In the first of these, for instance, between Fuchsia and her nurse, Nannie Slagg, the latter cannot answer any of the former's imaginative questions, nor does she attempt to do so. Moreover, not only is Mrs. Slagg's love a sort of jealous, possessive love that prevents Keda and Fuchsia befriending each other (Peake 73), but also, age, work and temperament has made Mrs. Slagg an inadequate source of emotional compensation, one who is far more invested in complaining about herself and seeking Fuchsia as an emotional release rather than loving the child as her caretaker. Thus in a formal gathering of the castle people, all of whom she seems to dislike, she asks Fuchsia to take care of her: "I'm not well— I'm not; I'm *not*. And nobody cares— not even you.... You will look after me?" (Peake 233) In another instance, before Titus's Earling ceremony she wails about the child being taken away from her, running to Fuchsia for comfort while at the same time carelessly telling the young girl: "But you're only a girl.... You don't matter. You're not going to be anything" (Peake 381). That Fuchsia loves her so fiercely and genuinely is more a statement of her own emotional potential and her hunger for affection than of the actual health of the relationship.

The lack of interactions between Keda and Fuchsia is especially strange considering they would have spent their time primarily around the same set of people— Nannie and Titus. Keeping the two women in the novel who share a capacity for love and instinctual living seems to have been a conscious choice on the part of the author. Incidentally, both these women end up choosing death despite all their striving for life and love. Keda could have provided Fuchsia with the affection or at least understanding that the latter had craved all her life and that she certainly never received from either her mother or from the petulant, needy Nannie Slagg. Thus the only potential for a balanced female friendship within Gormenghast is never materialized. Not only is Keda, a

woman with sharpened maternal instincts denied a chance to love Fuchsia, a young girl craving a mother, but by choosing death, she also nips the chance of a relationship with her own daughter. Parallel to this is the relationship between Gertrude and Fuchsia, another mother-daughter relationship that fails to materialize because of these characters' inability to communicate with each other. Thus characters who could have potentially enriched each other are never given the chance to interact: Gertrude and Fuchsia, Keda and Fuchsia and Keda and The Thing. And as far as the relationship between Cora and Clarice Groan is concerned, these sisters are each so emotionally and intellectually stunted—symbolized in the semi-paralysis of their bodies—that their relationship seems more a soliloquy than a dialogue. As twin 'halves', they appear as physical manifestations of the split in the Self.

It can be argued of course that Tolkien's Middle-earth doesn't offer much in the way of friendship between women either. Apart from the in-universe implication of a positive and loving relationship between Galadriel and Arwen, the Tolkien women never interact within the narrative space of *The Lord of the Rings*. In fact, barring Éowyn, and briefly, Arwen, Tolkien never really probes into women's desires, being more content with the idea of women as guardian angels holding up their light to shine upon the paths of the heroic men on their quests. Galadriel (morning star) and Arwen (evening star) are both named after stars in the courtly tradition, and both function as echoes of the divine Elbereth whom the elves all worship. Peake creates women who are more flesh and bone and makes us confront their loneliness and their madness. This is a world where women can't guide men to glorious victories, and where the latter can't save the former.

The absence of feminine companionship in Gormenghast is significant from a psychological perspective, for as Estés points out, the ancient "women's ritual of being together"

afforded them a necessary and “enlivening” escape from an overabundance of male energy.¹⁹⁶ The absence of such a release thus hampers the “natural feminine cycle.”¹⁹⁷ This could explain why almost all the women in Gormenghast are damaged in one way or the other, including the brilliant but emotionally distant Gertrude. But in a more collective sense, this imbalance in the male and female energies might contribute in the further breakdown of communication between the sexes. The women of Gormenghast thus seem caught up in a cycle where the crystallized patriarchy of the Gormenghast social system influences their emotional well-being leading to a deterioration of relationships which further helps in entrenching the same patriarchal entropy.

The emotional aloofness of the male and female principles, and the preference for male intellectual companionship coupled with a distrust for female emotions and female sexuality is a persistent theme in Peake’s work, especially so in the Gormenghast corpus. Sepulchrave is suspicious of Gertrude’s vitality while Prunesquallor is fascinated but at the same time repelled by her earthiness which he considers an offence against his own superior aesthetic sensibility and taste (Peake 425). Similarly, although both Irma and Bellgrove are equally deluded at the onset of their marriage, the latter eventually gets a more sympathetic treatment from the author as the woman is made to fulfill the stereotypical role of a petty, insensitive nag who is antithetical to the man’s intellectual and emotional needs: “One grows so very tired of straight lines” (Peake 711) — Bellgrove says in utter despair, but finds no sympathy from his relentless wife. Feminine energy, it seems is incompatible with the male intellect at peace.

A comparable approach to life is hinted at in *The House of Darkstones*, an early draft of what was to become the novel *Titus Groan* and eventually grow into a trilogy. In this draft, Peake

¹⁹⁶Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 339.

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

envisioning an island setting where a lonely and socially awkward Lord Groan meets an entomologist named Mr. Stewflower. While they remain initially distant with each other, they become friends after the Stewflower's eyes grow "very loving" when Lord Groan expresses his admiration for a moth. At the abrupt end of that draft, these two characters are found companionably leaning against each other in a sort of emotional-intellectual compatibility, "back to back", having "done with shyness."¹⁹⁸ This is suggestive of the "Platonic love" that Robert Graves describes as "the Philosopher's escape from the power of the Goddess into intellectual homosexuality."¹⁹⁹ Although this truncated draft runs only about four pages in print, the world that it paints is one devoid of women, something of which is retained in the final creation, "In spite of his intellect, which he knew to be far and way above hers, he felt and was suspicious of the heavy, forceful vitality of his wife" (Peake 159). This sense of suspicious superiority springs from the male intellect seeking spiritual sufficiency.²⁰⁰ This need to seek emotional adequacy from an intellectual refuge is what Gertrude recognizes as "the wrong way" (Peake 312) in her husband, for abstract philosophy divorced from natural life cannot really quench one's inner longing for fulfillment.

This pattern of intellectual self-sufficiency is even more evident in the other prominent male/paternal figure in the novel, Doctor Alfred Prunesquallor. Prunesquallor leads a bachelor existence amongst his books and his laboratory and tries to fill up emotional vacuum with clever, elaborate turns of phrase in conversation. He is contemptuous of his sister, condescending towards Nannie Slagg and not entirely approving of the countess. The only female in his life with whom he shares some sort of emotional bond is Fuchsia who he genuinely loves as a surrogate daughter,

¹⁹⁸ Peake, *Peake's Progress*, 105-9.

¹⁹⁹ Graves, *The White Goddess*, 7.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

although that love isn't enough to save her in the end. Interestingly, in a 2015 paper, H.L. Tyler suggested that the physical appearance and many of the traits of the doctor were modeled on a contemporary actor named Ernest Thesiger who was widely assumed to be homosexual.²⁰¹ Prunesquallor himself offers very little hints of his sexual needs or inclinations except for the occasional witty innuendoes about sword-swallowing and pythons, and at one occasion is appalled by the notion that he might want to embrace Gertrude (Peake 422). We get a slightly deeper insight into his mind when on another eventful evening Steerpike runs in shirtless to inform them of Fuchsia slipping and spraining her ankle in the rain. Steerpike's bare torso causes the doctor's spinster sister, Irma to shriek and faint and then dash away from the room to moan elsewhere, leaving her brother to be "in an ecstasy of astonishment. The spectacle of a half-nude, dripping Steerpike both repelled and delighted him" (Peake 218).

A sort of violent, suppressed homosexuality is however hinted at in *Boy in Darkness*, another work which, like the curtailed draft of *The House of Darkstones* is also set in a male kingdom, devoid of the feminine principle:

'... You ought to know that, *Hyena*, dear. Ah me, how rough you are.'....

'If you call me your love again, I'll skin you,' said Hyena...²⁰²

The violence in *Boy in Darkness* is deeply suggestive of the brutality plaguing the modern world that casts a larger shadow in the urban dystopia that is the third novel, *Titus Alone*. But although the first two novels— *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* are set in an appropriately medieval castle,

²⁰¹ H. L. Tyler, "Ernest Thesiger as a Source of Inspiration for Dr. Prunesquallor," *Peake Studies* 14, No. 3 (2015): 11-14.

²⁰² Peake, *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories*, 49.

Peake does not present episodes of male physical prowess and heroism as one may find in Tolkien's Middle-earth, a trend which continues in *Titus Alone* where the only characters to display any fighting skill are the ambiguous Muzzlehatch and the villainous Veil. Thus although both the City and Gormenghast itself are steeped in patriarchal ideals, the masculinity Peake depicts is strangely emasculated in the absence of its feminine counterpart. Also interesting is the fact that when Peake does depict physical strength and violence in a character, it is usually a negative rather than a heroic representation. Veil and the Helmeteers in *Titus Alone* and the second son, Miles in his play, "The Cave" are examples of this general tendency, while Muzzlehatch in the former is an exception.

In the unpublished play titled "The Cave,"²⁰³ Peake traces Man's gradual alienation from the feminine divinity in tandem with his growing intellectual cynicism and materialism. This is done through a symbolic history of civilization told as the story of a single family through the ages, a history in which the aggressive male and intuitive female principles are directly placed as opponents fighting for control. As man, seeking control over the world changes from fearful devotee of the goddess to aggressor, the woman too changes in his perception from Moon Goddess to heretical witch and temptress, the enemy challenging the authority of the rational, male world order represented at first by the Church and then by the State. Subtitled 'Anima Mundi', it follows man's collective rupture from the Anima through time, the Cave as microcosm reflecting the mind of the society as a whole, revealing humanity's gradual rupture from its instinctive wisdom and intuition as it adapts itself to an increasingly mechanical, violent and joyless life.

²⁰³ Peake, "The Cave or Anima Mundi".

Banishing the Moon Goddess

The Cave is divided into three acts spanning three ages. Peake creates a unique structure to communicate his cosmic vision, maintaining the unity of place and action—the cave functions as a Neolithic home to a primitive family in the first act, then as a medieval mason’s rough workshop in the second, and then a twentieth century underground hideout from war in the third with the same set of characters continuing a single story— but dispensing with the unity of time, thereby stretching the play across centuries and thus turning the story of four people in a single location into a symbolic chronicle of the entire human civilization. The main characters in this play are the members of a family consisting of a domineering husband and father, his submissive wife and their two sons. The elder son is always an artist trying to interpret or commune with the shadowy, frightening numinous world through his art while the aggressive and insecure younger brother seeks to bend the physical world to his own will in order to control it: “I will discover things! Perhaps I will find a way to kill the cold. I will stop the streams from freezing. I will make weapons stronger and sharper...”²⁰⁴ Disrupting this familial space is the figure of the goddess/witch.

In the first act, an early Stone Age family in a cave is hiding from the wolves, the cold and the wrath of the Moon Woman. A woman turns up, and she is at first believed to be the goddess herself till she makes herself a target by daring to think and express her non-conformist thoughts. Yet although she says she is not the Moon Goddess and doesn’t believe in her, Peake nevertheless creates an almost surreal image where she stands at the mouth of the cave, illuminated by moonlight, evoking the primal vision of “the Venus of Laussel standing with the horn of the moon upraised in her hand” as well as the Catholic “icon of the great cheeta who stands on the horned

²⁰⁴ Peake, “The Cave,” 4.

moon and awaits the rebirth of the world.”²⁰⁵ This very mythic image of the moon goddess bestowed on this character by Peake transforms her from an ordinary heretic to a wiser figure of divinity. Peake thus emphasizes the quality of a higher consciousness that enables the woman to intuitively know of a power in the world beyond the tribes’ ancient superstitions. Tellingly, he names her ‘Mary’ in the next two acts, subverting the sanctified image of the Virgin Mother by turning her into a voice of defiance.

The second act of the play takes the same set of characters and the cave to the medieval age, where the elder son, now called Harry carves a hideous gargoyle for the local cathedral, to the great consternation of his father. His brother who has joined the witch-hunting Inquisition is equally dismissive of the art. The only person to find beauty in this “foul abortion” is the woman, now persecuted as a heretical witch by the Church. Although fleeing persecution once again for her blasphemous thoughts, Mary has a better understanding of God’s creation: “For look at it. It has been made. It is superb and alive. It is worthy of any building — Cathedral or Cavern. God who created the camel, the toad, the scorpion or the owl; God who created the goat — He would enjoy it.”²⁰⁶ The heretical outcast thus offers an intuitive truer appreciation of both the human and the divine than what the fragmented collective consciousness of religious gatekeepers can fathom. We are reminded once again of Blake: “Did he who made the Lamb make thee?”²⁰⁷ In a fragmented, soulless world with its split consciousness, Peake seems to suggest that the key to wholeness and healing is to be found in the alienated feminine energy.

²⁰⁵ Sjöö Monica and Barbara Mor, *The Great Cosmic Mother: Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2013), 16-17.

²⁰⁶ Peake, “The Cave,” 15.

²⁰⁷ Blake, “The Tyger” in *William Blake: A Selection of Poems and Letters*, 49.

Estés reminds us that the word ‘witch’ derives “from the word *wit*, meaning wise. This was before cultures carrying the one-God-only religious image began to overwhelm the older pantheistic cultures which understood the Deity through multiple religious images of the universe and all its phenomena.”²⁰⁸ Thus the ‘witch’, Mary has intrinsic knowledge of the fullness of divine creation that the narrow-sighted, monotheistic world around her fails to understand. As an artist and interpreter of beauty, the elder son has a better knowledge of this truth than the rest of his family, including his didactic father and his fanatical brother. The inspired but non-conforming art thus becomes a threat to the status quo, to the simplistic black and white, good and evil view of the world, but it is the Woman/Mary who articulates the truth of his sculpture. Without her, his voice is a lonely one that can be easily dismissed. It is the unnamed Girl who challenges the assumptions of tradition: “I am at war with something more [than the cold and the wolves]... I am at war with fear”²⁰⁹ and it is Mary who in the second act questions the idea of a “stern God of brimstone.”²¹⁰

In the final act, Mary becomes an enemy of the state, and in a desperate need to protect herself and those she loves, she is forced into a compromise with the repressed, aggressive younger brother, Miles. The sundering between the Artist and the Woman is complete, completing the journey away from wholeness which had begun in the first act. Peake saw the violence of his contemporary world as a destructive power annihilating all its regenerative possibilities, with the symbols of deathly power displacing the feminine from its traditional healing role. In a short poem

²⁰⁸ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 89.

²⁰⁹ Peake, “The Cave,” 10.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

titled 'May 1942' he writes: "Now is the month of maying/While pretty lads are slaying/Each with his metal lass."²¹¹ Miles in *The Cave* is a representative of this world.

The cave, we must note is a symbol of the female womb and thus the site of intuitive wisdom, a sacred space symbolic once again of the Goddess. Throughout the play, the characters move from one form of fanaticism to another, each time-shift taking them from further away from the truth of the cave— a symbol of the unconscious— while the woman remains an agent of dissenting thought, harbinger of the newness that can revivify a stunted society. Although she suffers apparent defeat, her effect is felt nevertheless, especially by the Mother in the story, who despite being terribly repressed beneath her husband's ego is always the first to sense the divinity in the Woman/Mary in each of the three acts. The hero of the play is not a warrior but an artist, and thus the only one in the family who can understand and love the woman who is viewed with suspicion and hostility by all the others. But in the third act, this relationship too suffers a breach, the woman is forced to compromise while the man becomes emotionally distant, seeking in his weakness the reassurance of a penalizing God:

"Mary: Oh enough! You have a god inside you. Do you want one with a beard?
Harry: I *do*. Indeed I *do*."²¹²

Significantly, while the young woman herself has no beliefs except a need for an endless search, the mother, having suffered a numbing of her own spiritual faculties by the dictatorial rationality of the father is inspired by the former's presence into reaffirming forgotten beliefs, recognizing in

²¹¹ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 119.

²¹² Peake, "The Cave," 29.

the younger woman a sort of divine sisterhood: “She can see us from above. We are nothing but moles. A family of moles. We have buried ourselves too soon.”²¹³

The conclusion of *The Cave* with its image of bunkers and bombs and faceless, omnipresent governments with their suspicion of anyone who doesn’t conform situates the play firmly in the contemporary, war-torn world, the same world that Titus Groan discovers in the third novel when he moves away from Gormenghast. It is the same world that produced the horrors of Belsen that Peake so poignantly describes in the Under-River section of *Titus Alone*, to be discussed in the next chapter. The breached relationship between Man and Woman and between Law and Faith is thus both a reflection and symptom of this world, the world which possibly also inspired the stagnant, rootless reality of Gormenghast.

Peake’s decision to use the twin images of the cave and the Moon Goddess in *The Cave* suggests a familiarity with ancient pagan religions where the Moon Goddess is often conflated with the goddesses of the earth and the underworld. “In the most primitive, the Moon is worshipped as the Supreme Triple-goddess Ngame, clearly identical with the Libyan Neith, the Carthaginian Tant, the Cannanite Anatha, and the early Greek Athene.”²¹⁴ This familiarity is also discernible in the Gormenghast novels, although, as mentioned before, Gormenghast follows no recognizable religion except a set of dry rituals whose significance has been forgotten, and which admits no divinity except for the sacredness of the tenets themselves. Yet there are hints of the goddess figure in the castle liturgy. Fuchsia’s secret attic is described as “a kind of pagan chapel” (Peake 52), Rantel and Braigon fight on a full moon night (in a chapter suggestively titled ‘Knives in the

²¹³ Peake, “The Cave,” 35.

²¹⁴ Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (np: Penguin Books, 2017), 22. First published in two volumes in 1955 by Pelican Books.

Moon') in the woods for Keda, recalling the image of the King of the Wood who attained his position by slaying his predecessor in combat. Later, after their deaths, Keda travels with a carving by each of the men as mementos: "...her burning trophies, her white eagle, her yellow stag" (Peake 274), recalling the woodland goddess once more— the eagle and the stag both symbols of the male godhead. Also, the latitude awarded to the chosen Bright Carvers to walk the castle ramparts on 'full moon' nights suggests the vestiges of a long forgotten lunar reverence akin to that found in primitive matriarchal religions.

Recalling *The Cave*, we know that Peake saw artists as having a deeper, more intuitive knowledge of the wild goddess, which could explain the importance that the Bright Carvers have in Gormenghast society, despite their apparently second class status. A preternatural association with the moon could also explain the brief flowering and consequent decay of their unearthly beauty. The moon is an especially loaded image of feminine regenerative energy in ancient religions due to its cyclical pattern of growth and decay, suggesting the potential of growth and rebirth in man. As an archetypal mother figure, she is thus to be found not simply in the ancient classical religions highlighted by the likes of Robert Graves but also in the stories and customs of African Bushmen and the indigenous people of the Americas. As these ancient cults evolved, the Moon/Queen's lover became the king, taking on the male aspect of the moon while in the final state, the king abrogated his Moon-god aspect and proclaimed himself the Sun-king, thus severing his dependence on the goddess. However, the marriage between the two is still celebrated as the divine marriage as in Osiris and Isis, and in Gormenghast this role is performed, albeit in an extremely degenerated, dysfunctional manner in the marriage of Sepulchra and Gertrude.

This gradual negation of the feminine in Gormenghast runs oddly parallel to the loss of its inner consciousness represented in its collective forgetfulness of meanings and values beyond the

codified words of ritual. It creates a world in which the Moon Goddess is reduced to an example of a ludicrous improbability, a jest that Dr. Prunesquallor, the male intellectual casually and unnecessarily throws at his sister, Irma, “Are you in fact the Moon Goddess?”, following up immediately with a sexual innuendo about ‘sword-swallowing’ (Peake 234). The idea is a subject for levity not simply because Irma, in her repressed shallowness is far removed from any sort of divinity but also because in the universe of Gormenghast, the Moon Goddess or the White Goddess has been deposed, as Prunesquallor proves a few sentences later by dismissing the moon as a “fatuous circle of silver paper” (Peake 234). The countess, Gertrude retains her divine connection to nature at the cost of detachment from public and even familial life, her powerful brain remaining dormant unless fueled by crisis. Her daughter, Fuchsia dreams of adoration from strangers in faraway worlds (Peake 153) at the beginning of *Titus Groan* but is assailed by “the growing sense of her own inferiority in everything but rank” (Peake 760) at the end of *Gormenghast*, her journey culminating in an accidental suicide. As Peake depicts in *The Cave*, the gradual erasure of the feminine from the collective consciousness is accompanied by an increasing tendency towards violence arising from a spiritual disconnection from the self. In Tolkien’s Middle-earth, the elves often pray to Elbereth, the queen of the Valar, while their enemies, the orcs are described as an all-male species with no higher purpose than violence driven by hate for the ‘other’ and the evil Black Riders are made to flee at the very mention of Elbereth.²¹⁵ Unlike Tolkien, Peake’s world has no such reverence for the goddess, and her power is thus forgotten. Marie-Louise von Franz says in *The Feminine in Fairytales*, “If a god is forgotten, it means that some aspect of collective

²¹⁵ Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*, 193.

consciousness are so much in the foreground that others are ignored to a great extent. The archetype of the mother goddess has suffered that fate in our civilization.”²¹⁶

As the women in Peake’s fictional world suffer this continual negation, so does the collective psyche of Gormenghast move from the light of consciousness into the dark, with no connection to the rejuvenating energy of life or as Estés terms it: the “Life/Death/Life nature [which] is a central attribute of the instinctual nature of women.”²¹⁷ The result is a stunted order of mechanized life of which the faceless, indistinguishable Grey Scrubbers are the supreme examples: “Through daily proximity to the great slabs of stone, the faces of the Grey Scrubbers had become like slabs themselves.... even the most fantastic, the most ingenious of arrangements could not have tempted into life a design whose component parts were dead” (Peake 19). It is this order of decay that Titus Groan rebels against. It is no surprise then that his yearning for freedom is fired by a woman, his feral half-sister: “She... had taught him, by the least twist of her body in mid-air, that the castle was not all” (Peake 804), thus showing him the possibility of life beyond the walls of his ancient inherited home.

The Women of Gormenghast

While the Gormenghast novels relate an essentially coming-of-age story for its rebellious hero, Titus, it is also equally the story of Fuchsia, his older sister. We meet Fuchsia before we meet Titus, observe her experience the same rebellious desire of escape that we later find in her younger brother, and her story is inextricably linked to the two main male characters in the first two novels— Titus and Steerpike. The latter of these is introduced into the upper echelons of the castle

²¹⁶ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Feminine in Fairytales* (Boston: Shambala, 1993), 30.

²¹⁷ Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, 59.

by her, initiating a series of events that includes the death of her father, her aunts and the two successive Masters of Ritual, Sourdust and Barquentine. Fuchsia's death at the end of *Gormenghast* plays a decisive role in Titus's final decision to leave. It is thus fitting that we begin our analysis of the women of Gormenghast with her.

Fuchsia Groan is the daughter of Sepulchra and Gertrude, the earl and countess of Gormenghast respectively, thus approximating the role of the princess of the castle. Left to her own devices in the charge of a half-competent Nannie, the imaginative child builds for herself the role of the imprisoned princess waiting to be rescued by a tall dark stranger. This fantasy is possibly a means of escaping the neglect and lack of affection that she clearly suffers from. Gertrude is an apathetic mother, and while the melancholic Sepulchra pays enough attention to notice her absence when she's hiding for a fortnight, he fails to exert any effort to actually find her. And when she does resurface, his weary enquiry is limited merely to 'where' she had been hiding, and not why (Peake 38). This very first exchange between father and daughter in the novel sets the tone for how dysfunctional the Groan family truly is and how acutely lonely their daughter might be.

But despite the lack of attention, Fuchsia shows remarkable imaginative and creative potential. Frohvet and Frobet, discussing Gormenghast's artistic expressions, write:

...the functional aesthetics of Gormenghast can be summed up with three brief examples: the obscurant Poet, who was blindly honored once a year and otherwise ignored; the oppressed and oppressive Bright Carvers, whose desperately-wrought works were consigned to the oblivion of Rottcodd's gallery or the cleaner oblivion of fire; and the Professors, a gaggle of intellectually bankrupt *poseurs*. Ironically, the only aesthetically pure vision in the whole place belongs to Fuchsia herself.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ E B Frohvet and E B Frobet. "The Tragedy of Fuchsia Groan," *Peake Studies* 6, no. 1 (1998): 44.

Fuchsia is curious, creative and has a love for the natural world, impulses that fail to find a proper outlet owing to lack of guidance. Her father who could have nurtured her love for reading and writing is incapacitated by his own depression while her mother, despite her tender maternal affection for birds and beasts is incapable of connecting with her own children at a human level, and this is reflected in her relationship with both Fuchsia and Titus. Moreover, Gertrude's disregard towards her daughter is also partly determined by the patriarchal mores that she has internalized, leading to her choice to initiate Titus rather than Fuchsia into the mysteries of nature: "...for it is my son I wish to teach for there is no use in my revealing my secrets to a girl..." (Peake 312).

Nevertheless, we know from Fuchsia's memories of the few walks that her mother had taken her on in the past. During these walks "she had envied her huge mother when the wild birds came to her at her long, shrill, sweet whistle and settled upon her head and arms and shoulders..." (Peake 214)— a skill that she would have liked to learn but wasn't taught. An abiding image from Fuchsia's reminiscences is her mother silently leading her into a cave to take shelter against the rain (Peake 215), a scene that evokes the mystery of initiation into the rites of a Paleolithic Venus.

Fuchsia also has her own 'cave', her secret room which as a private, sacred space allows her the chance at spiritual communion, and also highlights her inner divinity. Yet the machinations of Fate or the inevitability of Gormenghast sends the outsider, Steerpike to that sanctum, thereby defiling it forever. In fact, Steerpike intrudes both her secret attic and her mother's cave, manipulating both opportunities to further his own designs. Not only her private mystery, but Fuchsia's instinctual life is also taken away from her. This is achieved firstly by the madness and consequent death of her father, which forces her to abandon her private fantasies and dreams of escape in order to become a responsible daughter and sister. The duty of Gormenghast thus

overwhelms the imagination of the individual. Secondly, her instinctual life is also destroyed by the influence of Steerpike who having invaded her secret attic, gradually draws her away from herself by projecting himself as smarter and superior to her, thus manipulating her romantic inclinations. Steerpike's bewitchment of Fuchsia against her own better, instinctive judgement parallels the bewitchment of the princess by the troll in the fairytale about the Princess's worn out dancing shoes, suggesting an imbalance in the 'kingdom' of Gormenghast itself. Marie-Louise von Franz interprets the problem in this story to be the imprisonment of the feminine by the shadow or the destructive animus.²¹⁹ The problem is healed by the hero who kills the troll and reanimates the three dead kingdoms with his blood, thus reuniting a fragmented consciousness. Thus what Gormenghast requires is the integration of its splintered layers, the reanimation of its forests of gold, silver and diamond as in the fairytale. Significantly, like her mother, Fuchsia has an instinctual connection to plant life, revealed in her tendency to fill her pockets with pebbles and lichen to the eternal exasperation of the hapless Nannie Slagg.

Sadly, despite such potential, Fuchsia fails to live up to those impulses. The fate of her creative endeavours is thus hinted at in the "great writhing root" (Peake 63) serving as centerpiece at her attic altar. Despite being "polished to a rare gloss" (Peake 63), this prized possession is as dead as the innumerably branched, magnificently painted but nevertheless dead root taking up an entire room in her aunts' apartment. The very nature of Gormenghast seems to have a quality that stifles the lives of its daughters. Thus, despite her own intuitive potential, and despite initially not liking Steerpike and despite all the signs she receives, Fuchsia allows herself to be led away from her mysteries, to be manipulated into mistrusting her own judgments and intelligence.

²¹⁹ Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 52.

Fuchsia's bewitchment is not so much owing to Steerpike's qualities as it is to what she thinks he represents. This is an image that is carefully and cunningly crafted by Steerpike who is skilled at reading people's vulnerabilities and using them for his own benefit. Tolkien's Éowyn, princess of Rohan, similarly imprisoned in her own house falls in love with the idea of Aragorn in whom she sees "a hope of glory and great deeds, and lands far from the fields of Rohan,"²²⁰ just as Fuchsia is enchanted by the adventure of Steerpike's contrast from her constricting, unchanging castle home. The difference between the two lie in the object of their infatuation. Éowyn is fortunate in that she bestows her initial admiration upon the noble Aragorn who has no ulterior motives in misusing her affection. Moreover, she eventually finds true love in the equally noble and worthy Faramir when her people, the Rohirrim are able to shake off their torpor to go to war. This allows Éowyn the chance to go out into the world and eke out her own role in it. Fuchsia, trapped for life in the changeless Gormenghast has no such luck. Furthermore, Éowyn's disillusionment with Rohan and the House of Eorl is caused by Wormtongue's words, whereas Steerpike is able to charm Fuchsia because all her early sense of resentment towards Gormenghast springs from genuine causes. Rohan can reclaim its greatness because it can recall history while Gormenghast has forgotten the past except for the vestiges of its ritual. In fact, there are no suggestions anywhere in the text that Gormenghast even has any past glory to pride itself upon. Fuchsia's eventual succumbing to despair bears close parallel to Éowyn's predicament: "But who knows what she spoke to the darkness, alone, in the bitter watches of the night, when all her life seemed shrinking, and the walls of her bower closing in about her, a hutch to trammel some wild thing in?"²²¹ But while Éowyn is given a way out of it by her author, Fuchsia is left to die

²²⁰ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 849.

²²¹ Ibid.

unappreciated: “Rich as a dusky orchard, she had never been discovered. Her green boughs had been spread, but no travellers came and rested in their shade nor tasted the sweet fruit” (Peake 760). Her fate thus becomes a metaphor of how the senseless adherence to an expired *weltanschauung* might stifle the creative life-force of a civilization.

In her desperation to escape, Fuchsia makes the mistake of overriding her own judgment and projecting her own impression of the heroic upon Steerpike. Her predicament may be compared to that of the young wife in the Bluebeard story.²²² The heroine of this fairytale is a woman disconnected from herself and her own intrinsic knowledge of the truth, willfully deceiving herself in the pursuit of love. Fuchsia is similarly disconnected, and on a larger, collective scale, so is Gormenghast. The former had seen Steerpike’s gleeful expression on the night of the fire, recognizing the monstrous in him. This causes initial unease in her growing relationship with the young man: “Unable to reconcile the heroism of Steerpike’s rescue with his face as she had seen it beyond the window before she fell, Fuchsia began to treat the youth with less and less assurance” (Peake 261). In her reverie during Titus’s first Breakfast, she seems to be aware of the nature of Steerpike’s cleverness as she compares him to her father: “...not Steerpike no no not him, he is too hard and clever not like you who are more clever but with kindness and not quick with clever words” (Peake 310).

But somehow, Fuchsia chooses to forget this original instinctual knowledge, allowing herself to be seduced by the same cleverness that she had once instinctively disliked, dismissing her distrust in favour of the hard, intellectual evidence of Steerpike having saved them all. In the process, she forgets her own strengths, or the fact that before seeing Steerpike’s face through the

²²² Charles Perrault, *The Complete Fairytales*, trans. Christopher Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 104-114.

window, it was she, Fuchsia, who had reached the window, attempting to break them out of the burning library. Her reaction is similar to Bluebeard's wife: "...the young wife has fooled herself. Initially she felt fearful of Bluebeard. She was wary. However a little pleasure out in the woods causes her to overrule her intuition.... As a result she persuades herself that Bluebeard is not dangerous, but only idiosyncratic and eccentric."²²³

For Fuchsia, trapped as she is in a stagnant, changeless world, Steerpike's youth and irreverent ideas are like an exciting wind of change. She is repeatedly taken over by his 'cleverness', his gift of the gab, his casual cruelty in referring to others which might appear as freeing to someone as burdened by her feelings for other people as Fuchsia is. By "his 'gift of speech' which she found so difficult but "which was for him so simple" (Peake 261), he convinces her of her own stupidity in contrast to his smartness. He charms her to the extent that she grows to become ashamed of the 'untidiness' of her former attic sanctum and her rooms in comparison to his ordered apartments (Peake 678). She overrides her own assessment of Steerpike's evilness with the heroic image of himself that he meticulously constructs for her and this dilemma and the pacifying of it is revealed in the poem she writes about him, trying to convince herself of his heroic qualities (Peake 665).

She forgets to trust her own innate judgment, the spell breaking only in the end when Steerpike reveals how he truly views her by his momentary lapse into anger which causes the mask to slip: "As surely as the change of his voice, as surely as the word '*fool*', this shove in the darkness had woken her to a reality both bitter and galling" (Peake 679). This enables Fuchsia to realize at last "the natural edge of her own intellect" (Peake 682). She walks away, but the overwhelming

²²³ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 43.

weight of guilt and shame is too much for her naturally melancholic nature to bear. And her brother, unlike the soldier brothers of Bluebeard's eighth wife, is too late and too distracted by his own dilemmas to save her.

The trajectory of Fuchsia's life follows the pattern of what Estés calls "brutal loss in fairytales."²²⁴ This begins with the loss of her 'vital life' in the discovery of her sacred space which for her is a numbing, agonizing experience akin to the death of a lover (Peake 119), followed by the burden of having to helplessly watch her father's descent into madness. This she suffers alone, without any comfort from either her mother or her nurse. A few years after her father's death, she loses the nurse who had been her foster mother, however inadequate. She is then forced to shift from her old rooms "of many memories" with a "sense of dire uprooting" (Peake 647) right after Nannie's death, and one can imagine that a sensitive girl like Fuchsia would feel the displacement keenly. All of this together creates a hunger in her soul that Gormenghast cannot fulfill. "To be in the state of *hambre del atma*, a starved soul, is to be made relentlessly hungry. Then a woman burns with a hunger for anything that will make her feel alive again."²²⁵

Fuchsia's judgment is blighted because she is starving for life, and the youthfulness and vigour of Steerpike attracts her simply because he "did not belong to the old, heavy intolerant world of Barquentine: he belonged to the lightness of life" (Peake 265). Thus enticed, she deludes herself into seeing him as heroic even though, deep down, she is aware of his true nature. But even in that captive state, her goddess nature is never completely buried. It is hinted at in her smoldering eyes, suggestive of an inner fire that Steerpike observes with a clinical detachment yet wariness because he can never truly touch it:

²²⁴ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* 218.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 228.

She seemed too much alive— alive in so different a sense from the glittering and icy vitality of [Steerpike]... too much alive in the way that love like an earthquake or some natural and sinless force, is incompatible with a neat and formal world. However quietly she sat back in her chair... she was potentially disruptive. (Peake 678)

Her crimson dress and the ruby stone that Doctor Prunesquallor gifts her hints at her deeply passionate nature, for red is “the colour of vibrant life, dynamic emotion, arousal, *eros* and desire.”²²⁶ Steerpike, clinically ruthless and incapable of emotion, dismisses this as ‘romantic’ (Peake 123), but despite his cunning, he can’t really understand her. Gormenghast’s forgotten worship of the goddess is hinted at in the Daughter’s Dove necklace Fuchsia wears at her brother’s first Breakfast. In the ancient Mediterranean religions, doves were often symbols of feminine fertility and procreation and were associated with mother-goddess figures such as Ishtar, Astarte, Aphrodite and Tanit. Fuchsia’s red dress and black hair makes her in a way a mirror image of her mother, Gertrude with her mass of flaming red hair and her swathes of inky black dress. Both of them recall the “red Goddesses” of earlier times—

...who are deities governing the full spectrum of female transformation— all “red” events— sexuality, birth, and the erotic, and originally part of the three sisters’ archetype of birth, death, and rebirth, as well as part of the rising and dying sun mythos throughout the world.²²⁷

With the mother and daughter as Matron and Maiden, the old nurse as the Hag completes the matriarchal trinity of Gormenghast.

The trouble with Gormenghast is that it has repressed the Goddess, dismissing her as irrational and of inferior intellect. This is reflected in Sepulchrave’s suspicion of Gertrude’s vitality

²²⁶ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 99.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 485.

and Steerpike's disdain of Fuchsia's instinctive inclinations. The arrival of Steerpike thus signals the death of this intuitive life for Fuchsia, thereby pushing her towards the path of destruction. This loss is underscored in the way Fuchsia keeps hitting her head and losing her balance throughout the text— slipping in the rain on the way to the cave with Steerpike, falling from the window in the burning library, fainting at her brother's first breakfast and eventually falling into the waters from her window. While the woman in *Bluebeard* was saved by her brothers, Fuchsia's eventual death is catalyzed in equal measure by her disillusionment in Steerpike as in Titus: "When a woman understands that she has been prey, both in the outer and inner worlds, she can hardly bear it. It strikes at the root of who she is at centre..."²²⁸ Her manner of dying — drowning in water— suggests an overpowering of the consciousness by the unconscious, the dangers of being controlled by the archetype: "She would pretend that she was the sort of person who would not only think of killing herself so that the pain in her heart should be gone forever, but be the kind of person who would know how to do it, and be brave enough" (Peake 761).

In a way Fuchsia suffers the same ailment as her father: "Fuchsia's discovery of his [Steerpike's] true nature causes her to lapse into a state of melancholy— a predisposition for which she inherited from her father."²²⁹ What is even sadder about Fuchsia's fate is the fact that there are adults around her who could have helped her, adults who suspect Steerpike's motivations as well as his influence on Fuchsia early on, yet do nothing about it. Flay, it is true has his hands tied due to his exile, but there are instances in the novels where Prunesquallor is repeatedly suspicious of the nature of the relationship yet does nothing to interfere. He observes Steerpike watching

²²⁸ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 55-6.

²²⁹ G. Peter Winnington, "Fuchsia and Steerpike: Mood and Form," 1110. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake's *The Gormenghast Novels*.

Fuchsia during Titus's Earling (Peake 386), and spends a long time pondering over her poem about heroes with mottled faces (Peake 665), but does not think it necessary to either warn her or to observe Steerpike more carefully. Her mother, Gertrude is similarly ineffectual, although she is quick to mark both Steerpike's suspiciously prompt arrival during the fire at the library and his proximity with her daughter (Peake 291). For a society as bound by codified action as Gormenghast, where the minutest deviations from the norm leads to stringent condemnation, this level of passive inaction in the face of possible criminal conspiracy against that very order is both surprising and indicative of its stagnant, moribund collective psyche. The order of Gormenghast has so far declined that it cannot protect its own creative potential (represented by Fuchsia) from such vicious, malignant manipulation. Says Estés, "As in the animal world, a young girl learns to see the predator via her mother's and father's teaching. Without parents' loving guidance she will certainly be prey early on."²³⁰

In 'Fuchsia and Steerpike: Mood and Form', G. Peter Winnington points out that although Fuchsia's death was planned in the early stages of the story, the manner of her death went through several revisions in the manuscripts. In the early versions, Peake envisioned Steerpike killing Fuchsia. He also considered possibilities such as Fuchsia killing herself after thinking she had killed Steerpike or after discovering she was pregnant. What however remained unchanged through subsequent revisions was Steerpike's involvement in Fuchsia's death, whether direct or indirect. This dark end to the relationship is foreshadowed in the dark, shadowy spaces of their encounters. As Winnington calls it: "an aura of death (that) surrounds their relationship,"²³¹ beginning from their very first meeting in the attic which signals the death of Fuchsia's sacred life.

²³⁰ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 43-4.

²³¹ G. Peter Winnington, "Fuchsia and Steerpike: Mood and Form," 1111.

A parallel of this intrusion of the feminine alter can be seen in the 1932 German film, *The Blue Light*²³² written by Béla Balázs, poet, artist and writer of fairytales. In the film, Junta, the village outcast reviled as the devil's witch finds her secret space of spiritual communion in a cave filled with the beautiful and mysterious blue crystals. But she is driven to death when Vigo, the man she falls in love with leads the villagers to the cave that had been her temple sanctum. While Vigo's intention in sharing Junta's secret is for her to be accepted by society, what he shares with Steerpike is a lack of understanding for the sacred, metaphysical nature of that private space. For both men, this discovery of the cave/attic communion space provides an opportunity for material profit. In the case of Vigo, this impulse is more generous because he wishes to advance the cause of both the woman and the villagers, while for Steerpike, the desire is far more selfish and malicious as he sees in Fuchsia a ladder for personal growth. What is clear enough here is that even though Steerpike does not directly cause Fuchsia's death, he is definitely responsible for killing her inner life, revealed in the general imbalance that she shows especially around him: "Fuchsia is naturally a clumsy girl, and in the presence of Steerpike she seems even to lose her sense of balance."²³³ Throughout the novels, she keeps tripping, fainting and having her head hit, revealing a slackening grip on her consciousness owing to the malevolent influence of Steerpike. As in the fairytale of the twelve pairs of dancing shoes, where the troll bewitches the princess to dance with him every night, Steerpike by seducing Fuchsia gains control of her action and behaviour in detriment to her own wellbeing. Or in other words, owing to the neglect suffered by the feminine principle in the collective consciousness, a negative archetype in the form of Steerpike rises in the collective unconsciousness which seeks to make its own place in the conscious by manipulating the feminine.

²³² *Das Blaue Licht*, 1932.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 1114.

It is important here that Steerpike is the exact opposite of Fuchsia, incapable of wonder or emotion, “an exact imitation” of an artist (Peake 127) without Fuchsia’s imaginative and artistic feelings. Fuchsia craves love and thrives in artistic disorder, Steerpike detests both (Peake 677).

It is significant that in the final draft of *Gormenghast*, not only does Fuchsia die like Shakespeare’s Ophelia, but she dies after her disillusionment in Steerpike is compounded by her discovery of her brother with the Thing. François suggests there is an incestuous element²³⁴ in the relationship between Fuchsia and Titus, a possibility that allows Titus to fit into the patterns of both the prince who kills the troll and marries the princess, and the brother who kills Bluebeard and saves his sister, with one small difference— although Titus manages to kill the troll/Bluebeard represented by Steerpike, he fails to save the princess. Thus the narrative veers closer to yet another pattern— that of Hamlet and Ophelia, for Fuchsia Groan dies as Ophelia did, abandoned by the men in her life and drowned by her disillusionment. Ophelia and Fuchsia are both passive victims in a male-dominated world, the receptacle of Ophelia’s ‘O’ resembling the bell-shaped structure of the fuchsia flower, stressing their function as recipients of male projections. Just as Ophelia ceases to exist with her father dead and her brother and lover abroad, personifying the archetype of the male-dependent ‘nymph,’²³⁵ Fuchsia too dies when abandoned by the men in her life, having identified too closely with the magical anima figure of the mermaid.

The Hamlet pattern is re-emphasized in the name of Titus’s mother, Gertrude. Like the prince of Denmark destined never to rule, the heir of Gormenghast too suffers from an intense yet difficult relationship with his mother, a factor that has seldom been picked on by the critics. Unlike

²³⁴ Pierre François, “Stasis and Rebellion in Gormenghast: Part III — Rebellion (Eros),” *Peake Studies* 11, no.2 (2009): 44.

²³⁵ Matthew A. Fike, *A Jungian Study of Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121.

Shakespeare's Gertrude, Lady Groan's perceived inadequateness however does not stem from an extramarital attachment towards another man who happens to be the father's murderer, but rather through her utter incapacity to form any sort of emotional attachment with any other human being— husband, son or daughter. Nor does she maintain any connection with her own birth family, or a personal confidante. It seems Gertrude is incapable of communication on a human level, and this leaves deep repercussions in the lives of her children.

In a footnote to his essay, titled 'Situating Gormenghast', Ronald Binns remarks that the public image of Peake as a happy family man:

...seems jarringly at odds with the neurotic and disturbed elements in his prose.... Mark Spilka, in *Dickens and Kafka* (London 1963), makes the interesting suggestion that the grotesque, the failure to portray character except in terms of distortion, is a result of a mother-fixation. Oddly enough Peake's outburst of energy in starting *Titus Groan* followed his mother's death in the autumn of 1939.²³⁶

A deep unresolved mother-fixation would not be abnormal in Peake, given what we know about his childhood in a foreign country, brought up mostly by servants while his parents were too busy with their hospital and their patients. Throughout his fiction, the loving mother-figure is almost conspicuous by her absence. The young Hugh Silver in Peake's very first work of fiction is separated from his parents and must take up the onus of guidance and survival on his own, Captain Slaughterboard's parents are dead, the protagonist in the short-story, 'Same Time, Same Place' does not communicate with his parents, the comedy, *The Wit to Woo* has a functioning father but once again no mother and in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* not only is Gertrude an absent mother

²³⁶ Ronald Binns, "Situating Gormenghast," 1068. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake's *The Gormenghast Novels*.

to Fuchsia and Titus, but the latter is abandoned for the second time by Keda who leaves her foster-son to pursue love, and then proceeds to abandon her own daughter who also grows up motherless.

In the *Introduction to Suffocating Mothers*²³⁷, Janet Adelman speaks of the custom of wet-nursing as a second source of maternal deprivation, the first deprivation occurring when the mother refuses to nurse the child herself, and the second when the weaning from the wet-nurse happens. Thus Titus Groan, who experiences both, shows classic mother-fixation in his adult behaviour in his inability to have a stable, functional relationship with any woman in his life. In the third novel, *Titus Alone*, the only actual mother briefly depicted is the scientist's wife who not only doesn't have a relationship with her daughter, Cheeta but also exhibits a vacuous, empty personality.

One of the few exceptions to this pattern of an absent mother in Peake's oeuvre is *The Cave* which depicts a complete family unit of both parents and two brothers but the characters in this play are less individuals and more archetypal representations of the collective social consciousness. Even here, the mother, while caring and affectionate is an ineffectual figure completely dominated by the father and the younger son.

Young children who suffer either the loss or absence of their mothers have been known to grow up into defensive, emotionally detached and self-absorbed adults. While Peake's biographies suggest a different outcome, this certainly is the case with Titus Groan, as it is with Shakespeare's Hamlet. "For most adults, if there was trouble with the mother once but there is no more, there is still a duplicate mother in the psyche who sounds, acts, responds the same as in early childhood."²³⁸

²³⁷ Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, 'Hamlet' to 'The Tempest'* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 5.

²³⁸ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 172.

The mother figure that Peake constructs in the fictional Gormenghast is possibly this internal mother— aloof, absent and apparently indifferent:

Her expression was neither kindly nor unkindly. It was simply absent. She appeared to be unconscious of having a face at all. Her features made no effort to communicate anything... He was fascinated by her but he had no point of contact... She had no communication. (Peake 649)

Gertrude is a formidable character because she is impossible to decipher. Steerpike can gauge the Earl to be a depressed man and anticipate his madness as a consequence of the loss of his books, he can judge Fuchsia by a look at her red dress to be a romantic, dreaming girl of fifteen, but the countess baffles him because she does not fit into any recognizable category of human behaviour. As a mother, she spends no time with her children, forgets their ages and is disinterested even in holding her newborn son, preferring to proffer her attention on her birds and cats instead. Yet she has a forceful personality that can be awakened to great, terrible anger at any perceived threat to that same son with whom she has no point of contact: “And I will crush its life out! I will break it! Not only for Titus’s sake....” (Peake 430).

Sepulchre’s madness is a result of his active, conscious refusal of the instinctual, his deliberate prioritizing of reason and logic at the expense of the emotional and the spiritual. This is physically symbolized in his turning away from the angels in the ceiling of his breakfast hall. Stanley Grossman stresses the importance that spiritual systems had for Jung, stating: “He [Jung] believed that reason stifled the natural forces which nonetheless would seek their revenge one day and try to overwhelm consciousness.”²³⁹ On the other hand, Gertrude is too much a creature of

²³⁹ Stanley Grossman, “C.G. Jung and National Socialism,” in *Jung in Contexts: A reader*, ed. Paul Bishop (London: Routledge, 1999), 103.

unconscious instincts to succeed in interpersonal relationships. Remarking upon Gertrude's avoidance of the room where the baptism ceremony of Titus is held, Sanders points out that:

... the Countess avoids the most pleasant and attractive room in the castle precisely *because* 'there were no shadows in the corners';.... This craving for indistinctness is analogous to the Countess' mental retreat from the world around her, which separates her from husband, daughter and son, and from which she rouses only when Gormenghast's gloomy tradition is threatened.²⁴⁰

Her lack of contact with her family becomes in the larger scheme a lack of contact of the Mother Goddess with the conscious civilization, for the goddess, banished from active life has chosen to recede to the unconscious.

It is impossible to know what Gertrude is thinking because her thoughts do not travel along normative lines, and because she is so deeply attuned to Nature, she doesn't seem to need any human companionship. All the problems that Steerpike is able to create at Gormenghast is due to his understanding of the dysfunctional human relationships plaguing its denizens. Since Gertrude by identifying too closely with the primordial feminine archetype has eschewed her need for human companionship, there is nothing that she lacks and therefore she cannot be understood or manipulated. And yet, these are the same qualities that make her an unavailable mother and wife. Like a sleeping Gaia, or as Prunesquallor views her, "more a legend than a woman" (Peake 430), she nurses injured birds and cats like a Mother Incarnate yet remains indifferent to the human affairs around her unless awakened to extreme anger. She reminds the readers of "...the mother goddesses [who] depict absolutely unreflecting femininity. They simply personify elemental

²⁴⁰ Joseph L. Sanders, "'The Passions in their Clay': Mervyn Peake's Titus Stories," 1076. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake's *The Gormenghast Novels*.

emotional feminine reactions.... Everything poor, lamed, and unhappy was taken on her lap and loved and nursed.”²⁴¹ Even Prunesquallor, whose cultivated sensitivities are generally repulsed by the countess’ earthiness is “affected... strangely” by the sight of her on her knees by a dying fire, surrounded by her white cats, deftly milking a white goat (Peake 430).

Gertrude’s connection with the unconscious is highlighted by her association with cats, a creature of the underworld and with birds which “are symbols of unconscious spiritual contents.”²⁴² As an embodiment of the divine feminine she fascinates Titus, yet, like her husband, Sepulchrave, she too fails to avoid the pitfalls of over-identification with the archetype. Thus as a character, she awes the readers, but remains a difficult character to emotionally connect with, since she doesn’t fulfill any of the customary womanly roles, in contrast to the Tolkien women like Luthien, Galadriel and Arwen— who in spite of their goddess roles also fit into the familiar roles of lovers and mothers. Galadriel is an especially pertinent figure in this discussion, because she is “wise and fearless and fair” and has the potential to become “beautiful and terrible as the Morning and the Night Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning.... beautiful beyond enduring, terrible and worshipful.”²⁴³ But she chooses to tone down her divinity in order to be more relatable and ‘human’ and comforting, and to be the woman who shines her light in the dark when the hero, Frodo is troubled: “I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel.”²⁴⁴

Thus while Sepulchrave fails to connect with his feminine, instinctual side till he’s driven to madness, Gertrude, like her daughter Fuchsia fails to use her intellect to its full measure. Despite

²⁴¹ Franz, *The Feminine in Fairytales*, 25.

²⁴² Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 130.

²⁴³ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 356.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 357.

possessing a powerful brain that notices anomalies and patterns and even senses forebodings of future dangers, she remains latent and inactive, and like Prunesquallor, fails to act adequately in time, leading to further disasters that perhaps could have been avoided.

Gertrude's withdrawal from the conscious world also leads to forgetfulness that affects the life of her son in more private ways than the fortunes of Gormenghast. Right after Titus is born, she instructs Nannie Slagg to bring the child to her when he is six (Peake 45), presumably to begin teaching him the secrets of having an interior life with the birds and flowers and trees. However, this never happens, for when Titus is eight, we find her asking Prunesquallor how old the boy is, admitting that she doesn't see her son (Peake 429). Finally, the promised lesson arrives when Titus is twelve, to the great surprise of the son, but by that time, Titus has already met the Thing and projected his Anima fantasies onto her. On the physical level, all that happens is as Gertrude begins to whistle at birds, the Thing, hidden in her perch begins to respond by imitating her calls. This greatly angers the countess who grips her son "as though she were holding him back from something, as though the wood was hiding something that might hurt him— or draw him away from her" (Peake 651). Dubbing the incident as Gertrude's initiatory lesson on 'the birds and the bees', Winnington offers an interesting interpretation of it:

Here Peake is writing of what happens to every heterosexual adolescent boy: sooner or later he finds a girl who supplants his mother as the primary love of his life. And the mother's initial reaction is ambivalent: she wants her son to be initiated into the world of adult love at the same time as wishing to protect him from possible heartbreak and keep his love for herself²⁴⁵.

²⁴⁵ G. Peter Winnington, *The Voice of the Heart*, 140.

Conversely, the path to individuation requires a separation from the Mother, yet the archetypal pattern dictates that we hold onto the love and security that she represents. This is further complicated in the son where the Mother is also conflated with the Anima. Thus in hero myths across the world, the hero must overcome a monster, thereby overcoming the bonds of the Mother in order to win a kingdom and a princess (the Anima). Failure in this rite of passage means that the Anima is never freed but “remains trapped and inert in the unconscious in the custody of the mother complex.”²⁴⁶

In a way, it makes sense that Titus’s anima- fantasy for the Thing is fated to end so abruptly, for he is never free of the Mother even though he defeats Steerpike, just as Hamlet’s relationship with Ophelia cannot succeed because of the former’s Mother Complex. For the same reason, Fuchsia, Titus’s other Anima, also dies, drowning into the water of the unconscious from where the hero fails to liberate her. The unconscious trauma of rejection by the mother in infancy plays out as adult Mother Complex in *Titus Alone* where he fails to form fulfilling, stable relationships with members of the opposite sex. Thus although Titus superficially frees himself by walking away from Gormenghast, mentally he remains a thrall of Countess Gertrude, and this reflects on his relationship with the women in the City in which he determinedly resists emotional involvement, exhibiting one of the typical effects of the mother-complex in a son: “Don Juanism, [where] he unconsciously seeks his mother in every woman he meets.”²⁴⁷ In fact, his first major relationship is with Juno, a symbol of “quasi-maternal sexuality and refuge”²⁴⁸ who recalls Gertrude not only

²⁴⁶ Anthony Stevens, *Jung: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 76.

²⁴⁷ Jung, *Four Archetypes*, 20.

²⁴⁸ Tanya Gardiner-Scott, “‘A Barrier of Foolery?’: The Depiction of Women in *Titus Alone*,” 1155. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake’s *The Gormenghast Novels*.

by her mother-goddess name but also by her “superb carriage” and “noble proportions” (Peake 849). The relationship ends when he begins to feel suffocated by Juno’s love that does not fulfill the pattern of maternal rejection. His next relationship is with the petite and physically aloof Cheeta, the complete opposite of both Juno and Gertrude in her enormous vitality. While Titus is physically attracted to Cheeta, she disgusts him by her coldness and her fierce need for control. The adult Titus thus displays a pattern where he either runs from an emotionally fulfilling relationship or is physically attracted to the woman who won’t reciprocate his sexual desires. In a paper titled ‘The Psychology of Hamlet’ Eileen Cameron says that

...because of difficulties in their infantile experience with mothering grow up with an unconscious but overpowering fear and hatred of femininity, both in women and in themselves, which they try to repress by certain defense mechanisms, including an obsessive need to idealize or degrade women and to control them.²⁴⁹

We might add here that Titus in his interactions with both Juno and Cheeta exhibits some of the general misogyny and disdain of the feminine that is characteristic of Gormenghast. At the same time, both of these women, like Gertrude and Fuchsia act as jealous or possessive anima in trying to prevent Titus from seeking his destiny by keeping him in their own spheres.

It may be argued that Fuchsia also performs part of the mother function for Titus, fulfilling the archetypal role of Mother-Sister-Anima²⁵⁰ seen in goddess figures such as Isis and Hera. As the Mother-Anima, Fuchsia is equally wary of the Thing as Gertrude, seeing Titus as needing to be saved from her and thus seeking advice from the doctor when she first learns about her brother’s

²⁴⁹ Eileen Cameron, “The Psychology of Hamlet,” *International Journal of Language and Literature* 2, no.3 (2014): 166.

²⁵⁰ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Mumbai: Yogilmpressions, 2017), 92. First published in 1949.

infatuation with his foster-sister. What Gertrude and Fuchsia both fear in the Thing is her ability to draw Titus away from the life of rituals as the Earl of Gormenghast, an ironic situation considering how both of them recognize the oppressive quality of that life at some level. This is especially tragic in Fuchsia, considering her creative potential and her early desire to run away to a different world, a desire which is ultimately sacrificed to the demands of the Gormenghast tradition, reflecting an inevitability where even the ones recognizing the systemic repression cannot conceive of an existence outside the system. Thus Fuchsia gives up her desire for freedom just as another of the mother figures of the novel, the wet-nurse Keda briefly escapes the oppressive social structure of the Bright Carvers only to return and die.

Perhaps more than Gertrude or even Fuchsia, Keda is a more obvious example of patriarchal subjugation. Having been forced to marry against her will and subsequently widowed, she escapes her community to take refuge in the confines of the Gormenghast castle to escape having to marry again. This occurs at a time when she is mourning her recently dead infant son, and she thus seeks the solitude of the self rather than the masculine authority of a lover or a husband. Perhaps she also comes to Gormenghast looking for a release of her frustrated motherhood as well as for feminine solidarity, something unavailable within the jealous petty rivalries of her own community. Thus the very first sentence that she says to Nannie that is not a reply to one of the latter's questions is: "Perhaps I shall see her [Lady Fuchsia]" (Peake 72), yet that never comes to pass, possibly owing to a jealous Nannie Slagg who keeps both women separate for herself alone. At any rate, Keda exhibits an independence of spirit and a capacity of quick decisions that makes her comparable to Gertrude, who displays qualities when she deigns to use them. She chooses of her own accord to leave the Outer Dwellings, because she is too tired to have to choose between her two suitors. She later chooses that she must have love and therefore

returns home again. On return she learns of another husband already chosen for her, and she chooses to make love to her suitor in order to defy the society that would impose its choice on her otherwise. Yet, the irony inherent in her rebellious act is that her escape from an unwanted marriage must be legitimized by submitting herself to another man, so that she cannot be possessed by another she doesn't want. In the rush to save herself from becoming the bride of yet another old husband she does not love, Keda makes a hurried choice between her two lovers without pausing for self-reflection, leading to further tragedy.

Her two lovers, Rantel, who takes without understanding, and Braigon who understands enough to let her choose, are also not allowed to survive as they destroy each other for Keda's love. Keda thus recalls Mary from the second act of *The Cave*, the free-spirited woman branded a witch for choosing love and free thinking over obedience: "The more I love the world and follow what I believe to be true, the more pain I give."²⁵¹ Having already chosen Rantel to escape a socially-dictated marriage, her late realization of her true love for Braigon inevitably challenges the former's patriarchal notions of honour and possession, leading to violence.

Keda's tragic end is sealed from the moment Rantel and Braigon decide to fight over her. In this, both the forceful Rantel and the more understanding Braigon submit to the codes of patriarchy where men must fight to possess the woman irrespective of the latter's choice. As Rantel admits to Keda after challenging his rival to the fateful duel: "I do not understand your love" (Peake 189). Rantel's anger is precipitated by Keda's having chosen him first, thus he views her love for Braigon as a betrayal. Braigon on the other hand allows Rantel to find her first, and is merely happy to find her happy and free, causing Keda to exclaim: "I love the way you have not wept with anger or torn yourself to shreds to find me here. The way you have sat here all by

²⁵¹ Peake, "The Cave," 25.

yourself, oh Braigon, whittling a branch, and waiting, unafraid and understanding everything...” (Peake 188). Both Braigon’s undemanding love, and Keda’s unabashed proclamation of freedom are anomalies in an order where hierarchies and unquestioning compliances are the norm. Keda’s quest for love is thus not meant to succeed. The ultimate challenge that Keda can muster to this inexorable structure is to not play by its rules by opting out altogether of the game. Yet alive, she cannot imagine a life outside this society. Thus although she leaves home for a second time and finds rest and shelter with the brown father, she feels compelled to return to the Bright Carvers with her unborn child, and ultimately seeks freedom in death.

The most destructive cultural conditions for a woman to be born into and to live under are those that insist on obedience without consultation with one’s own soul... those that force a woman to choose between soul and society, those where compassion for others is walled off by economic tiers or caste systems... and where curiosity and creativity are... rewarded only if one is not a woman...²⁵²

A fiercely free spirit trapped in the rigid cage of social conditioning, Keda can find no escape from the iron grips of custom other than death. Her leap from the edge of a cliff thus remains her final defiance against a world that would not let her choose her own life, and her own love. But although a defiant act, one that she supposedly chooses joyfully, the moment of her death, seen through the eyes of Flay evokes a sense of pain and suffering: “...he knew himself to be in the presence of Sorrow... in the figurette was the personification of all pain....” (Peake 349). In spite of the smile that begins to grow at the moment of her death with the knowledge that her people had no longer any hold on her, Keda does turn back once: “for the sake of the child” (Peake 349). In dying and thus severing the ultimate bond between mother and child, she hopes to give her child the release

²⁵² Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 174.

from all the ties that she couldn't free herself from in her own life: "You shall be free. From the beginning you shall be free of me, as I shall be free of you..." (Peake 322). Yet this final choice leaves her daughter an outcast without anybody to love or to be loved by. Estés writes, "It is not uncommon in punitive cultures for women to be torn between being accepted by the ruling class (her village) and loving her child, be it a symbolic child, creative child, or biological child²⁵³." Even before the birth of her daughter, Keda's people had already rejected her spirit, her need for love and selfhood, leading to an 'collapsed' or "ambivalent mother construct in her own psyche", thus sapping her strength to "live it in her own way."²⁵⁴

Keda's inability to lead a fulfilling, happy life both inside and outside of Gormenghast parallels Titus's dissatisfaction both in Gormenghast from where he escapes and in the City, from where he feels almost compelled to return home. In this sense, she is a far more influential mother figure for her foster son as the one who raises the first rebellion by actually breaking away from the Gormenghast order of life, even if that attempt ends in defeat and death.

Keda's suffering finally finds defiant expression in the form of her abandoned daughter, the Thing who receives from her mother only the gift of rootless freedom as an inheritance. In fairytales, the witch is the shadow figure from the outskirts of civilization who becomes a disruptive force for the society that has rejected her. As the witch-child of an outcast mother, the Thing experiences a fourfold rejection from mainstream society: first as the daughter of Keda who broke social taboos and therefore failed to belong, second, as a child suffering maternal abandonment, third, as a child born out of wedlock in a conservative society and finally, as a member of the Outer-dwellers who themselves have been pushed to the outskirts by the

²⁵³ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 173.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

Gormenghast society. That is to say, on the personal level, she is abandoned by a mother who has already been rejected herself, and on the social level, she is ostracized in a community that is already relegated to the outskirts of the sophisticated consciousness of the upper echelons of society. The result of it is that the Thing rejects these rejections in her turn and refuses to belong to any order of civilization. Yet, her stealing from the Bright Carvers, destroying their work, disrupting orderly social behaviour also hints at a deep, unconscious anger at not belonging, at being treated differently as an orphaned child born out of wedlock.

... the Thing's relationship with the culture from which she has been estranged is an iconoclast's, a statue-breaker's, a culturally ambivalent attitude compounding recognition of sacredness and a desire to desecrate what is holy. The Thing retaliates against her fundamentalist society by striking where it hurts most, i.e. at the bright carvings which link the small 'outer' community to the castle's beating heart. This is a form of cultural acknowledgment, albeit destruction-oriented.²⁵⁵

Behind all the hate and anger, what the witch really represents is that particular element in the collective psyche that has been excluded from conscious life and which now therefore seeks through negative means to be accepted and integrated. If Gormenghast represents an over-sophisticated, over-stratified Logos, the Thing represents its very antithesis— absolute instinct, lacking even language, signaling an absolute breakdown of communication with the collective consciousness. As Jung tells us: “Unconsciousness is the primal sin, evil itself, for the Logos.”²⁵⁶

Thus for the Bright Carvers and for Gormenghast society in general, the Thing is almost a demonic entity who evokes an uncanny fear by her very existence. And yet, despite being actively

²⁵⁵ Pierre François, “Stasis and Rebellion in Gormenghast: Part III — Rebellion (Eros),” *Peake Studies* 11, no.2 (2009): 35.

²⁵⁶ Jung, *Four Archetypes*, 33.

shunned and reviled by everyone as an outsider and a threat to social customs, Keda's child does in fact in a twisted way belong to the society that shuns her.

The Thing's primary connection to Gormenghast and to the Bright Carvers is through her mother, Keda. As the latter's daughter, she amplifies the rebellious spirit that Keda had once expressed in defying a society that wanted to design her life for her. The Thing is thus a product of her mother's desire for freedom and love, the two things that Gormenghast society constricts. However, Keda chose to defy the structure from within the structure through legitimate means. She tried to escape her people by accepting the perfectly traditional role of a wet nurse for the Groan heir, and then tried to avoid a forced marriage by making love to another man, thereby submitting to the patriarchal mores. She even tried to leave behind that order altogether by going beyond its borders. Yet, she couldn't escape the starvation of the soul, causing her to return and seek escape in death. Her daughter in contrast is a rebel all the way, refusing to be caged at all. While Keda was tender and caring, the Thing is what Estés calls a 'feral' child: "Feral women of all ages, and especially the young, have a tremendous drive to compensate for long famines and exiles."²⁵⁷ This certainly explains her overwhelming lust to possess the bright carvings, symbolic of all the beauty and creative energy that she and her mother had been denied.

Despite the society's rejection of her, the Thing has a supernatural connection with Titus, her foster-brother and seventy-seventh Earl of Gormenghast. In her, Titus discovers a promise of life beyond Gormenghast:

He had seen something which lived a life of its own: which had no respect for the ancient lords of Gormenghast, for ritual among the footworn flagstones... Something that would no more think of bowing to the seventy-seventh Earl than would a bird or a branch of a tree. (Peake 503)

²⁵⁷Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 214.

Peake here is suggesting that a positive aspiration towards the Anima is necessary for the true realization of the Self, something that is impossible within the fragmented psyche of Gormenghast with its repressed, sleeping feminine principle. Gormenghast lacks the natural, healthy drive towards sex, obvious in the spinsterhood of its daughters, in the emotionless, passionless relationship between Gertrude and Sepulchra and in the absolute lack of opportunities for members of the opposite sexes to interact at all, and this is in keeping with its stultified life. The Thing therefore becomes for Titus a symbol of rebellion, freedom as well as of sexual lust: “Suddenly the slight and floating enigma of the glade had taken on a sex... had woken in him a sensation of excitement that was new to him” (Peake 546).

Tellingly, this realization of the Thing as a girl comes to Titus at the funeral of Nannie Slagg, one of the most possessive yet inadequate mother figures in the novels. The experience marks his initiation into a journey towards an independent identity:

“...she [the Thing] is the outer manifestation of an inner drive in Titus which has both erotico-incestuous and Promethean dimensions. As Titus’s Eros, the Thing materialises the indomitable spirit of rebellion that lies dormant in his psyche until he is about seven years old.”²⁵⁸

Yet despite being a symbol of rebellion, the Thing cannot escape the effect of repression. Keda gives her the gift of freedom, but that freedom comes at the cost of social identity, robbing her of language and consciousness. Thus she can only uncomprehendingly imitate the Countess as the latter whistles to the birds just as she subsequently imitates Gertrude’s cry of warning without understanding the language (Peake 651). This trait of imitation also links her to Irma

²⁵⁸ Pierre François, “Stasis and Rebellion in Gormenghast: Part II — Rebellion (Thanatos),” *Peake Studies* 11, no.1 (2008): 7.

Prunesquallor, another severely repressed woman whom Peake associates with parrots and macaws, birds known for their mimicry. The Thing may represent for Titus a sort of female version of the romanticized ‘noble savage’, but all of it is merely the boy’s own projection, the Thing having regressed to an almost chthonic state of unconsciousness in her associations with nature and inanimate matter, making her incapable of feeling or responding to love. This Titus realizes only when he finally meets her in the cave where he hears her make a sound that bears no relation to any language: “It was a sound, quite solitary and detached. It had no concern with communication. It was inward and curiously pitched” (Peake 734). Even non-verbal communication fails to find its mark: “But no expression crossed the freckled face” (Peake 735).

Although viewed as an outsider, the Thing’s utter unconsciousness merely shows the next stage of regression that is the fate of women in *Gormenghast*, already evident in the starved, divided consciousness of the Groan twins, Cora and Clarice, and even in the formidable and brilliant Gertrude. In fact, the lack of human expressions on the face of the Thing recalls the countess: “Her expression was neither kindly nor unkindly. It was simply absent. She appeared to be unconscious of having a face at all. Her features made no effort to communicate anything” (Peake 649).

Rafanelli mentions that in the early manuscript, the Thing is named ‘Leaf’, “an embodiment of the natural world.”²⁵⁹ This is suggestive of her role in the novels as more of a symbol and less of an individual. The later change to ‘Thing’ is further indicative of her lack of independent agency, rejected as she is both by human community— thus depriving her of the skills to communicate and function in society— as well as by supernatural elements, which manifests in

²⁵⁹ Christiano Rafanelli, “Titus and the Thing in *Gormenghast*,” 1105. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake’s *The Gormenghast Novels*.

her abrupt death by lightning. The irony is that she burns by fire on the Day of the Bright Carvings, thus symbolically becoming a sacrifice in the ceremony that she had tried to disrupt, belonging in the end to the very people who had rejected her.

As a creature frequently described as bird-like, nymph and dryad, the Thing recalls both the countess' affinity for birds and Fuchsia's water-nymph image in death. In fact, relationship between these two sister-anima figures goes deeper, for the stroke of lightning that kills the Thing also marks the beginning of the apocalyptic rain that will eventually drown Fuchsia. Even more striking is the symbolism of their deaths—the Thing dies by fire of lightning and is burnt up while Fuchsia dies by water, highlighting the fire-water, yin-yang motif that runs through the novels. Fuchsia, having tried to repress her instincts is swallowed by the unconscious, the Thing, having regressed too deep into the unconscious is devoured by the fire of consciousness. While Fuchsia is bewitched by Steerpike and dies while trying to act out the role of a heart-broken, romantic girl, the Thing in turn inadvertently bewitches Titus by becoming the object of his childish romance. Their deaths represent the death of Titus's own infantile anima. "In psychological terms one could compare a person in a fairytale who is bewitched to someone in whom one structural entity of the human psyche has been damaged in its functioning and is unable to function normally."²⁶⁰ It is with the death of these two women that Titus is left free to pursue his own destiny.

What is particularly jarring about the Thing's fate is that genre expectations lead us to believe Keda's daughter to be playing a larger role in the narrative. Just as Titus fulfills the role of the miraculous promised child, the Thing too has the mythical connotations of the changeling or the abandoned/lost child. Like the Ugly Duckling, she stands out by her difference, startling all by

²⁶⁰ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Psychological Meaning of Redemption Motifs in Fairytales*, ed. Daryl Sharp (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980) 16.

her alabaster skin (Peake 349). The old man who succours Keda in her illness tells her that the child will come to him when it is ready (Peake 281), a promise that never comes to pass, because the child is never ready. This expectation is built up during Titus's Earling when the author builds up an almost supernatural connection between the foster-siblings. As Titus turned away from Barquentine and Gertrude: "In the arms of the woman by the shore the strange child began to struggle with a strength that she could not understand. It had reached outward from her breast, outward, over the lake..." towards Titus on the raft who tears off his necklace and utters a single cry and is answered by the Thing: "In the absolute stillness it filled the universe— a cry like the single note of a bird" (Peake 389).

Yet this latent potential of a true connection between them is nullified as the Thing is abandoned by society. She becomes solely the male hero's inspiration, without any possibility of having her own story. Because the Thing never learns human language or human behaviour, she is never prepared for her journey of initiation or to travel on the path of integration. Being of almost the same age as Titus, her story is instead supernaturally ended by a bolt of lightning just as Titus's journey is about to begin. This failure of story as one might call it is not simply a statement on the Thing however, but ought to be taken as a commentary on the lost or repressed feminine potential of all of Gormenghast, and of the repressed potential of all its women. Thus the four prominent women in Gormenghast and the outer dwellings— the mother-daughter pairs of Gertrude and Fuchsia and Keda and the Thing seem to exist not for the sake of their own stories, but to advance in various ways the story of Titus. This is especially true for the Thing, but she is not the only female in the novels to be denied her own adventure, for Fuchsia, though far more individualized is similarly deprived of her imaginative life and fated to die an untimely death.

The repression of the feminine is heightened in the characters of the twins, Cora and Clarice Groan, aunts to Titus and Fuchsia and in Irma Prunesquallor, sister to the castle doctor. In many folktales, twins are often endowed with magical powers, their dual nature representative of the wholeness of the psyche. Estés also tells us that in certain “African and Carib communities the symbol of the twins is said to possess... the mystical energy of the soul.”²⁶¹ But the aunts in Gormenghast are drawn as pitiful, ridiculous halfwits, revealing a basic deficiency in health and intellect. This deficiency, when considered along with their brother Sepulchre’s lack of libido and the peculiar eyes of Titus himself might be interpreted as a result of in-breeding due to an obsessive emphasis on the purity of the Groan bloodline— something Peake would be familiar with in relation to the European royal houses. The negative impact of such inward living is psychologically manifested in the limited thought processes of Cora and Clarice which fail to go beyond their jealousies of Gertrude and of each other.

In fact, the linked emotional patterns of the twins and the sudden manic determination that Steerpike manages to whip them into— “...they took no notice, only leaning forward, holding each other’s hands and crying in their dreadful emotionless voices: ‘Burn! Burn! Burn! Burn! Burn!’ until they had exhausted themselves” (Peake 203) — recalls real life instances such as the infamous case of the Papin sisters. The Papins were two French sisters convicted of murdering their employer’s wife and daughter in 1933. According to doctors, the sisters suffered a condition known as *Folie à deux* or ‘Madness of Two’, also known as shared psychosis or paranoid disorder. “This condition occurs when ...a pair becomes isolated from society and the outside world, and leads an intense, inward lifestyle which leads them to become paranoid of everything outside of

²⁶¹ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 116.

their own life.²⁶² Cora and Clarice certainly show milder versions of these symptoms in their obsession with the idea of Gertrude stealing their birds or wanting to kill them and the castle ignoring them, fears that are further fanned by the Shadow/Steerpike. *Folie à deux* is usually a result of childhood abuse and torture. While Peake offers us very little insight into the childhood of these sisters, we do know that their niece suffers enough casual indifference to the extent of often missing meals. In case of the twins, this possible physical starvation takes symbolic form in the half paralysis of their bodies, making them effectively half-persons individually. But although weak and stupid, the twins manage to kick-start a chain of events that lead to a series of disasters, and results not only in the deaths of their brother and eventually their niece but ironically enough also their own.

The twins are basically motivated into action by two factors. The first is their jealousy of Gertrude whom they disdain for not being a Groan and hold responsible for stealing from them both their brother and their birds, birds which were probably never theirs anyway, seeing that their painted tree had always been dead. This jealousy is coupled with a hunger for power, which is fanned by Steerpike for good measure. Secondly, they are enamoured of the charms of the manipulative Steerpike, which is suggestive of the sexual repression they share with Fuchsia and Irma. Their sexual, emotional, intellectual and psychological starvation is made physically evident in their half paralyzed bodies, and they are depicted by the author and viewed by everyone else in the castle as half-wits.

Yet even the twins offer some latent, deeply buried potential. When Steerpike first arrives to manipulate the aunts, he begins by showing an interest in the two things that these women take

²⁶² Jan Siery, "The Papin Sisters — France's Killer Maids," *Survival of the Dad*, April 26, 2018, <https://survivalofthedadblog.wordpress.com/2018/04/17/the-papin-sisters-frances-killer-maids/>.

pride in as the products of their creative energies— their needlework and their Room of Roots (Peake 193-4). Franz points out that a needle is a common symbol in witch work: “A needle makes it possible to join pieces of cloth together, therefore it also signifies connection, Eros joining things that would not hold together otherwise.”²⁶³ The Groan twins, due to their semi-paralytic state are able to use only one hand for their embroidery, yet there is no one to appreciate their painstakingly created aesthetic expressions.

The twins’ second source of pride, the Room of Roots however is also a source of mortification, for although this maze of “a thousand branching, writhing, coiling, intertwining, diverging, converging interlacing limbs” (Peake 196) has been painstakingly painted over a period of three years, it has failed its chief purpose, which is to call the many-coloured birds to nest along its branches. Estés writes of the relationship between trees and women: “Many women are sensitive... the way trees are sensitive to the quality of the air...”²⁶⁴ yet sometimes, the warrior within them is “a tired-out, battle-fatigued soldier who just doesn’t want to hear it anymore, doesn’t want to talk about it, doesn’t want to deal with it. A parched oasis in the psyche rises as a result of this”²⁶⁵ where the “withered trees”²⁶⁶ crave for nourishment.

The intricacy and detailing of the colours suggest that the roots are the twins’ unconscious attempt to create a mandala, just as a desire for the birds, even if consciously fueled by a jealousy of their sister-in-law reveals a buried desire for an internal life, yet what the twins lack is Gertrude’s connection to the earth. Just as the roots which have been uprooted from the soil, Cora and Clarice

²⁶³ Franz, *Archetypal Patterns*, 53.

²⁶⁴ Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 362.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 363.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 362-3.

too are completely disconnected from their unconscious. The result is that instead of the twins together forming a whole, the two together share only half a consciousness, taking turns to think or feel sad or be depressed (Peake 432).

It is easy to dismiss the twins' detachment from the unconscious as a trait of their general foolishness, but one wonders if they had always been so. If we recall the Boy (Titus)'s conversation with Goat and Hyena in *Boy in Darkness* where the former attempts to seduce the beast-men with talks of revenge and golden thrones²⁶⁷ and compare the language Steerpike employs to tempt the twins,²⁶⁸ we notice a parallel not just between Steerpike and Titus but also between the beast-men of *Boy in Darkness* and Cora and Clarice Groan. In the novella Peake suggests that Goat and Hyena were not always the deformed half-men we see them as, but have been corrupted and warped from human to animal forms by the Lamb by affecting a sundering between body and soul. Struck as they are by the malady of forgetfulness, they know of a past in which they were somewhat more complete than the present. Likewise the twins recall a time of relatively lesser isolation when they had numerous servants and when their brother played with them. Like Goat and Hyena, they too had undergone a physical distortion in the form of epileptic fits in their teens which led to permanent paralysis of one half of their bodies. One might surmise therefore that Cora and Clarice too may not always have been the pathetic half-wits as we see them in the novels. Perhaps they too have been somehow diminished by Gormenghast. Their paralysis happened when they were, as they tell their niece, of about Fuchsia's age who is around fifteen at the time of this conversation (Peake 90). Something starved off their right, intellectual side in their puberty, at the brink of womanhood. Prior to that, even the aloof, intellectual Sepulchrave had played with them, but in

²⁶⁷ Peake, *Boy in Darkness*, 88.

²⁶⁸ See page 90 of this work.

their own words: “now he never wants to see us” (Peake 171). Thus we may sense an abandonment from the ruling male principle. This is revealed also in Fuchsia's initial feeling of betrayal at the birth of a brother and later at her brother's brief, rudimentary liaison with the Thing. Thus the twins' jealousy of Gertrude is not simply pettiness but a deep hurt at being neglected that is projected onto the wrong person. Even their hunger for power, their desire to sit at the heads of tables and entertain guests can be interpreted as loneliness, for as Groans they should know by experience that the ritual of Gormenghast allows no scope for the exercise of that kind of power. And it follows therefore that if the daughters of House Groan have been relegated to the sidelines of whatever social life the castle has, it is because the ritual of Gormenghast has little need of them.

Loneliness and sexual repression are traits that the twins share with Irma Prunesquallor, who though not quite as empty-headed as Cora and Clarice is nevertheless a sharp contrast to both the over-enthusiastic wit of her brother, and later to her quiet, sad, silly yet dignified and learned husband. Even though her desperation to find a husband and her obsession with her physical appearance make us laugh, we know that her repression is a consequence of the situation she has been placed in. Although we laugh at her inability to understand the often cruel sarcasm that her clever brother directs towards her, unlike Alfred Prunesquallor, his sister has been given no opportunities by Gormenghast for either intellectual or emotional companionship. Irma does not have a servant cum surrogate mother figure in Nannie Slagg as Fuchsia does, neither does she have any innate affinity with birds or cats like the Countess. Unlike Cora or Clarice, she does not even have a half-wit sister. Consequently, Irma is one of the most damaged amongst the female characters who suffers not only from tremendous sexual repression but also from loneliness. This shows in the hysterical fits she suffers from. Also, among the castle women, Irma is possibly one of the most disconnected from nature, proclaiming her “hate” for it by setting herself as an

opponent to the “vile rain” that destroys her sophisticated boudoir (Peake 758-9). In Jungian terms, she reveals the traits of a pathological negative mother complex, repudiating “all that is obscure, instinctive, ambiguous and unconscious in her own nature.”²⁶⁹ Unlike Gertrude who bestows maternal affection on her birds or Keda who hears a bird singing at her breast when in love, Irma’s primary avian associations are with the imitative and aggressive parrots and the macaws that she wears on her predatory corsages and whose screams she emulates to give vent to her feelings when assured of her conquest of Bellgrove: “she gave vent to the primeval jungle in her veins and screamed like a macaw...” (Peake 577).

Yet, in spite of her limited intellect and her shallowness, Irma Prunesquallor manages to stir a society devoid of courtship rituals into a buzzing ground of rumours and anticipation. It is a testimony to the unbalanced nature of Gormenghast society that Irma’s party where she wears her corsage of a thousand parrots becomes a subject of ridicule mixed fascination amongst the teachers whom she invites. In a world where there is no healthy manner of communication available to men and women, her blatantly transparent attempt to initiate a courtship is both ridiculous and sad. The imbalance is of course heightened by the fact that Irma refuses to invite a single woman to her party in order to make herself the sole centre of attention. The castle liturgy affords no dances or parties, no social life, no purpose, no teleological justification for the observance of rituals, and the male professors lead as much of a sterile life as Irma herself till the latter’s invitation turns their world upside down. The extreme effect of this lopsided consciousness is seen in the comic episode in which an unfortunate teacher named Throd suffers a seizure on viewing her and is later compelled to escape Gormenghast forever out of shame. “He had seen no woman for thirty-seven

²⁶⁹ Jung, *Four Archetypes*, 37.

years. He gulped her through his eyes as at some green oasis the thirst-tormented nomad gulps the wellhead” (Peake 580-1).

Irma’s excessive intellectual and psychological damage is probably heightened as a toll of constant living with the clinical male intellect of her brother. Yet, as we have previously noted, Irma is capable of intellectual perceptions on occasions. Although no match for the doctor’s wit, she is able to provide accurate insights into his character, and on one occasion during Sepulchrave’s illness, it is “only Irma who put her finger on the spot” and makes the terrifying but correct deduction, that “the House of Groan was different” (Peake 320). Her ‘romance’ with Bellgrove quickly dwindles as she manages to see through his mask of strength and assumes the role of the dominating wife, acquiring what Jung in *Four Archetypes* calls a certain “masculine objectivity”²⁷⁰ that is unmoved by Bellgrove’s pleas for tenderness and a “tardily discovered maternal quality”²⁷¹ with which she scolds her husband, his students and his staff.

If the Groan twins are jealous of Gertrude’s so-called power and position, Nannie Slagg, the caretaker of the Groan children is petulantly jealous and needy in her desire to be loved. As the widowed hag, she is part of the feminine triumvirate of Gormenghast along with Fuchsia and Keda/Gertrude as maiden and matron, but in a setting that divests women of their power, she is at best a pitiful parody of the mother goddess. In fact, Peake uses her character to highlight the gaps of memory between the past and the present that characterizes Gormenghast. Nannie Slagg is far more impactful as an idea or a legend after her death than she had ever been as a real person in her life, and her funeral invites veneration not only from the servants but from Gertrude herself (Peake 545). But alive, as the old woman of the trinity, she possesses only a “vacant anatomical ancience”

²⁷⁰ Jung, *Four Archetypes*, 37.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

(Peake 88) that lacks the wisdom to offer guidance to the young hero who has inherited “a fragment from the enormous rock of mankind” (Peake 88). Interestingly, although there are several scenes in the novels depicting the relationship between Fuchsia and Nannie, there is not a single scene in *Gormenghast* that involves Titus speaking to his old nurse, even though he is still ostensibly in her care. Even more tellingly, Peake doesn’t depict Titus’s reaction at her death. We see Fuchsia’s grief at her death, and even Gertrude who had always had little patience with Nannie comes to pay her respects, but there is no sign of grief from Titus, who is instead thrown into a paroxysm of fevered excitement with his discovery of the Thing’s femaleness, and one can almost imagine the peevish voice complaining: “How *could* you? How could you? ... but *you* wouldn’t care, oh no, not though...” (Peake 513). Incidentally, this conversation quoted above is the only instance of Nannie addressing the boy Titus in the text, and it occurs right after Titus returns from his first escapade away from the castle. Even here, however, we are never shown the boy’s response. There is not a single instance in the novel of Titus speaking to Nannie, which indicates a complete absence of even inadequate maternal influence in his conscious life.

Such petulant neediness is the defining trait of Nannie’s relationship with Fuchsia as well. She is often possessive about Fuchsia’s relationships with others. This is most obvious in her preemptive dismissal of Keda’s interest in meeting her, but also evident in her careless criticism of Prunesquallor and Flay, people Fuchsia actually likes. Neither does she understand Fuchsia’s love for nature or her urge for creative expression: “What’s that stone for? What is it *for*, dear? What’s the *use* of it?” (Peake 154) Nannie Slagg thus represents the ‘dry old woman’, or the negative ‘senescent force’ where “something normally vibrant within the psyche” is “starched

flat... [and] distorted.”²⁷² “Rather than mentoring her ward, the old woman will attempt to calcify her.”²⁷³

Fuchsia here is that creative spirit in a woman’s psyche that strives to be freed from the lifeless value system of the collective initiative that the dry woman stands for. When overwhelmed by the senescent force, the wild spirit suffers a chaining to the collective, leading to loss of soul and decay. This loss is evident in the peevishness of Nannie Slagg who “... had been sprightly once. A vivacious pert little creature. Bright as a bird” (Peake 544). Fittingly, Nannie Slagg also embodies the split between the masculine and the feminine in Gormenghast. She had been married once, but her husband died on the day of the wedding. Clearly, integration is impossible in Gormenghast. “Sex as a motive power driving both character and plot is thus entirely absent in the first two Titus books: in its place are the surreal alternatives of ritual and rebellion, malice, envy and revenge.”²⁷⁴

The negation of sex encompasses in a broader scale the negation of all desires and agency. The woman who chooses to defy this, Keda is promptly punished for her transgression with the death of her lovers, and eventually her own suicide. And her daughter who is born an outcast is denied even the repressed understanding of desire: “The physical encounter between Titus and the Thing is sexual only for a moment. It is essentially a confrontation between an adolescent and something neither fully formed nor fully human: the inchoate form of his desires.”²⁷⁵ Thus all the women in Gormenghast suffer repression and neglect in some form, resulting in lives of suffering

²⁷² Estés, *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, 225.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Mason, “Atrophied Sexuality in Gormenghast,” 35.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 36.

and pain, and often in death. Of the repressed women, Irma somewhat manages to etch out her personal destiny by rejecting the instinctual altogether and by adopting a sort of militant, objective attitude, but this feeble barrier of prim and proper domestic sophistication stumbles when the Unconscious attacks in the form of the ‘vile rain water’ (Peake 759), intruding inside her carefully designed home of pastel walls and muted carpets. The only woman who is able to retain her inner power is Gertrude, but even the countess doesn’t go unscathed, because her power comes at the cost of human relationships. As Ann Yeoman says, “She accepts all the physical demands of ritual by divorcing her mind from the human life of the castle.”²⁷⁶

The choices for Titus in this world are limited— the rational philosophy of the Father which might lead to depression, insanity and suicide or the unconscious instinctual life of the Mother: “...the secret is to be able to freeze the outsider completely and then he will be able to live within himself which Sepulchrave does in the wrong way for what use are books to anyone whose days are like a rook’s nest and every twig to duty...” (Peake 312). There is no option of a synthesis between the ‘outside’ and the inner life within the fragmented space of Gormenghast. Thus in choosing to pursue the Thing who belongs to neither realm and who promises a life independent of the castle, Titus is asserting his latent desire to be free of both the Father and the Mother. His “experience finds its psychological explanation in C. G. Jung’s hypothesis that consciousness is heightened as a result of a confrontation of conscious and unconscious psychic contents,”²⁷⁷ generating a third, “transcendent possibility.”²⁷⁸ Later, during the Flood episode, he unconsciously

²⁷⁶ Sanders, ‘The Passions in their Clay’, 1077.

²⁷⁷ Ann Yeoman, “‘Arabesque in Motion’: The Dreamscape of Gormenghast,” *Peake Studies* 4, no. 1 (1994): 8.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

conflates the Thing with another feminine symbol— the boat. The boat as a symbol recurs unobtrusively yet persistently in the novels: “Deep in the chaos of his heart and his imagination—... the Canoe had become, perhaps had already been when he had first sent her skimming beneath him into the freedom of an outer world, the very centre of Gormenghast forest, the Thing itself” (Peake 772).

The Symbol of the Boat

The boat or the ship is a feminine vessel, “often associated...” Franz tells us, “...with the moon and moon goddesses... It facilitates communication, commerce and cultural diffusion.”²⁷⁹ Communication as a quality has dwindled in Gormenghast, yet the boat finds a presence in its ritual. The most important ritual in which it appears is of course that of the earling, during which “Titus is seated on a raft in the midst of the Gormenghast lake like a little Noah on his Ark.”²⁸⁰ One of the other most notable instances of the mention of this symbol in the text, apart from Barquentine making paper boats is the daily traditional observance of the teachers who at the end of every school day turn their long tables upside down and sit within the upturned tops “as though they were boats and were about to oar their way into some fabulous ocean” (Peake 498), while raising their voices in “an obscure chant”, the boredom in their voices clearly visible (Peake 498). In contrast to this is Titus’s expression of creative energy as he carves wooden boats with his penknife and launches them “upon their perilous missions to the isles of blood and spices” (Peake 498), these childish amusements firing his longing “to discover what lay beyond the margins of his realm (Peake 498).” Significantly therefore when Gormenghast’s apocalyptic flood arrives,

²⁷⁹ Franz, *The Cat*, 33.

²⁸⁰ Oliver Plaschka, “Behind Twisted Woods of Thorn: pastoral themes in the Titus books,” *Peake Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 31.

overpowering its ordered regimented life floor by floor, rising upward through its halls and passages, it is the creative community of Bright Carvers that channels its energies into boat-building, signifying a new movement towards communication.

The Flood is a common mythical symbol of renewal across cultures, apocalypse signifying that the old world order has run its' course, and new symbols of consciousness ought to be found. Titus, in the middle of his quest for Steerpike in the water asserts his role as first man as the crags rise out the water to signal the arrival of a new consciousness: "Was he the Earl of Gormenghast? Was he the seventy-seventh? He was the First— a man upon a crag..." (Peake 789). The passage recalls Jung's account of watching the herds of wild animals grazing on the East African plains "in soundless stillness... I felt then as if I were the first man, the first creature, to know that all this is."²⁸¹

In a world of dead symbols, it is not the society but the individual hero who must strive towards this new consciousness by creating the world anew from the primeval state. When we consider the older Flood myths, we are reminded that heroes such as the Biblical Noah²⁸² or Uta-napishti, the 'finder of life' in *Gilgamesh*²⁸³ do not save their cities but are meant to start their life anew somewhere else, just as Titus must leave Gormenghast if he is to embrace this new consciousness. In the Sumerian epic, the god Enlil decrees that "Uta-napishti shall dwell far away, where the rivers flow forth,"²⁸⁴ never to return to his own people. In a Chinese fairytale called 'The

²⁸¹ Jung, *Four Archetypes*, 32.

²⁸² "The Book of Genesis," *The Book of Genesis (The Vatican)*, accessed November 17, 2020, http://www.vatican.va/archive/bible/genesis/documents/bible_genesis_en.html, Chapters 6-9.

²⁸³ Andrew George trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation* (Penguin: London, 2000), Tablet XI, 88-99.

²⁸⁴ George trans., *Gilgamesh*, XI 205, 95.

Great Flood', the disguised god warns the boy hero specifically to save no other human beings.²⁸⁵ When the boy disobeys him out of pity for a drowning man, the latter shows his ingratitude by getting the boy thrown in prison, from where he is released when the raven brings a divine message revealing the truth to the judge. Eventually the hero arrives at a new city where he marries the princess and starts a new life.²⁸⁶ Interestingly, the raven also appears in the Biblical and Sumerian flood stories. Noah sends out a raven²⁸⁷ to search for land before he sends the dove, as does Utnapishti.²⁸⁸ In *Gormenghast*, before the onset of rain, the Thing, an abandoned child, disrupts the ceremony of the Bright Carvings by stealing the carving of a raven which is ironically the bird of 'filial love' in China.²⁸⁹ We are told that she had "watched, with her eyes wide as a child's, the evolution of the wooden raven... pined angrily, impatiently.... For the completion of so pretty a toy" (Peake 713). Her theft causes Titus to follow her, and it is when he finally defies the old order in pursuit of the elusive feminine by escaping from the castle's most important ceremony that the rains begin.

Thus the flood does not necessarily transform Gormenghast so much, aside from disrupting its physical order as it transforms Titus. While on a physical plane the flood waters of Gormenghast becomes the site where Titus overcomes the villainous Steerpike, on a symbolic level, the journey into the dark on his boat gives him a sense of his individuality: "He, Titus... was about to prove his existence" (Peake 793) — and spurs him towards newer excursions. Marie-Louise von Franz

²⁸⁵ Wilhelm, ed., *The Chinese Fairy Book*, trans. Martens, 25.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

²⁸⁷ *Genesis* 8:8.

²⁸⁸ George trans., *Gilgamesh*, XI 154, 94.

²⁸⁹ Wilhelm, ed., *The Chinese Fairy Book*, trans. Martens, 30.

remarks that the boat is, like the plough or the wheel one of the archaic inventions of man with a miraculous quality. It “goes over the water of the unconscious...” and has “...the meaning of something that keeps you afloat and makes it possible for you not to drown in the unconscious.”²⁹⁰ With the aid of the boat, Titus escapes the fate that befalls Steerpike, Fuchsia and Sepulchrave, all of whom succumb to the dictates of the archetypes they identify with.

Gormenghast’s stagnation is heightened by its geographical isolation, surrounded by wastelands in the North, marshes in the South, quicksands and a ‘tideless’²⁹¹ sea to the East, and endless knuckles of rock on the West (Peake 238). The physical decay of Gormenghast is not just limited to its derelict towers and abandoned corridors, but is reflected in the natural world that surrounds it. A boat is an especially potent symbol in such a setting, for it suggests movement. It promises not only to traverse the unconscious but also, through the flow of water, it takes one to unknown places, offering new experiences to a depleted consciousness. In Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, the boats are also one of the gifts from Galadriel to the members of the Fellowship, and throughout the narrative, ships, seagulls and the sea remain persistent symbols of longing for Valinor, that elusive realm of ideal beauty and permanence.

It is no surprise then that in the third novel, *Titus Alone*, Titus arrives at the city, the site of his new adventures by boat, and is washed up by the river onto the shore. This of course is another common fairytale trope: “To be thrown into water is to be handed over to Fate— ... one is confided to the flow of life.”²⁹² The insights he gleans by this journey will be our subject for the following chapter.

²⁹⁰ von Franz, *The Cat*, 34.

²⁹¹ A curious term from Gormenghast’s baptism liturgy (Peake 238), which suggests an absence of the moon.

²⁹² Marie-Louise von Franz, *Individuation in Fairytales* (Boston: Shambala, 1990), 16.

Chapter Four

The Quest for Identity in Titus Alone

Job's eagle skids the thin sky still,
 Her shadow swarms the cold Welsh hill,
 The hawk hangs like an unloos'd bomb
 And fills the circular sky with doom.
 To-day across the meadow
 There runs another shadow
 Cast by a grizzlier bird that swings
 Her body like a scythe, nor beats her wings,
 A bloodless bird, whose mother was a man;
 A painted bird of steel— a skeleton
 That sheers shrill-naked to the screaming bone,
 And bears her sexless beauty to the town.
 O hawk with naked eyes!
 O bloody eagle circling the dark skies!
 Our century has bred a newer beauty,
 The metal bird from the cold factory.²⁹³

At the end of *Gormenghast*, Titus leaves behind his ancestral home in search of a purpose beyond its ancient walls. The third novel, *Titus Alone* thus finds him in a different locale altogether, amidst a new set of characters and new set of laws. This shift from a medieval castle to a futuristic city makes *Titus Alone* seem a very different sort of novel than its predecessors, leading many readers and critics to question its place as a part of the trilogy. We will thus open our discussion in this chapter by examining this apparent difference in tone and style, what it means in terms of the protagonist's narrative progress, whether there is a thematic unity that holds the three novels together or if the novel marks the beginning of a different cycle altogether.

The primary factors that distinguish *Titus Alone* from the previous novels are its setting and its ending. As already stated, in the third novel, Titus moves away from Gormenghast and

²⁹³ Peake, "The Metal Bird" in *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 31.

arrives at a new City. But having arrived there, he longs to return home, and yet, in the end, he chooses to turn away just as he is about to see the castle again. At the end of this novel therefore Titus belongs neither to the City nor to Gormenghast. There is no coronation as in the first novel, and no heroic victory as in the second. He has no home, and no kingdom. We will therefore take a closer look first at the overall pattern and ending of *Titus Alone* to see how different it truly is from the other two novels or if there is an overarching theme that connects all three in a single unified structure.

We shall then shift our focus to the world of *Titus Alone*. The City seems to be an alien locale after the vivid and immersive experience of Gormenghast, but it is also, for the reader, a more recognizable setting and a rather familiar one if one considers twentieth century literature. We will therefore look at Peake's novel in comparison with Modern literature with Titus as a modern hero, his quest for identity and the mythic nature of his journey. We shall try to establish if this third novel too, like its predecessors employs a mythic pattern, concluding the chapter with an examination of the ambiguous ending of Titus's journey at the close of the third novel.

Departure from Gormenghast

One of the primary observations for a reader moving from *Gormenghast* to *Titus Alone* is the obvious difference between the two worlds of these novels. Throughout the progress of the first two novels, the readers have followed Steerpike's rise to power, Titus's drive for freedom and the various multifarious goals of a myriad array of characters that they had grown familiar with within the ancient stones of Gormenghast. *Titus Alone* takes us to a locale that is as new to us as it is to the protagonist. In a letter dated 29th July, 1958, from Maurice Temple Smith, original editor of *Titus Alone* to Peake, the former suggests that the science fiction elements in the third novel were of somewhat lesser imaginative quality than the myth of Gormenghast: "...the direct allegory of

the scientist and his death ray belongs to a lower level of imagination than the myth of Titus and Gormenghast...²⁹⁴

This apparent tonal difference between the third *Titus* novel with its two predecessors is what has sometimes led critics to ignore *Titus Alone* altogether in their analysis of the trilogy, citing the lack of thematic unity. Mervyn Peake was already beginning to succumb to his illness at the time of the writing of this novel, and this biographical fact is often used to justify its exclusion from serious discussions of its thematically coherent place in the journey of Titus Groan. Colin Greenland speaks of encountering people who are enthusiastic about *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* but have never completed reading *Titus Alone*, a trait he claims is peculiar only to Peake amongst readers of fantasy and science fiction.²⁹⁵ Nobody who admires *The Fellowship of the Ring* or *The Two Towers* for instance would admit to not reading *The Return of the King*. Not just general readers, but critics also often display this exclusionary attitude. In her paper comparing Lewis Carroll's *Wonderland* to *Gormenghast*,²⁹⁶ Isabelle Guillaume refuses to consider *Titus Alone* in her discussion, declaring the novel to be not the concluding part of a trilogy but as the beginning of a second diptych that was never completed²⁹⁷ and therefore, according to her, part of a separate cycle than the first two novels.

²⁹⁴ Quoted in G. Peter Winnington, "On the Editing of *Titus Alone*," *Peake Studies* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1990): 20.

²⁹⁵ Colin Greenland, "Beowulf to Kafka: Mervyn Peake's *Titus Alone*," 1142. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake's *The Gormenghast Novels*.

²⁹⁶ Isabelle Licari-Guillaume, "Making Sense in Isolation: From *Wonderland* to *Gormenghast*," *Leaves, CLIMAS -Université Bordeaux-Montaigne* 4 (2017): 117.

²⁹⁷ This is technically true, since Peake did initially plan to write a cycle of Titus Groan novels & even left early notes for a fourth one.

As is apparent from Guillaume's view, one of the reasons why it is difficult to analyze *Titus Alone* along with *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* is its apparent lack of a satisfactory closure. Steven Swann Jones posits that fairytales must include "fantasy, a quest, a happy ending and an identification with the unambiguous protagonist."²⁹⁸ *Titus Groan* begins with the birth of Titus Groan and the rise of Steerpike and *Gormenghast* ends with the latter's fall, followed by Titus finally acting on his desire to be free of his ancestral home, completing the parallel narrative arcs of the two main characters. The events of the third novel, including the actions of its hero are in comparison rather more ambiguous. Titus arrives in the City, yet after years of longing to be free of Gormenghast now cannot abide its absence. He spends some time traveling aimlessly around this new strange place, finding conflicts and adventures where he comes off as less than heroic. He is often rude, selfish, cold and crass to the people who offer help and affection. Eventually with the help of allies, he does return to his birthplace at the end of the novel, but deliberately turns away before he can see the castle. As far as satisfying narrative expectations is concerned, neither does the hero heal/conquer/rule the new kingdom of the City, nor does he return victorious to the first kingdom which is Gormenghast. Contrast this to the narrative arcs of Tolkien's Bilbo or Frodo Baggins who travel away from home in search of adventure, earn some form of victory and return home to the Shire again, and in case of the latter, also heal the disease affecting both the wider world and the home kingdom. Titus in contrast earns no discernible victories in the third novel, often requiring to be rescued by other characters like Juno, Muzzlehatch and Anchor. Instead of discovering his own latent heroic qualities like a Frodo or a Bilbo, he seems to have lost whatever heroism he had discovered at the end of *Gormenghast* when he defeated Steerpike.

²⁹⁸ Steven Swann Jones, *The Fairytale: The Magic Mirror of the Imagination* (London: Routledge, 1995), 12-17.

One might argue of course that Frodo Baggins ultimately fails to remain at the Shire, and like Titus Groan, he too is forced to turn away from home. However, Frodo is still afforded the reward of a blessed rest in Valinor amidst other friends and heroes, whereas Titus is unable to sustain any relationship and is left without a given path or destination in sight. The argument that Titus doesn't have his destiny yet because his journey wasn't meant to be completed in a trilogy can offer only a partial explanation to the questions raised by *Titus Alone*. The greater cause of narrative discomfort in the novel arises not simply from the fact of Titus's homelessness at the end but from the character's own discomfort at belonging. While traditional characters like Frodo or Bilbo *grow* as the result of their journeys (in case of two of the other Hobbit heroes in this story, Merry and Pippin, this growth is literal, for they return to the Shire physically taller than they were before), earning the respect of the outer world, Titus shrinks in stature on leaving Gormenghast and is unable to adjust to this change from being the revered earl to someone whose very legitimacy is under question: "He has no passport. He is wanted.... a vagrant; an alien; an undesirable" (Peake 848).

His predicament recalls the experience of the boy Jim in J.G. Ballard's autobiographical account of his time in China after the Japanese occupation when from a pampered white boy used to ordering around the local servants he becomes a persona non grata forced to scavenge for food by sneaking into empty houses. Being used to be treated with a certain awe, he cannot understand why he has suddenly become lower than the lowest: "He knew both the amahs well, and waited for them to reply in their pidgin English. But they ignored him.... Jim tried to step past the amahs, when one reached out and slapped him in the face."²⁹⁹ The slap shocks Jim because it forces him to come to terms with the hatred from those from whom he had only received servitude before.

²⁹⁹ Ballard, *Empire of the Sun*, 68.

Jim has to come to terms with who he is on the streets of Peking without the safety blanket of the white boy's wealth and social standing, the loss of which is symbolized in the separation from his parents. Titus, on the other hand must contend with his own absolute irrelevance in a world where the names Gormenghast or Groan inspire neither reverence nor awe.

In this sense, one might suggest that while the journeys of the hobbits in Tolkien or that of Peake's own Hugh Silver in *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs* are a celebration of the enterprising spirit, pride and victory that would be associated with the heydays of the Empire, the experiences of a Jim or a Titus on the other hand offer a discomfiting look at its decline, a challenge to the colonizer's innate sense of superiority. Thus identity becomes the crucial issue for Titus, for without the weight of Gormenghast's history behind him, he no longer knows who he is. The doors of the past are closed, yet the present remains unclear. At the end of *Empire of the Sun*, Jim returns to his parents and to his former house, but it is no longer the same, and he must prepare to return to England, the unfamiliar homeland he's never seen, just as the boy Mervyn had done in his turn. This sense of loss and alienation permeates Titus's experience of the City, but neither can he return to Gormenghast, his childhood home where has already experienced ennui and an absence of meaning. His experience thus naturally fails to offer the *dénouement* that authors such as Tolkien give to their characters in their works.

However, in this very sense of vaguely dissatisfying incompleteness, *Titus Alone* in fact follows along the patterns set by the first two novels where familiar narrative structures are repeatedly invoked only to remain unfulfilled, the awaited happy ending remaining elusive. In this Peake is following the Modernist tendency to subvert narrative expectations by dismantling neat, closed, coherent structures. A hero arriving at an unfamiliar city/kingdom after a long journey is a familiar fairytale trope. Peake also offers other familiar motifs in the path of Titus's journey,

such as help from older figures (in this instance Muzzlehatch and Juno), a perilous journey and a battle with Evil which the hero wins with help from his allies. There is even the familiar sacrifice of the father-figure in the end, with the death of Muzzlehatch at the hands of the helmeaters. Where *Titus Alone* veers away from the established pattern is in its ending with an ambiguous resolution. The fairytale hero who travels to a kingdom far from home generally achieves two goals: firstly, the healing of the kingdom and secondly, union with the anima by marrying the princess, which is generally a consequence of or a reward for the first. These end-goals are met neither at the end of *Gormenghast* or at the end of *Titus Alone*. Muzzlehatch might destroy the evil factory but the innately oppressive political structure of the City is still in place, necessitating the hero's escape while the princess figure (a role filled in the novel by Cheeta, the scientist's daughter) remains hostile till the end.

The name 'Cheeta' is interesting in this context because it suggests a sort of ferocious animality which merges with the underlying question of 'human'-ness and 'animal'-ness that runs through the novel. "You are almost without substance," Titus tells her, "save for the bits you call your body" (Peake 964). This recalls the Lamb from *Boy in Darkness*— an embodied intellect without blood or substance, highlighting the total absence of the Eros principle. Cheeta as the anima figure of the City thus heightens the absolute negation of the Eros by the Logos. In fact, crude as Titus's sexual advances towards Cheeta are, the latter's revulsion of all things remotely physical — to the point where she feels sick on being touched (Peake 947) is perhaps also suggestive of a deep-seated divorce from her own sexuality and femininity that is rather telling on the psychic health of the civilization. This divorce from humanity or sexuality is also highlighted in the creatures Cheeta conjures for the fake Gormenghast she creates for Titus. When Anchor arrives at the Black House with Juno, he is 'chilled' by the 'face' of the pantomime 'Fuchsia': "All

femininity had gone out of it. The features had become merely physical additions to the head. The face had died behind them” (Peake 1006).

Titus and Cheeta in this instance represent opposites— the fault-lines of masculine and feminine in this civilization. The man seeks physical gratification without emotional involvement — a masculine conquest in which the woman remains passive, whereas the woman is splintered from her own nature. This is also the split between body and soul that plagues Gormenghast, highlighted in *Titus Groan* in the opening epigram from Bunyan— a result of a civilization of repressions. We see this in reverse in the relationship between John the Savage and Lenina in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*, with the former viewing sex as sinful and repulsive and the latter failing to comprehend emotional expressions beyond the physical. Instead of being harmonious and complementary equals as in the more conventional pairing of Aragorn and Arwen, Tolkien’s divine masculine and feminine, these men and women of modern dystopian civilizations are so far removed from their own selves that they remain incompatible, rendering any possibility of healing through a divine union ineffective.

The name Cheeta also recalls the feline Egyptian goddesses Sekhmet and Bastet, both often associated with the mother and consort-goddess Isis. Her dressing table carved from a single hunk of granite with its fragrant onyx and porphyry pots and other implements of beauty have all the visual parallels of an altar (Peake 956-7). But this is a goddess who has been sidelined from the currents of life, busy with her posse of admirers while the City is run by the male scientists in the factory.

It might be worth-mentioning here that Cheeta, although superficially pampered, is like Fuchsia Groan a neglected, affection-starved daughter. This would explain her bouts of dissatisfaction with life, despite having “everything that money can buy...” and despite the

advantages that come with being “the scientist’s daughter” (Peake 956), a dissatisfaction that is heightened by the people around her who try to placate her with material gifts instead of offering emotional companionship. This is perhaps partly the reason why she seeks Titus’s friendship and a companionable conversation, but Titus himself also suggests that he is a tool for her to impress her father: “You spend your time with me, showing me off to your father. But why? Why? To shock him and his friends” (Peake 947). What shocks the scientist eventually however is not Cheeta’s grand plan to destroy Titus but the loss of his factory in an explosion caused by Muzzlehatch. At a moment when Cheeta too is terribly distraught, albeit for different reasons, the scientist abandons his daughter in order to retrieve his lost formula. And Cheeta in her part is stripped off all her polish: “Now with her dignity departed forever, she bared her teeth” (Peake 1013). In her effort to forcefully win over something unattainable, to rediscover some semblance of significance in her life, she finds herself utterly defeated and alone. Her final realization is that “there was no love...” for her, and that, in a way similar to Fuchsia, “she was irrevocably alone” (1013).

The ending of *Titus Alone*, once again, thus brings up a similar set of questions as the ending of *Gormenghast*. Just as the Flood didn’t quite transform Gormenghast society, Titus and Muzzlehatch’s coup doesn’t transform the City. This is also quite similar to the pattern of events depicted in the novella, *Boy in Darkness*. Both *Gormenghast* and *Titus Alone* also end in failed anima integration, with Titus leaving a mother figure behind. In other words, there is no discernible victory in the end for Titus that the reader may grasp at or identify with.

The other reason why *Titus Alone* is discomfiting to the readers is the shift from the medieval isolation of *Gormenghast* to the unsettling familiarity of the City, despite its supposed strangeness or novelty for Titus. Unlike Gormenghast, which has a sort of “cosy remoteness ...

the sense of snug security that comes of being in a world that is secret, enclosed and apart, *Titus Alone* enters more risky and uncomfortable territory... [It] finds our hero at large in a place which has an uncomfortable resemblance to our own uneasy world. And like our own world, it seems to be rushing headlong towards self-destruction.”³⁰⁰ This is also one of the reasons why the novels are difficult to categorize, because Peake seems to have shifted from fantasy to science fiction. In the words of John N. Grey, “Too original to belong neatly in any genre... they may have something interesting and subversive to say about what it means to be modern.”³⁰¹

The City is a familiar motif in much of modernist literature. While the technological marvels of the early twentieth century created a euphoric vision of the future in popular parlance, this new order of life, far removed from the known certainties of the accustomed old structures also created a sense of displacement and alienation. Thus the seedy underbelly of the modern metropolis becomes the subject of introspection in High Modernists such as Baudelaire, Eliot and Joyce.

Titus as Ulysses

In fact, Titus Groan’s aimless journeying around the City, desperately seeking some reassuring reminder of home recalls both the Greek Odysseus in his quest for Ithaca as well as, and more pertinently Joyce’s modern take on Homer’s epic.³⁰² This is especially evident in Stephen Dedalus’ and Titus Groan’s relationships with their respective mothers and how it impacts their search for identity. Marylu Hill writes on *Ulysses*:

³⁰⁰ Desmond Mason, “The Green Peake of *Titus Alone*,” *Peake Studies* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1992), 18.

³⁰¹ John N Grey, “The Things They Say,” *Peake Studies* 13, no. 3 (2013), 42.

³⁰² James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Paris: Sylvia Beach, 1922).

At the heart of it [the narrative] is Stephen's relationship with his mother, both the real mother who nurtured him and is now dead, and an imaginary mother who is a product of Stephen's fearful and anxious consciousness.... His selfhood derives simultaneously from the unconditional affirmation which his real mother gave him and from his active struggle against all that the imagined mother stands for— an all-encompassing fertility linked with nature which signals death to Stephen.³⁰³

In *Titus Alone*, since the real mother, the Countess has identified too deeply with the archetype of the Mother Goddess, there is no separation between the real and the imagined mother and the hero's quest for identity is both an active struggle away from Gertrude while also simultaneously seeking the nurture he hasn't received from her. This unresolved mother complex complicates his relationship with Juno, another goddess figure whose maternal, caring instincts are immediately triggered by Titus's lost, homeless air. An interesting point is the physical resemblance between Gertrude and Juno— both women are described in terms of ample and stately physiques. Titus is attracted to Juno and at the same time repulsed by her solicitude as it contradicts his ingrained need to play out the cycle of maternal abandonment, causing him to break free of the commitment. Naturally, the end of his relationship with Juno is immediately followed by a moment of identity crisis: "It was a feeling that in leaving her he had once again to face the problem of his own identity. He was a part of something bigger than himself... He was the leaf but where was the tree? Where was his home?" (Peake 889-90)

Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses* is equally at odds with his mother's Catholicism, Mulligan's skepticism and Haines' Englishness just as Titus is dissatisfied as much with Gormenghast's tradition upheld by the Countess as he is by the City's indifference and Muzzlehatch's brusque animality. Both of them reject their roots and suffer the consequent guilt of that abandonment.

³⁰³ Marylu Hill, "'Amor Matris': Mother and Self in the Telemachiad Episode of *Ulysses*," *Twentieth Century Literature* 39, no. 3 (Autumn, 1993): 329.

Both of them also embody Telemachus' sense of being usurped. Like the prince of Ithaca, Stephen feels usurped from home which is both Ireland and the tower he shares with Mulligan whereas Titus, despite leaving Gormenghast behind, still wants the obeisance due to the seventy-seventh earl.

Throughout the narrative, Peake also employs other subtle Homeric parallels. While Muzzlehatch is more obviously a father/Ulysses figure, his association with animals and his mysterious adventurous past recalls Nestor, the tamer of horses who reminisces about war and women. Titus's interactions with Juno and Cheeta may be paralleled to Odysseus' entanglements with Circe and Calypso while something of the rudderless anxiety of the Aeolus section of Homer's epic is perceived in chapter forty-six of *Titus Alone*. Titus, newly separated from Juno is assailed by an acute identity crisis, which is soon replaced by fear as he finds himself followed by an orb-like drone. He breaks it by flinging his flint stone at it, in the process losing his last physical anchor to Gormenghast (Peake 890). As he tells Muzzlehatch: "And without my flint I am lost... even more lost than I was before" (Peake 892). To escape persecution from the City, Titus, like Odysseus makes a mythic journey to the Underworld when he travels to the Under-River on Muzzlehatch's suggestion. But while Homer's hero had sought advice on the path back home, Titus needs to escape solely because he is an outsider without the right identification, and the Under-River is a safe haven for the undesirables of the State. This section recalls Peake's own experience of the horrors of the Belsen concentration camp in his capacity as a commissioned war artist, a period that Maeve Gilmore in her memoir of her husband refers to as his visit to "the nether land of horror."³⁰⁴ Thus while Titus is like Ulysses, a lost traveller, Peake's approximation of the myth comes across less in specifically delineated parallels and more in the general sense of being

³⁰⁴ Maeve Gilmore, "A World Away," in *Mervyn Peake: Two Lives* (London: Vintage, 2007), 48.

lost and longing for home. This is akin to Modern Man's experience of alienation in a rapidly disintegrating world order, an estrangement born of the conflict between a sensitive, questioning individual and the normative collective mentality.

In this search for selfhood and home, Peake thus conflates both Telemachus and Odysseus in his protagonist, creating a modern hero trying to make sense of a changed universe. However, unlike Stephen Dedalus or Leopold Bloom, or for that matter, Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*,³⁰⁵ Titus isn't an intellectual or an artist, or at least, if *Titus Awakes* is to be considered, he is not yet an artist. Thus unlike Stephen he has no formidable philosophical logic to make up for his lack of heroic abilities. Peake creates an intellectually ordinary man and makes him confront the ennui of the modern world without providing him a 'tradition' to fall back upon. If there is a latent nostalgia for the past in the works of the high modernists, Peake seems to suggest the ineffectiveness of such revisiting in the absolute redundancy of the Gormenghast lore which offers no more purpose or significance than life in the City. Taken as a whole, the trilogy then offers a narrative of a past that offers no sanctuary from a present that is equally deadening. Titus is the modern man who has outgrown the comfort of a secure theological framework, in this case Gormenghast, but neither can he submit unquestioningly to the all-encompassing grand narrative of progress of the modern urban technocratic state. He is yet to discover what he stands for. The figure of Muzzlehatch with its associations with the trickster god archetype, especially in his associations with animals and in the image of him riding a stag stark naked (Peake 825) — an amalgamation of God, human and animal may hint at a latent creative spirit — "Kinship with animality, the savior dimension, moral ambivalence, artistic creativeness— these are the main structural traits which Peake's Muzzlehatch

³⁰⁵ D.H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (London: Duckworth Books, 1913).

shares with the mythological trickster.”³⁰⁶ But Muzzlehatch’s outcast existence and Titus’s wayward nature reveals that this spirit hasn’t yet come to fruition. As the former reminds Titus: “Juno is part of your journey. So am I. Wade on, child. Before you lie the hills, and their reflections” (Peake 893).

Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom are both misfits in the modern world, a common trait of the twentieth century hero, but Peake’s Titus is a misfit in a truer sense, for while he is lost, he doesn’t yet seem to have a vision of the alternative. Nor does he have any sense of being a part of the temporarily degenerated but nevertheless great Western cultural ‘tradition’. The only thing he has, and that he seeks refuge in is the idea of Gormenghast, and Gormenghast itself does not remember its past. Titus’s inability to belong either to the past or to the present also sets Peake apart from the more canonically acknowledged dystopian or science fiction writers such as George Orwell or Aldous Huxley. Unlike Peake, Orwell and Huxley both create futuristic worlds where the attitude towards the cultural tradition of the past becomes a marker of the degeneracy of human society. In Orwell’s *1984*, Shakespeare is censored while in Huxley’s *Brave New World*, the ideas of human emotions, morality and relationships depicted in Shakespeare become a source of incredulous laughter. When John the Savage reads out the passage from *Romeo and Juliet* where the eponymous heroine pleads with her parents to not marry her off to Paris, even the not-so-completely conditioned Helmholtz can’t help breaking out “in an explosion of uncontrollable guffawing... In its smutty absurdity the situation was irresistibly comical.”³⁰⁷ While this is

³⁰⁶ Pierre François, “*Titus Alone*, or the Spirit of the Carnival ‘after the Catastrophe,’” *Peake Studies* 6, no. 3 (1999): 6.

³⁰⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Vintage Digital, 2008), Kindle Book, 2894. First published in 1932.

ominous and pessimistic on one hand, on the other it provides the reassurance of a past cultural grounding that might yet save the world.

In Peake's world, whether in Gormenghast or in the City, literature does not hold any special significance, Sepulchre seeking out the poets of yore only after the fire in the library has destroyed their work, driving the earl to madness. Thus the Poet of Gormenghast ultimately abandons poetry for rhetoric and ritual, while the Poet of the City is merely someone who talks ineffectually and self-indulgently at parties for the urban elites: "The novelty of seeing so distinguished-looking a man behave in a manner so blatant, so self-centred, so withdrawn at one and the same time had intrigued Titus so keenly that he had outlasted at least thirty guests since the poem started" (Peake 39). The truth of life that literature and philosophy are supposed to convey has thus already been lost. The past and present are equally dismal, and there seems to be no hope for a more enlightened future.

Titus Alone as Dystopia

The world wars presented the dark face of science by setting up hitherto unimagined levels of human violence, questioning our assumptions about human morality and inherent superiority as a species. Consequently, the works of a lot of writers during this period— Orwell and Huxley prominent among them— depict an increasing anxiety of a coming dystopia where human beings are stripped of free will and the capacity for independent thought or even human feelings.

This anxiety becomes the driving mood in *Titus Alone*. In the two novels located in the medieval Gormenghast, Peake had already explored the question of humanness and the loss of human individuality in an overtly rigid society. The Grey Scrubbers, physically undistinguishable from the grey walls and floors they spend their entire lifetimes scrubbing, having no identity or existence beyond this role may be the most obvious example of such loss but in effect, the life of

every person in the castle is defined by their role and place in the castle ritual. The difference between Gormenghast and the City is that the former primarily affects submission through faith—Flay and Swelter, whatever their differences nevertheless both believe in the rightness of the Groan Law, as does everyone else except Titus and Steerpike. In the City, the submission is extracted through fear, espionage and technological manipulation—the weapons of the modern police state. This change in approach creates a jarring effect for the readers by replacing the timelessness of Gormenghast with the immediacy of the City with its motor cars, airplanes, factories and scientists. Peake's editor expressed this discomfort in his letter to the author by ascribing the latter to a: "a lower level of imagination."³⁰⁸ At the same time, by refusing to attribute a specific futuristic time stamp upon his City unlike Orwell or Huxley, Peake perhaps creates a more ominously contemporary locale than either of them.

Apart from the death ray and the planes, Maurice Temple Smith, Peake's editor had also suggested cutting out Cheeta's visit to the factory, a scene which ultimately remained in the published version, although we have no way of knowing whether Peake had made any changes to the original version of the scene. In a rather casually harrowing episode, Cheeta visits her father in the factory, and is served there by his servants, all of whom have the same face: "At once she was surrounded by a dozen men in overalls. Their faces were all the same. One of them opened his mouth. The very act was obscene" (Peake 973). A little before this visit, Titus himself comes across these 'men' in the factory: "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" (Peake 944) — an image evocative of TS Eliot in *Preludes*: "One thinks of all the hands/That are raising dingy shades/In a thousand

³⁰⁸ Letter from Maurice Temple Smith dated 29th July, 1958. Quoted in Winnington, "On the Editing of *Titus Alone*," *Peake Studies* 1, no.4 (1990): 20.

furnished rooms.”³⁰⁹ How these men come to be is not told by Peake (or perhaps omitted at the advice of his editor) but it is implied in the text in a vaguely sinister tone — “Thousands of them, and all of them the same, staring like waxworks? What was that stink that crept across the lake? What is it he’s making there?” (Peake 963) Like Huxley’s Bokanovsky group, Peake thus creates an ambiguously dated dystopian scenario where human bodies are stripped of independent thought and spiritual capacities, thus raising the question of what truly constitutes a human being. In *The Undiscovered Self*, Jung writes:

Scientific education is based in the main on statistical truths and abstract knowledge.... [displacing] the individual in favor of anonymous units that pile up into mass formations..... The moral responsibility of the individual is then inevitably replaced by the policy of the State (*raison d'état*).³¹⁰

The interconnection between moral responsibility and intrinsic human evil is one of the primary themes in *Titus Alone*. Nor is Peake’s emphasis on this particular issue limited solely to the premises of the factory, but extends to an overarching commentary on the life of the entire City itself. The airplanes and the drones in this world have a sort of malicious sentient presence. Muzzlehatch treats his car more like an actual human companion than he often treats real people around him and the Helmeteers behave as some sort of weaponized human-machine cyborg. On his first wanderings through the City, when Titus spies on the party of the elites through the glass ceiling, the guests appear to him:

...like a gathering of creatures, of birds and beasts and flowers.... The giraffe-men and the hippopotamus-men. The serpent-ladies and the heron-ladies. The aspens and the oaks: the

³⁰⁹ T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems & Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004).

³¹⁰ C.G. Jung, *The Undiscovered Self* (New York: Signet, 2006), 11-12.

thistles and the ferns- the beetles and the moths- the crocodiles and the parrots: the tigers and the lambs: vultures with pearls around their necks and bison in tails. (Peake 835-36)

This description is very reminiscent of Peake's various drawings of anthropomorphic animals as well as the animal-human characters in his poetry and fiction. We are reminded of Winnington's commentary on Peake's persistent fascination with the human-animal hybrid form, begging the question: "...once the God who set man over animals is no longer there, what is left of man's status?"³¹¹ This is also one of the themes in the novella, *Boy in Darkness* which I discussed in the previous chapter.

In fact, a slightly horrified obsession with variations of the human form divorced from the human mind such as the cyborg or the zombie is a persistent theme in a lot of popular fantasy and science fiction. Mention may be made of the orcs (created out of tortured elves) in Tolkien and the White Walkers in G.R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* series. In the popular British television show, *Doctor Who*, two of the most recurring monster species happen to be the Cybermen and the Daleks— both created from distorted organic life forms, often human bodies and stripped of all human emotions, although the Daleks do retain the feeling of hatred for everything that is not a Dalek— reminiscent of the very abiding human hatred for the 'other'.

While popular culture usually tends to depict these aberrations as monsters with their defeat generating a feel-goodness about the enduring quality of humankind in general, darker dystopian worldviews such as in Huxley or Peake tend to use such creations as a foreboding image of the fate of all of humanity. Both Peake and Huxley, as well as Orwell paint a bleak picture of the 'new world', causing the reader to question the exuberant celebration of modern progress. As John N. Grey says: "The modern world is founded on the belief that it's possible for human beings

³¹¹ Winnington, *The Voice of the Heart*, 80.

to shape a future that's better than anything in the past. If the Gormenghast novels have any continuing theme, it's that this modern belief is an illusion."³¹²

Besides, the divorce between the human body and the human consciousness is not simply a moral question, but also a loaded political one, because it comes with the question of control and enforced conformity. This is perhaps most spelled out in Orwell's *1984* which is predominantly a novel about subservience to the state through fear and conditioning, but the political thrust is certainly present in Huxley's novel where the obedient, unquestioning workforce of an entire factory may be produced from a single Bokanovsky egg. The film-director Satyajit Ray explores similar ideas of conditioning and control in the 1980 film, *Hirok Rajar Deshe*³¹³ while Terry Pratchett does the same with his reinterpretations of the vampire and the elvish myths in the Discworld novels *Carpe Jugulum*³¹⁴ and *Lords and Ladies*³¹⁵ respectively.

In Peake, the circumstances are vaguer, but we do know the City to be a place that demands absolute conformity (hence the relentless persecution of Titus by the Helmeteers) and that its factory produces unthinking, compliant, undifferentiated servants through some sort of horrible experimentation. But the difference with Peake is that while in most dystopian works, some amount of faith is retained in the old, the present state of degeneration having been reached by negating and rejecting the past (the readers' present or immediate past) world order, neither Gormenghast nor the City offers the reassuring comfort of a former Golden Age. Peake's City has forgotten the past too. Titus retains an individual nostalgia of the importance Gormenghast

³¹² Grey, "The Things They Say", 42.

³¹³ *Hirak Rajar Deshe*, 1980.

³¹⁴ Terry Pratchett, *Carpe Jugulum* (London: Transworld, 2008). Kindle edition. First published in 1998.

³¹⁵ Terry Pratchett, *Lords and Ladies* (London: Transworld, 2010). Kindle edition. First published in 1992.

bestowed on him, but after two novels, the reader is very aware that while awe-inspiring, Gormenghast is every bit as stifling and didactic as the City turns out to be.

Peake strips the reader of the comfortable nostalgia of an ideal, model past while simultaneously taking away their pride in the marvelous new world. Thus even though his stories look structurally similar to traditional fairytales, they lack the essential function of the release that a happy ending provides. While discussing the role of Disney's adaptation of Grimm's fairytales in the formation of American childhood, Nicholas Sammond points out: "Disney was represented as interceding between an ideal past and an unrealized ideal future, distilling the best impulses of the past into a digestible form that would reappear as the present corrected in that future."³¹⁶ Thus Maurice Temple Smith's misgivings about the scientist's death ray in *Titus Alone* may not entirely be owing to the fact that "science fiction was a much less respected genre"³¹⁷ at the time, as Winnington rightly points out, but possibly also because of the discomfort generated by Peake's entirely nihilistic, depressing depiction of the present and future.

The motif of the animal-human identity also connects the City to Gormenghast. In Gormenghast, animals were primarily used as symbols of psychological regression, an extreme identification with the archetype in a world where the repressive nature of the conscious reality has made integrated existence an impossibility. The Countess Gertrude maintains only a tenuous link with conscious reality by transferring all her emotional investment into her identification with the Mother/Earth Goddess archetype. This simultaneously makes her emotionally unavailable to her family while protecting her from the sort of depression that her husband or her daughter fall

³¹⁶ Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child 1930-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 366.

³¹⁷ Winnington, "On the Editing of *Titus Alone*," 19.

prey to. By allowing herself this link to her unconscious, she manages to keep a hold on the sanity that deserts the Earl when he loses the intellectual barrier he had built around his unconscious. “If she hadn’t allowed herself to have all these cats, she would have been neurotic. That’s why people are neurotic, ‘cos they’re frightened of going down the streets with fifty cats following them.”³¹⁸

Her husband, Sepulchre collapses into a suicidal identification with the Night Owls when the books, his last resource for communion is taken away from him. Keda’s daughter, The Thing lives a pure animal existence, reflecting the end-result of an absolute repression in a rigidly regimented hierarchical society. On the other hand, Steerpike, who represents and literally rises from the shadow of Gormenghast is more than once referred to as the beast in the novels. His defeat should, in the principle of the story integrate the shadow elements to the collective consciousness, yet, his final submerging into the water suggests a further repression rather than assimilation.

Titus killing Steerpike is thus an incomplete integration, which is why the former is still dissatisfied at the end of the second novel and eventually compelled to leave. Just as the defeat of the Lamb doesn’t heal the inverted wasteland in *Boy in Darkness*, the defeat of the skewbald beast (Steerpike) doesn’t quite heal Gormenghast. For the healing to be complete, Titus must now contend with the beast within, as revealed in his dreams in the City: “There was no movement—save in his dream, where, tumbling from a tower, a skewbald beast fell headlong” (Peake 885). Although he is locked in yet another fight-to-death in *Titus Alone*, the beast he encounters in the dark tunnels of the Under-River, aptly named ‘Veil’, appears as the Shadow creature, revealing the innate monstrosity that is within Titus himself: “For a moment there rushed through Titus’s mind. For a moment he lost his hatred... The man had been born with his bones and his bowels.

³¹⁸ Mervyn Peake, “The Reader Takes Over,” *Mervyn Peake Review* 10 (Spring 1980): 12.

He could not help them” (Peake 917). He is even called a ‘beast’ by Cheeta in moments of extreme rage: “Beast, beast, beast! Go back to your filthy den. Go back to your Gormenghast” (Peake 957), she exclaims when Titus rejects her, and later, when her plan to humiliate him falls through, she says: “I’m glad your neck is bleeding. You beast! Bloody Beast!” (Peake 1013). Both of these instances are moments when Cheeta herself is ironically at her most feral.

Like Cheeta, Veil embodies a sinister emptiness that recalls the Lamb: “It was as though he were faced with a machine: something without a nervous system, heart, kidney, or any other vulnerable organ” (Peake 915) — but he is also, in many ways, similar to Muzzlehatch who slays him. François deals at length on the many anatomical parallels between Muzzlehatch and Veil, suggesting they’re the dual sides of the same coin: “Besides the absence of lips and arachnean mobility, Muzzlehatch has all the devilish attributes of a man created by Hephaestus in the underworld³¹⁹.” Peake employs the same sort of linguistic ‘othering’ for Muzzlehatch and Veil as he had previously done with Titus and Steerpike, gods and monsters mirroring one another.

What is comforting about Gormenghast is that as a more traditional quasi-medieval fantasy setting, it allows the reader to focus on the figure of Steerpike as the single site of evil. This is because the medieval world, as Johnson points out “was based on mutual shadow projection; it thrived on a fortress mentality, armor, walled cities, possession by force, ownership of anything feminine by male prerogative, and city-states in perpetual siege...ruled by patriarchal values that are famous for their one-sidedness.”³²⁰ But this medieval consciousness has become a clearly outmoded way of being even in Gormenghast, which would explain Titus’s dissatisfaction even after defeating Steerpike. But this shadow projection is made complicated by Peake in the City,

³¹⁹ François, “*Titus Alone*, or the Spirit of the Carnival ‘after the Catastrophe’,” 1.

³²⁰ Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*, 31.

where both Muzzlehatch and Titus are outcasts or outsiders themselves, and therefore themselves the site of the projections of the people in the City.

In his letters to Maeve Gilmore from Germany, Peake reveals the difficulty in picking the enemy when they are the exact same as oneself: "... in the main there is an intense feeling of hatred. Eyes are averted— or the stare is insolent. They are now doing what the Dutch, French and other subjugated races did when the Germans were in control."³²¹ This reminds us of Mary in *The Cave* questioning the definition of evil: "How do we know what is evil? What is evil to you is not evil to me,"³²² causing Miles to declare her a heretic for not conforming to the collective norms. Miles, the voice of violent collective authority is a perfect example of what Jung calls "a sort of collective possession ... which rapidly develops in a psychic epidemic."³²³ In the Titus Groan novels, Miles has his equivalents in characters such as Barquentine (who corresponds to the second act, medieval, witch-hunter Miles) and Acreblade (who corresponds to the third act, police state Miles). In *The Cave* Peake charts the gradual splintering of the collective psyche as rituals are divorced from meaning and converted into dogma, leading to increased collective fanaticism and culminating in the utterly nihilistic violence of the modern era in the third or final act of the play where even the sensibilities of the artist, Harry, is ultimately overwhelmed by the dominant ideology. "The mass crushes out the insight and reflection that are still possible with the individual, and this necessarily leads to doctrinaire and authoritarian tyranny..."³²⁴ Like Harry then, Titus is a failed hero in this technocratic locale of the Modern City who often even refuses to take up the

³²¹ Gilmore, "A World Away," 52.

³²² Peake, "The Cave," 16.

³²³ Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, 5.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

hero's mantle, such as when he rejects the leadership offered by his followers from the Under-River or when he fails to empathize with a dying Black Rose after she is rescued from the clutches of her tormentor, Veil. In a world that is bent on repressing the 'goddess', Peake's men all reject and rebel against the feminine— be it Sepulchrave, Barquentine, Miles, Muzzlehatch, and even Harry or Titus. If *Titus Alone* makes the readers uncomfortable, it is because Peake refuses to design a neat world of identifiably opposable good and evil and instead demands that they confront the darkness beneath their own sophisticated consciousness:

Dr. Jung has pointed out that it requires a sophisticated and disciplined society to fight a war as long and complicated as World Wars I and II...primitive people would have tired of their war in a few weeks.... They would not have had a great accumulation of shadow since they live more balanced lives.... the greater the civilization, the more intent it is upon its own destruction.³²⁵

These ideas are as pertinent to the current era of rising mob violence and fanaticism around the world as they were to Peake's own time. In another letter to Maeve, Peake speaks of the trial of a Nazi Party member named Peter Back, and how the latter's lawyer:

...tried to show the background which Back had had— how he had been warped, and how being so self-conscious of his being a cripple he had striven to excel himself as a party man. None of this excuses him, but the lawyer quoted the French phrase 'To know all is to forgive all.' Oh Maeve— it was very tragic— its sadness is more upon me now...³²⁶

No surprises then that Titus repeatedly fails to and even refuses to be the hero in *Titus Alone*, even positively recoiling from the idea of an army of devoted followers that the trio of Crabcalf, Crackbell and Slingshott promises to him (Peake 960-1). While the medieval Gormenghast has outgrown

³²⁵ Johnson, *Owning One's Own Shadow*, 30.

³²⁶ Gilmore, "A World Away," 50.

its rituals, the modern City hasn't really devised a constructive alternative to play out its Shadow, leading to a long-drawn collective repression which finds perfect expression in the soulless humanoid creations of its factory.

Gormenghast conjured up an ancient, feudal world and evil contained itself in the single figure of Steerpike. By contrast, in the unidentified world of *Titus Alone* we get a vision of the future... more urban and contemporary than the temporally and geographically remote society of Gormenghast.³²⁷

In this new locale, evil is far more insidious and entrenched within the very hierarchies of society—the police, the soldiers and the scientists.

What is comforting and reassuring about a traditional fantasy tale is that its world is generally divided by straightforward lines into black and white and the good men can usually restore order by defeating the evil entity. Middle-earth stands for all the cherished western values— courage, nobility, loyalty and fellowship, all its evil stemming from the corrupting influence of Sauron. Once Sauron is defeated, the world is ready for a golden era under the reign of Aragorn. Similarly, the curse of eternal winter in Narnia can be broken by defeating the White Witch. What Peake depicts in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* is radically different in this respect— apart from a set of archaic, inexplicable rules, there are no moral values cherished by Gormenghast society, and the evil it engenders comes from within its own depths, the kitchen. Gormenghast thus literally 'cooks up' its own Shadow. If that wasn't unsettling enough, Peake creates an even more harrowing world in *Titus Alone*, showing us that the death of Steerpike has achieved nothing, and that one cannot banish evil simply by defeating an external enemy. And it does not help that the City with its factory and motor cars and police and courts is harder to dismiss as an imaginary

³²⁷ Binns, "Situating Gormenghast," 1066-7.

place compared to a fantastic castle that nobody can find on a map. It is perhaps no accident that while the castle is given a name, the city is simply ‘The City’ — a generic name for the modern metropolis that could be anywhere and everywhere. Thus Titus’s journey to the City is foregrounded by distant hyena laughter, mocking his endeavor to run from himself:

“And all the while the far hyena laughter.” (Peake 811)

“And then again, and not so far away, came the hyena laughter.” (Peake 812)

The hyena appears prominently in two of Peake’s other works. The first of these is the already-discussed novella, *Boy in Darkness* where the hyena is one of the distorted men bestialized by the Lamb, representing the worst impulses of the human shadow— violence, brutality, greed. In *Noah’s Ark*, a play built on a little boy’s dream of the Biblical ark and its occupants, the hyena appears once again as a part of a corrupt sabotaging trio of the three uninvited animals— the vulture, the fox and the hyena who plan to murder the humans and become the new overlords of the earth. This group of conspirators highlight the futility of the Flood, and man’s failure to absolutely extinguish evil, an evil that stems for man’s own innate lust for mastery and his hatred for others. As the vulture tells the boy: “Because deep down inside you are one of us.”³²⁸

Although one of Peake’s less discussed works, the play offers a rather striking parallel to what transpires at the end of *Gormenghast*. The purpose of the Biblical Flood was to wipe out sin and evil, with only the chosen few making it to the new world. The arrival of the three villains in Peake’s dream-rendition of the myth ensures that evil manages to find a way to the next stage, hidden within us. *Gormenghast* ends in similar fashion in the aftermath of the flood, with its ills superficially defeated in the form of Steerpike, but no real recovery seems to be in sight.

³²⁸ Peake, *Peake’s Progress*, 411.

The flood motif appears as a comic subversion in *Titus Alone*, where in a parody of the Biblical Flood, we see a boy urinate upon a colony of ants: "...in all innocence, and in all ignorance,... it has saturated a phalanx of warrior ants who, little guessing that a cloudburst was imminent, were making their way across difficult country" — (Peake 906). Not only does an innocent act committed in ignorance result in veritable genocide, the image of the minute ants conflated with the act of urination hampering a supposedly great journey also creates an element of parody. In one little innocuous sentence, Peake thus also parodies the grand narrative of the heroic quest in the form of the heroic but ultimately doomed ants. Alice Mills in her essay explores the subject of evil in *Titus Alone* in great detail, using this particular example to point out the potential of evil in every individual.³²⁹

The 'flooding of the ants' isn't Peake's first use of smaller creatures to signify the futility and unpredictability of grand human endeavours. Reminiscent of both Shakespeare and Blake, Peake in these brilliantly vivid little snippets delivers a comic commentary upon the metanarratives of the Western Man's enterprising, exploring spirit and conquest and perhaps the ideologies that drive them. In *Titus Groan*, during the Dark Breakfast, : "Near the margin of this inner rain-fed darkness an ant is swimming for its life, it's strength failing momentarily for there are a merciless two inches of water beneath it" (Peake 318). In *Gormenghast*, Barquentine rubs his shoulder-blades against a wall:

...disturbing in the process a colony of ants which (having just received news from its scouts that the rival colony near the ceiling was on the march and was even now constructing bridges across the plaster crack) was busily preparing its defences... Barquentine had no notion that in easing the itch between his blades he was incapacitating an army." (Peake 525)

³²⁹ Alice Mills, "Holocaust Peake," *Peake Studies* 5, no. iv (April 1998): 39.

In *Boy in Darkness* the boy imagines a mildew patch on the ceiling of his room as an island with seas and harbours as he identifies himself with a fly coursing across the patch like an explorer. Yet it sticks to the coastline, and never ventures across the sea to newer lands, a symbol of Titus's own restrained freedom of movement.³³⁰

The correlation between human and animal is drawn on a larger scale in *Titus Alone* when Muzzlehatch rebukes the camel and the mule for succumbing to their ancient enmity, suggesting that hatred and violence is something intrinsic to living beings by virtue of being alive: "a primordial hankering" (Peake 824) that is our inheritance by default. Muzzlehatch's cages might have kept the beasts under control for a while, but they "broke loose... and *reverted!*" (Peake 824). In Peake's play about Noah's Ark, Noah's boat survives because despite this hankering, Noah and the child dreamer still retain faith in a divine end-goal. In a world where all sense of purpose and all connections to the soul have been lost, the primordial animal nature threatens to take control over the human.

If *Boy in Darkness* explored the question of 'human-ness' through an experiment in regression, *Titus Alone*, the third Gormenghast/Titus Groan novel examines the same theme through a process of dystopian evolution in the scientist's factory where people are transformed into identical, mechanical servants who although retaining the physical appearance of the Homo Sapiens hardly show any signs of being living, thinking humans. The method in this madness is not simply the battering and breaking, the realignment of bones and shriveling of the heart that the Lamb employs³³¹ but a more complete destruction in the form of death, as suggested in the "endless

³³⁰ Peake, *Boy in Darkness*, 24-5.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

impalpable sound” that emanates from the factory that is “likened to the smell of death” (Peake 943) and in the desperate plea of a potential subject of experiment that Cheeta overhears during her visit to the place: “No, no, no!” came the voice, ‘I want to *live*’”(Peake 974).

The scientist’s life-annihilating experiments also result in the destruction of Muzzlehatch’s zoo with all its animals, while the Lamb at least wants to keep his creations alive. Clearly, the scientist lacks even the stunted, twisted appreciation of life that the Lamb has. Peake here is painting a bleak picture of a world that is enamoured of its own purposeless, destructive technology, it’s shiny, sinister, sentient planes and drones and soulless, empty human beings, “where the scientists worked, like drones, to the glory of science and in praise of death” (Peake 936). This is intellect sans heart, the result of an impaired, single-point vision. As Carl Jung had said, “Our intellect has created a new world that dominates nature, and has populated it with monstrous machines³³².”

Also products of this technology are the ‘helmeteers’ a pair of sinister, helmeted soldiers who chase Titus throughout the novel with mechanical, ruthless efficiency. Unlike the animals in the *Boy in Darkness* or the ‘faces’ in the factory, these ‘beings’ are not even given speech, but we are given a hint of their pain when Titus hears a “low and horrible hissing” emanating from them:

It seemed as though a deep-seated anger had at last found vent for itself through the teeth of these identical figures. Their faces showed no sign of excitement. Their bodies were as unhurried as ever. They had control of every muscle. But they could do nothing about the tell-tale hissing which argued so palpably the anger, the ferment and the pain that was twisted up inside them. (Peake 964)

This passage is remarkably similar to the one we referred to earlier in Chapter 2 while discussing the Lamb’s reaction to the Boy. Just as proximity to the Lamb fills the Boy with nausea, the

³³² Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” in *Man and His Symbols* by Carl G. Jung et al., 90.

absolute lack of expression on the Helmeted Men's faces after Muzzlehatch's murder makes Anchor's stomach turn with revulsion, causing him to avert his eyes. Not surprisingly then, the rather underwhelming death of these two 'men' also in a way recall the Lamb. Quite like the white monster, these menacing figures of fear are revealed to have been 'nothing', in a manner of speaking, without their helmets — "...it was only when their helmets fell to the ground that a supernatural strength deserted them, and they were at once overpowered and slain..." (Peake 1015).

Peake's City is a dystopia ruled by fear where people are constantly under watch, the sinister shadow of science keeping tabs on all aberrations of behaviour. Strangely enough, the chief scientist, the man behind all this ominous power is a listless, non-descript figure, "the merest wisp of a man" that Muzzlehatch picks up like an inanimate bundle:

His voice had been utterly empty. His presence was a kind of subtraction. He was nondescript to the point of embarrassment. Only his cranium was positive— a lard-coloured hummock.... humanly speaking, he was a kind of vacuum for all that there was genius in his skull. (Peake 958)

In other words, "the greatest scientist in the world" (Peake 1009) as Peake describes him displays the utter dominance of the Logos principle and the utter negation of the Eros, that is: "...the emotions, feelings, the irrational attachments to this dominant content...a feeling style [that influences] how people relate to one another,"³³³ testified by his dysfunctional family, his casual indifference towards his wife and his lack of an emotional connection with his daughter. The scientist is a perfect microcosmic representation in his technological civilization that has completely repressed the feminine principle of its collective consciousness. Like the failed

³³³ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairytales* (Boulder: Shambala, 1996), 54.

creations of the Lamb, the scientist lacks the vital force, the life-blood or soul that adds the quality of aliveness to an organic body and in expending all his energies in this limited intellectual vision, replacing human relationships with a vacuous intellectual pursuit. Thus when his factory explodes, and he truthfully cries out: “It was all I had; my science, *all* that I had.” — Muzzlehatch’s response is: “And she was a lovely girl, I’m told” (Peake 1013). Like the City, the scientist is also not given a name, thereby highlighting the absence of a life beyond that of his experiments.

This absence of the feminine is also a defining quality of the Lamb’s Wasteland in *Boy in Darkness*, preventing the novella from fitting into any neat category of the traditional fairytale that usually ends in a union of the Logos and the Eros. This lack is highlighted in the Lamb’s bloodlessness,³³⁴ and in the reason behind the death of his creations who had all died due to a lack of some necessity for survival³³⁵ or of an *élan vital*. While the Lamb drains out vitality from his creations, leading to their eventual deaths, the scientist literally rips the life out of living people, turning them into a homogeneous bunch of automatons who merely look human. The Lamb, lacking in humanity himself, does not understand this, while the scientist, by replacing humanity with a formula has made himself “beastly” (Peake 1012). This rupture from the feminine prevents the healing of the Wasteland despite the death of the Lamb, and tellingly, the Lamb’s lair is not only subterranean like the Under-River and ‘the cave’, but also littered with the remnants of human technology. Much like Steerpike’s intrusion into Fuchsia’s attic altar, masculine progress has invaded the sacred feminine womb of creation in this nightmarish fairytale.

The scientist’s endeavour is a similar masculine rejection of the feminine comparable to Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein in that they both take the creation of life- a feminine function,

³³⁴ See Chapter Two of this thesis.

³³⁵ Peake, *Boy in Darkness*, 70.

and distort it into deadness. But Frankenstein's creation is an aberration, and is treated as such despite having a human consciousness, and the tale becomes a cautionary tale for those who would out-step their mortal bounds to play God. In Peake's *City*, distortion has almost been normalized, and in contrast to Frankenstein's secret project, the scientist's factory stands visible as a symbol of power. The distortion of humanity depicted in Peake's works are not merely physical, but psychological—Goat's and Hyena's terrified obeisance to the Lamb is a parody of a rigid religious hierarchy, while the scientist is an authority figure representing a regime that demands strict conformity. Peake's aim in both works is to depict the dangers of a ruptured collective consciousness, resulting in a society where factories wheel out assembly lines of servile, unthinking bodies whose human qualities have been eroded by living on fear. The future of such a world is deadness and ruins: "Once there were islands all-asprout with palms: and coral reefs and sands as white as milk. What is there now but a vast shambles of the heart? Filth, squalor, and a world of little men" (Peake 1012).

This is the crisis of faith that modern man faces in the absence of a higher power, and the modern city acts as the perfect microcosm of that rootless life. Evilness thus becomes a manifestation of the lack of humanness. Or rather, humanity by definition has the potential for evil, which is only kept in check through a fear of or faith in something higher. Steerpike is able to commit evil because he does not believe in the sacredness of the Law of Gormenghast, and Titus, inhabiting the same disbelief must now grapple with his own potential for evil. What is so revolting in the Lamb or the Helmeteers is the naked beastliness and the innate potential for violence that they hold up as a mirror to characters who would rather remain in a state of unknowing. But if Modern Man must become God, then he must also contend with his own demons, for the horrors of Belsen or Auschwitz could not have been actualized without collective

participation. The danger of any ideology, whether religious or political, or even the ideology of science and progress is its capacity to negate individual consciousness in favour of mass-mindedness. As Jung says: “the suggestive parade of State power engenders a collective feeling of security [but]... gives the individual no protection against his inner demonism.”³³⁶

In *Ulysses*, Joyce attempts to navigate an unheroic age by invoking the mythical structure of Homer’s *Odyssey* as Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus make their separate but connected journeys in search of identity and purpose. This thus becomes also the journey of Titus, who on being sundered from Gormenghast feels like a leaf plucked from a tree (Peake 890), yet his lesson is that he cannot return to a place that belongs to a dead-end past. Not only is the Gormenghast he has left behind a “crepuscular myth” (Peake 893) but even the Black House, the site of the imitation conjured by Cheeta is an ancient ruin. In fact, “the mood of unutterable desolation” that surrounds the place, the pair of cats followed by a host of woodland creatures who come to inspect the site, only to be driven away by a flotilla of planes (Peake 984-5) suggest that the Black House is the City’s own forgotten and abandoned Gormenghast.

Gormenghast is the childhood that Titus has outgrown, the Forbidden City whose gates are forever closed to an exiled Emperor, a mysterious, exotic colony of the White Man’s fantasies that now belong to the pages of history. One can dream of it, perhaps regret it’s passing, but there is no going back, just as one cannot recreate a heroic age in the squalor of a modern metropolis. “At the end of *Titus Alone*, he has found a new basis for his identity which is not dependent on Gormenghast”³³⁷— an identity that rejects the power and prestige that comes with being the

³³⁶ Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, 25-6.

³³⁷ Laurence Bristow-Smith, “A Critical Conclusion: The End of *Titus Alone*,” 1153. The essay was published as part of a selection of Critical Assessments (1025-1164) in the 1995 Overlook Press Edition of Mervyn Peake’s *The Gormenghast Novels*.

seventy-seventh Earl. The dangers of clinging to the past is revealed in Titus's fevered delirium: "The owls are on their way from Gormenghast.... The ravenous owls... the owls...the little owls" (Peake 941). A regression to the past could lead Titus down the same path as his father, Sepulchrave went down before him. As the actors of the fake Gormenghast reveal: "He searches for his home but he has never left it, for this is Gormenghast... He thinks that to move about is to change places. He does not realize that he is treading water" (Peake 996). In order to truly come into his own, Titus must free himself of the Gormenghast inside his head by freeing himself of the guilt of abandonment, and heed Muzzlehatch's advice: "Make journeys in your mind. Make journeys on your feet" (Peake 893). As a symbol of the self, Gormenghast is dead and Titus must rediscover it in himself through his journey.

Onward Journey— The Ambiguous Ending of *Titus Alone*

If we consider the entire trilogy as a bildungsroman, Titus Groan's journey becomes one of attaining selfhood, a journey to find out who he is— that can only be undertaken by leaving behind what he has outgrown. Titus, with his visions of otherness is a threat to this conformist world- to both conformist worlds— Gormenghast and the City. While Gormenghast exacts order and conformity, ironically in this new alien urban landscape it becomes the symbol of deviation by virtue of its existence and otherness, realized in the person of Titus.

However, Gormenghast and the City are not so different. Both demand absolute, unquestioning obedience just as both the old Chinese Empire and the new Communist order did in Peake's childhood land. The world hasn't changed, only the white chief of the 'Umzibooboo Kaffirs' has been made to confront his own irrelevance and the loss of his sense of superiority. There is even a hint that the City itself is a colonial power, thus emphasizing its contemporariness and simultaneously its selfishness, for the young Cheeta was once presented with a set of historical

tapestries only because she had been bored: “They were bought for her, thus denuding a small country of its only treasure” (Peake 956). It is the glittering City that creates the horrors of the Under-River— the dark shadow of 20th century civilization reflected in concentration camps. Peake pours his experience of war into creating this nightmare, stripping war of all heroism and romance. And Titus is no saviour in this world, in fact he is barely any better than the rest, and barring that one moment when he attempts to defend the Black Rose in the Under-River, only to be rescued by Muzzlehatch, he isn’t very heroic either. And this is perhaps the most discomfiting part of this novel for the readers— Titus does not win, he merely escapes. That Titus isn’t an admirable, or even a likable hero — not simply weak and cowardly but also petty, vain, arrogant, ungrateful, sexist and crude adds to this sense of discomfort. As the very opposite of a likable or sympathetic protagonist, Peake’s central character becomes the poster-boy for all the hidden fears and insecurities of the White Man in a shifting world in which he is no longer the master.

The White Man finding himself entangled in an identity crisis in a world where he is no longer the centre is a consistent theme in much of twentieth century literature. We can find this in the fantastic world of Tolkien mourning the passing of a golden age or in Lewis’s stance of moral superiority as opposed to the modern day depravity in Narnia or in the intellectual despair to be found in the works of writers such as Eliot or Joyce. In all of these works, whatever be the state of the present reality, the past is always held as a reassuring repository of values, a glorious tradition that is worthy of being recalled. Peake’s deviation from this trend lies in presenting the past— in all its grandeur, for Gormenghast is indeed grand in conception, and show it as essentially meaningless. It is the meaninglessness of the past that drives Titus to the modern day City, and even though the latter fails him in that regard, there is no point in returning to a past that is already obsolete. He left Gormenghast behind because he had wearied of the monotony of the eternal

encampment and eternal ritual (Peake 802) and because he had learned that “the castle was not all” (Peake 804). This is even truer after his experience of the City, although he recognizes that the City also is not for him, because “it leads nowhere” (Peake 947). In two unlike worlds ruled by unquestioned order, Titus has learned to ask the question which moves humanity forward—‘why’? Why must he lead a life of rituals? Why does Cheeta show him off? Why do the drones keep following him? This capacity to question makes him always “hungry to be somewhere else” (Peake 928) where he can find his answers. Roderick Main speaks of— “the emergence of ‘psychological man’,” in modern Western society, “‘a new kind of person who is ‘self-sufficient in relation to the past and to the existing social order and... capable of relating to both without commitment or loyalty because he is equipped with psychological ideas’”³³⁸, someone for whom meaning is to be realized in the personal sphere rather than in his relationship with social institutions that are increasingly failing to “organize the forces of society and personality.”³³⁹ Titus turning away from the expected social paths is thus a marker of the failure of the dominant weltanschauung to provide the answers he seeks.

Returning to the mythic parallels, while Ulysses returned victorious from Troy, Aeneas had to escape from his burning city to find a new home somewhere. Titus sees the fake Gormenghast dismantled and knows that he can no longer return to its ruins. In a way, the hostile anima helps him to sever his ties with his childhood. The annihilation of Gormenghast is hinted at in the almost incoherent opening of the fourth novel, *Titus Awake*, conceived and barely begun by Peake and completed later by Gilmore:

³³⁸ Roderick Main, *The Rupture of Time: Synchronicity and Jung’s Critique of Modern Western Culture* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2004), 118.

³³⁹ Ibid.

Meanwhile the castle rolled. Great walls collapsed, one into another sometimes with a roar of dust, sometimes with no sound.

The colours of the tracts were horrible. The vilest green. The most hideous purple. Here the foul shimmering of rotting fungi— there a tract of books alive with mice. (Peake 1168)³⁴⁰

This is a truth that Titus had already known when he had left his castle home behind. Having it enacted before his eyes helps him finally to accept it.

By all accounts, Peake had never meant to write a trilogy. When Titus turns away from the ringing bells of Gormenghast, he is also in effect refusing to conclude his journey, choosing instead to move further on, on newer paths. The hero's journey is by no means over. If he is indeed a new Aeneas, then his destiny lies further ahead, not in the safety of the mother goddess, for the hero's journey is necessarily a solitary path, nor in returning to the old kingdom, for it is the hero's quest to renew and realign the world. Titus's fate thus lies not in "staggering with a castle on his back" (Peake 980) but in founding a new one— the Gormenghast within himself. When Juno tells Anchor she needs Titus and Muzzlehatch and others she had cared for because she is nothing but her past (Peake 981), she is emphasizing her role as the Mother Archetype whom the Hero must separate from in order to find his Anima. And by rejecting Juno, the mother goddess who would have kept Aeneas/Titus sheltered, Titus finds the strength to also finally break free of Gertrude and find his own destiny. As he tells Anchor in the end: "She [Juno] is all heart" (Peake 1020). She pities and loves Titus, but as the latter realizes— does not believe in him. Titus parachuting off the plane on his own is thus his final breaking free from the Mother Complex, his slaying of the dragon in order to carve out his own path. The words spoken by Cheeta's actors to torment Titus into madness ironically becomes a delayed epiphany:

³⁴⁰ This 'Preadventure' section was written by Peake.

Yet this is our farewell. A farewell from his old self to his new. How splendid! To tear one's throne up by the roots, and fling it to the floor. What was it after all but a symbol? We have too many symbols. We are sick of them. It is a pity about your brain. (Peake 996)

The readers are made uncomfortable by this rejection of both the past and the present, but perhaps the author, and through him, his creation were looking for a new *weltanschauung* in order to heal a deeply schismatic civilization, because the old symbols and belief systems were failing to hold the world together, and the modern world had not devised any new adequate system yet. As Franz says:

... symbols of the Self, collective symbols of the Self, wear out. Religions, convictions, truths, they all age. Everything that has been talked about too much and which has for a while ruled human society is deficient in the sense that it ages. It becomes mechanical, too well-known, a possession of consciousness... That is the inner reason for the renewal of the kingdomouter reasons also contribute to the fact that the kingdom and rulers age, and with that what they stand for, namely a religious truth, which presupposes also a certain political outlook, a certain judicial outlook, certain social customs and prejudices.³⁴¹

Titus Groan opened with the birth of Titus and ended with his coronation. *Gormenghast* focused on the young earl's striving to make himself free of the castle and its laws, ending with him saying goodbye to his friends as he rides out beyond its borders. The third novel, *Titus Alone* becomes a narrative of the hero's struggle for understanding and becoming who he is without the towers of Gormenghast rising behind him. He goes out into the world and discovers that he cannot heal it without healing himself first. Titus may have physically left behind the past, but he still clings on to it to derive his own sense of self. His experience in the City makes him confront his own inadequacies and makes him realize that his identity comes from within himself, and not from a

³⁴¹ Franz, *Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption*, 24-25.

physical location. He is no longer of Gormenghast, but he cannot belong to the City because he needs to rediscover the significance that Gormenghast has lost, and the City has no answer to his questions: “I *must* not take it seriously, this land of yours, this land of factories, this *you*. I have been here long enough to know it is not for me... It leads nowhere” (Peake 946). Titus had become ‘alone’ by rejecting the labels of ‘Gormenghast’ and ‘Groan’ and now the solitary individual within him must ‘awake’ to this new identity.

Margery Hourihan writes how in traditional ‘hero tales’, the conclusive end of the hero’s journey “reaffirm the reader’s preexisting sense of cultural identity, asserting the traditional patriarchal values, the fundamental dualisms which underlie Western culture, as each crisis in the story results in the hero’s victory.”³⁴² She goes on to assert that:

Because readers have experienced similar texts before they know that the hero will triumph and the story will assert the traditional dualisms, and so they have no difficulty in decoding it. For instance, as the reader learns how Jim Hawkins, hidden in the apple barrel on the *Hispaniola*, overhears Silver talking to a companion and realizes they are pirates, he or she experiences a shiver of excitement and wonders what will happen, but never doubts that Jim and his friends will somehow survive and gain the treasure, that the forces of ‘good’ will triumph over the wild irrationality of their adversaries. The same certainty sustains the reader through all the subsequent narrative crises. So far as significance goes they are exact repetitions of each other: Jim and his friends are good and they behave bravely, resourcefully and honourably, while the pirates are bad and behave selfishly, treacherously and less intelligently than the others.

Therefore the good characters will win because it is in the nature of things for them to do so.³⁴³

Fond as Peake was of stories like *Treasure Island*, he recognized— like the artist, Harry in *The Cave* who sculpted a demonic gargoyle for a cathedral— that the problems of the modern world

³⁴² Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero*, 46.

³⁴³ Ibid.

required solutions beyond such a binary vision of good and evil. In a letter to George Lukács in May 1910, Béla Balázs wrote: “Through its form the fairytale symbolizes that the glass mountain at the end of the world does not bring dualism into my world. The fairytale is also here on this side. This feeling of unity could also be the conscience of the new culture.”³⁴⁴ Peake perhaps was looking to create this new kind of story that required a hero who could be the bearer of a unified consciousness, who would be heroic not in the traditional, physical, monster-slaying sense of the term but one capable of introspection and identification of his own inner demons. This is the hero that Titus must now strive to become.

³⁴⁴ Béla Balázs, *The Cloak of Dreams*, trans. Jack Zipes (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2010), 1. Ebook.

Conclusion

To live at all is miracle enough.
The doom of nations is another thing.
Here in my hammering blood-pulse is my proof.

Let every painter paint and poet sing
And all the sons of music ply their trade;
Machines are weaker than a beetle's wing.³⁴⁵ — ('To Live At All Is Miracle Enough',
Peake)

In the first chapter, we established that Peake's unique position as a child of English expats in China, with its attendant psychological, cultural and historical-political connotations and the subsequent return to an unfamiliar homeland contributed to the specific environment of Gormenghast and the alienation later experienced by Titus in the City. Gilbert comments that Peake combines the exotic otherness of the China outside and the Victorian Britishness inside the Tientsin compound to create Gormenghast: "Titus Groan preserves that urge of childhood to tip all experiences into a private world."³⁴⁶ But at the same time, this private world has enough historical and geographical vagueness to attain the timelessness of a dream or of a fairytale, and in fact, in the blurb of the first edition, Peake himself wrote these lines: "The life of Titus Groan. It is, and it is not, a dream."³⁴⁷

This dream-like quality is heightened by the general motif of amnesia and the many gaps in narrative information that pervade this world. Rituals are performed, but nobody remembers

³⁴⁵ Peake, "To Live At All Is Miracle Enough," in *Peake's Progress*, 255.

³⁴⁶ Gilbert, "Mervyn Peake and Memory," 12.

³⁴⁷ Pete Bellotte, "Did You Know?" *Peake Studies* 2, no. 4 (Spring 1992): 23.

their significance. Rottcodd, the curator of the Hall of Bright Carvings spends his days disconnected from and forgotten by the rest of the castle. Characters such as Flay or Gertrude or Steerpike never seem to recall any life or family prior to their arrival at Gormenghast. The novels themselves are replete with references to dreams and dreaming, and characters often describe their own experiences as having a sense of unreality or dream. Viewed in this light, Peake is not simply condensing and coalescing his childhood memories in the imaginary Gormenghast, but also writing out an unconscious mindscape, thus lending the novels an archetypal quality that elevates them from the realm of the individual to the collective experience.

One such well-used archetype is the trope of the lonely child that suggests a lacuna between older, life-affirming values and the current consciousness in which they have lost their significance, requiring a rejuvenation. This is often the starting point of many fairytales. Like Mervyn himself, or like Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island* or Hugh Silver in *The White Chief of the Umzibooboo Kaffirs*, Titus is an abandoned child whom the Past has failed— Gormenghast has failed because the existing Logos and Eros do not work and the child hero must learn to survive in an altered world.

However, we find in the second chapter that Gormenghast is a fairytale where expectations are repeatedly belied, leading to narrative dissatisfaction with the denial of the happily ever after. Although Peake evokes the myth of the diseased kingdom, the narrative repeatedly fails to deliver the expected rejuvenation. Thus the promised child is born, the old ruler is sacrificed, the infant prince is crowned, yet Gormenghast remains stuck in its moribund ways. This dissatisfaction is especially heightened at the end of the second novel, *Gormenghast* when the hero slays the monster, yet still fails to rescue the princess or achieve the harmonious anima-union that is the requisite of most fairytales with a young prince hero. This pattern becomes more urgent in *Titus*

Alone where not only does Titus's relationships with women end in failure, but he himself fails in most instances even to act like the hero. However, if we look back at the first two novels, Titus's refusal to save the City or the poor wretches from the Under-River who follow him does not seem out of place. What Titus has always craved through all his escapades is his own, individual freedom. His goal has never been to save Gormenghast from the tyranny of Barquentine or Steerpike, but to save himself. Steerpike himself as the antagonist, arising from the same deadness of Gormenghast society that Titus strives to free himself from provides the impetus for our hero to act. Titus and Steerpike thus mirror each other in their desire to defy the established order. Even in the novella, *Boy in Darkness*, structured almost like a fairytale, Titus strives to save himself, and succeeds, but his quick thinking and courage do nothing to save the kingdom itself, bringing no rejuvenation or harmonious union with the Anima. Unlike the Pevensies or Aragorn, for instance, Titus isn't out to rescue this kingdom from tyranny or evil, escape being his only motive, which he achieves at the end. The other characteristic that distinguishes the novella from a traditional fairytale is the absolute absence of the feminine in it, a lack which hints at the reason behind its deadness, as well as offering a clue to the real malady of Gormenghast—the repression of the feminine principle. The result of this repression is evident in characters like Fuchsia and the Thing who show early signs of possibilities with their own fairytale associations, only for their stories to be prematurely thwarted by death.

This divorce from the feminine is typified in the solitary, celibate existence of Rottcodd, the curator of the hall of Bright Carvings. Although ritualistically an important part of Gormenghast, Rottcodd takes no part in the castle's life and is characterized by a marked dislike for people in general, and a fearful antipathy for women in particular. Both as a symbol of the Self and as a representation of the Wise Old Man archetype, the curator exemplifies the quality of

forgetfulness that ails the collective consciousness of Gormenghast. The custodian of Gormenghast's spiritual resources, like the rest of that society has been lulled by the monotony of dry ritual into a passive existence. Just as this diminished wise old man is thoroughly disconnected from all human relationships within the castle, so is every other individual within the castle disconnected from everybody else. This is apparent especially in the male-female relationships that are marked by an absolute lack of love or understanding.

Not just an absence, but there is even a general disapproval of emotional connections in Gormenghast. We see this early on, in the relief experienced by Flay when he realizes that the reason he sought out Rottcodd at the beginning of *Titus Groan* is based on logical and not emotional needs (Peake 17). What this aloofness and fear of emotive contact suggests is a disintegration or at least a decline in people's capacity for empathy. The earl's trusted companion is Flay whose own taciturn nature mirrors the former's extreme introversion. The Countess speaks more to birds than to people. Even the doctor who tries to look out for the Groan children has very little understanding of the loneliness of his own sister, or the discomfort of Nanny Slagg whom he enjoys teasing. The most extreme examples of this phenomenon are Steerpike and Barquentine. The former, while incapable of empathizing with anyone, knows how to manipulate others into believing that he does. The latter, having never had anyone to empathize with treats people as cogs in the great wheel of the Gormenghast ritual. This negation of human relationships and the incapacity for empathy is extremely conducive to the rise of fascism. As gentle, kind and unassuming as the idea of empathy may sound, it is actually a radical concept which allows for a different, deeply individual basis of being rather than existing by the rules set down by the authorities. Empathy allows one to look at a non-conformist as something other than an enemy. We might note here that in Orwell's *1984*, O'Brien gloats on the breakdown of relationships under

the Party's rule: "We have cut the links between child and parent, and between man and man, and between man and woman. No one dares trust a wife or a child or a friend any longer. But in the future there will be no wives and no friends."³⁴⁸ In Tolkien, Sauron and Saruman work to spread discord among the people of the West, while Gandalf and Elrond's answer to that is a 'fellowship'. The lack of fellowship is why the Wasteland in *Boy in Darkness* cannot be healed. Peake specifically tells us that even after being released from the Lamb, the men "did not talk to one another: they did not talk to the Boy, nor he to them... they parted without a word."³⁴⁹ And the absence of the feminine principle is why such feelings are stunted, both in this Wasteland and in Gormenghast itself. As O'Brien tells Winston, "There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother... There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life."³⁵⁰ By prioritizing ritual over all else, Gormenghast has achieved this state of being.

The third chapter deals with the negation of the feminine principle in detail, with analyses of social and familial structures, inter-personal relationships and individual characters, both male and female. Not only does the repression of the feminine lead to stultified lives for both men and women, but we find that further narrative patterns are disrupted due to this malaise, affecting all of civilization. Thus familial bonds between husbands and wives (Sepulchrave and Gertrude, Irma and Bellgrove, Barquentine and his wife), brother and sister (the Prunesquallors, Sepulchrave and his sisters), parents and children (the Groans and their children, Barquentine's relationships with

³⁴⁸ George Orwell, *1984* (NP: GoodBook Classics, 2014), 219. Kindle. Originally published in 1949 by Secker & Warburg.

³⁴⁹ Peake, *Boy in Darkness*, 92.

³⁵⁰ Orwell, *1984*, 219-220.

his parents and later with his own son) fail to function in a harmonious manner. In case of Sepulchrave and Barquentine, the lack of healthy emotional outlets affect particularly their official duties within Gormenghast. Sepulchrave is unable to function once his library is destroyed, and Barquentine performs his role as the Master of Ritual with a vehemence bordering on cruelty that can be traced back to the neglect he suffered in his childhood. The complete negation of the Eros principle leads to the rise of its antithesis in the clinically cold Steerpike who insinuates his way up the social ladder of the castle through the gaps left by this emotional repression, finding easy, gullible victims, first in Irma Prunesquallor, followed by the daughters of Gormenghast — Cora, Clarice and Fuchsia.

It might be interesting here to note that many of the women of Gormenghast are intellectually and emotionally stunted— Cora and Clarice Groan, Irma Prunesquallor and Nanny Slagg being examples, while those who are not, such as Fuchsia or Gertrude or Keda have their potential thwarted somehow. Mason describes the looming ‘Tower of Flints’ as a symbol of Gormenghast’s “ossified sexuality”³⁵¹ which results in the female sexual urge being “thwarted by the flaccid weakness of the male sexual urge which has been submerged by ritual or lust for power. Thus it is that Gertrude turns to her cats and birds.”³⁵² Fuchsia is manipulated into distrusting her own intelligence and understanding by Steerpike, Gertrude keeps her sanity within the prison of rituals that is Gormenghast by withdrawing almost completely from everyday human society and Keda, the rebel who defies the norms for the sake of her right to love eventually finds suicide to be the only escape. Her daughter becomes an outcast, labelled as the witch or the demon child, more a receptacle for Titus’s desires than a sexual being in her own right. While she remains free,

³⁵¹ Mason, “Atrophied Sexuality in Gormenghast,” 33.

³⁵² Ibid., 34.

she is denied even the agency of human language as she survives alone in a regressed animal state, extinguishing whatever latent potential she might have had, and her sudden, almost supernatural death only serves to further the male hero's journey.

In this respect, it might be pertinent to speak of the repression of the feminine or the female godhead in Abrahamic religions, especially in Christianity, the dominant weltanschauung of the Western world. The Christian worldview splits the Mother Goddess archetype into two aspects. "The Virgin Mary... is cut off from her shadow side and represents only the light side of the mother image,"³⁵³ a watered down version of the once powerful and terrible mother, while her dark side is projected into free-willed women persecuted as witches. It might be worthwhile here to note the remarkably pagan temperament to be found in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien— his elves and western men all pray to Elbereth, the Queen of the Valar and not to Eru or the One God. Thus in his imaginary world he lets Galadriel retain her potential for darkness, even if she chooses to temper it down to become a more benevolent goddess figure. Consequently, the men of Rohan and Gondor who have little knowledge of her label her as the sinister White Lady or the witch of the golden wood.

In the Gormenghast novels, Gertrude regresses so far into the Goddess archetype that she is almost withdrawn from human society, whereas the Thing, also representing the idea of a nature spirit or sprite regresses into the animal state, and is an outcast who is completely rejected by society. Peake attempts to bridge this gap between these two aspects— the witch and the goddess by naming the witch figure in *The Cave* — Mary, a character who dares to ask: "What is the good of watching life strut by like a fighting cock beyond the windowpane?.... To be involved is to be

³⁵³ Marie-Louise von Franz, *Shadow and Evil in Fairytales* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), 126.

alive... I am frightened but I love it.”³⁵⁴ As the source of life and vitality, negating the feminine is negating the chance of renewal, which is precisely the problem of Gormenghast. Interestingly, the image of the arrogant, strutting ‘fighting cock’ is one that Peake uses elsewhere to describe Steerpike himself, crowing with “the high-pitched overweening cry of a fighting cock” (Peake 797). The Shadow finds a way to express the vitality that is denied a positive expression in the dominant consciousness.

The author himself had a problematic relationship with institutional religion, and this is reflected consistently in his work. The son of Congregationalists, he had to convert to Catholicism when he married Maeve Gilmore due to the inflexible stand of his in-laws,³⁵⁵ and he expressed his feelings on the “unkindness” of “tired creeds” in a poem beginning with the line— ‘How foreign to the Spirit’s Early Beauty’³⁵⁶ written in 1937. Winnington tells us that Peake “...did not go to church, and he took a distant view of the Catholic faith in which his children were necessarily raised.”³⁵⁷ Even notwithstanding the personal, Peake throughout his work reveals a distaste for evangelical dogma divorced from instinct, notable in works such as *The Cave* and *Mr. Pye*. François says of the latter: “... what epitomizes Mr Pye is his unshakable faith in the righteousness of his cause. In a different literary context, he would be a religious fundamentalist, unaware that the capitalization of ‘truth’ in human societies is tantamount to a denial of otherness.”³⁵⁸ In other words, to truly become a saint, one must have a fuller experience of life— the light and the shadow.

³⁵⁴ Peake, “The Cave,” 31.

³⁵⁵ Winnington, *Mervyn Peake’s VAST ALCHEMIES*, 118.

³⁵⁶ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 39.

³⁵⁷ Winnington, *Mervyn Peake’s VAST ALCHEMIES*, 119.

³⁵⁸ Pierre François, “Mr Pye: An Ovidian Curse for a Dichotomized Evangelist,” *Peake Studies* 6, no. ii (1999):

But more importantly, figures such as Mr. Pye or Barquentine— convinced of their own rightness are dangerous and the mindset they represent is exactly what leads civilization to the absolute paranoid nightmare of The City which watches people at every moment in order to detect deviation and non-compliance. In an essay titled ‘Literalized Metaphors and the Comedy of Excess’ in Mr. Pye’, Alice Mills notes the oddity of an evangelist who is apparently “overflowing with love for his fellow human beings” yet does nothing to aid the characters who keep falling around him, fatally or otherwise.³⁵⁹ She goes on to suggest that Mr. Pye’s Ovidian metamorphosis is a deliberate Greco-Roman reference on Peake’s part “in order to sabotage a Christian reading... Peake’s prime target is Christian evangelical morality.”³⁶⁰

In another poem, Peake declares:

No creed shall bind me to a sapless bole—
 Dig I for the dark roots beneath the soil.
 No foliaged candle and no aerole
 Shall lure me from my toil
 And snare my soul
 When I stand fighting the Cathedral,
 And the voluptuous clouds of Catholic
 Narcotic ritual...³⁶¹

Ironically enough, the Groan Law was perhaps in its inception not as inflexible as its acolytes think it to be. Sourdust carries not one but three books to determine the course of the day’s activities (Peake 49-50) — the first providing the primary guidelines, the third offering alternatives and cross-references, but most importantly, the second book is blank— suggesting infinite possibilities and change— that the successive Masters of Rituals seem to have failed to grasp, resulting in a

³⁵⁹ Alice Mills, “Literalized Metaphors and the Comedy of Excess in Mr. Pye,” *Peake Studies* 6, no. 3 (1999): 29.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁶¹ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 61.

dead-end ritual practice. The narcotic ritual of Gormenghast, overused and wrung dry of all significance is what causes Titus to eventually escape in order to find answers elsewhere.

This escape is foreshadowed by a series of events. First, the Day of the Bright Carvers, Gormenghast's most important ritual is interrupted, by the Thing who steals a carving of a raven, and then by Titus who leaves the ceremony to follow her. The Thing is then killed by a stroke of lightning, marking a sudden end to Titus's long obsession. This marks the onset of the torrential rain which leads to the flood. Fuchsia drowns in the water by falling from a window. Soon afterwards Steerpike is slayed by Titus in a watery fight. The flood subsides, the work of physical rebuilding begins, but nothing changes in the quality of life in Gormenghast which is still bound by the rhetoric of ritual. And thus Titus, like all flood heroes is destined to build his legacy in a new land.

In the fourth and final chapter, we examine Titus's experiences in the City, which showcases how modern technological advancements, instead of answering the existential questions raised in the medieval world of Gormenghast, serve to ensure only a more efficient form of conformity. This is a failure of the collective consciousness which has failed to keep up with the material advancement of civilization. Instead of renewing the symbols of the Self, the City has merely substituted the ritual of Gormenghast with mindless violence masked by the doctrine of progress, losing in the process its humanity. "All healthy societies have a rich ceremonial life. Less healthy ones rely on unconscious expressions: war, violence, psychosomatic illness, neurotic suffering, and accidents..."³⁶²

When the symbols of ceremony begin to wear out, as in Gormenghast, the health of the collective psyche begins to decline, and we are left eventually with an order where adherence and

³⁶² Johnson, *Owning One's Own Shadow*, 52.

obedience become more important than the original significance of the ceremony, often enforced with violence. This is the City that Peake depicts, and it is this diseased consciousness that fosters the rise of fascism, accompanied by the rise of a cult leader: “in order to compensate for its chaotic formlessness, a mass always produces a ‘Leader,’ who almost infallibly becomes the victim of his own inflated ego-consciousness, as numerous examples in history show.”³⁶³ This is as relevant today as it was when Jung wrote *The Undiscovered Self* or when Peake wrote *Titus Alone*. By leaving both Gormenghast and the City, Titus refuses to take up the mantle of this leader: “... a kind of power climbed through him like sap. Not the power of Gormenghast, or the pride of lineage. These were but dead-sea fruit. But the power of imagination’s pride” (Peake 792-3).

What Peake is questioning in *Titus Alone* is the culpability of individuals in the collective violence, so that even the casual act of a child urinating upon a column of ants becomes an act of violence (Peake 906), something far more sinister than a child’s innocent accident, drawing parallels with Veil casually killing a rat (Peake 915) or the “liquidation” of Muzzlehatch’s zoo (Peake 969) by the scientists. All of this is part of the same design of evil that is ominously hinted at by the sweet stench of the factory that so sickens Titus. The stench of the factory is, according to Alice Mills, redolent of the concentration camp. She goes on to discuss the incident of the urinating boy which serves to “extend the pattern of doubt to early boyhood, to attack sentimental views of childhood as innocent, and to implicate in the novel’s moral economy any reader who has ever killed an ant.”³⁶⁴ This idea of innate, collective guilt is stressed upon again by Peake a little later when Titus faces Veil. While Gormenghast could pick Steerpike as the scapegoat to become its ‘beast’, the City distributes its ‘beastliness’ in equal measure to Veil and Titus,

³⁶³ Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, 13.

³⁶⁴ Mills, *Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake*, 218.

Muzzlehatch and the scientist, human and animal. Thus when Titus and Veil face each other, the latter is moved not by any grand end-goal but by his “Loyalty to the child, the long scab-legged child, who tore the wings off sparrows long ago” (Peake 918). Veil’s loyalty to the child defines the human capacity for evil as something reflexive, or biological, binding the ant-flooding boy and Veil and Titus together in the shared evil of a species. Moreover, Mills reminds us that “The attempts to explain Veil’s conduct as driven by remorse, fear or loyalty resonate with Nazi camp guards’ pleas that they had acted out of loyalty; that they had only been carrying out orders; that they were sorry; that they had acted out of fear.”³⁶⁵ The innate human capacity for evil that Peake speaks of is the hidden darkness in our individual and collective psyches, the shadow we all project. A dichotomous vision allows this shadow to be projected rather than integrated, creating a never-ending cycle that causes more and more destruction. The site of the modern metropolis, representing the twentieth century technological state which is displaced from its roots and therefore needing absolute homogeneous conformity in order to justify its own existence is especially prone to this mode of being. This fascist need for homogeneity is validated by the establishment in the form of rigid identification and enforcement. Titus rattles Gormenghast because he dares to imagine an outside that is different from it, and he rattles the City because he speaks of an outside that does not fit into its recorded information. This would have been resonant in Peake’s time, and is surprisingly resonant today.

In the midst of such confusion, Titus longs for the lost Gormenghast, but he already knows he cannot find the answers he needs in its ancient labyrinthine corridors. Unlike other modern heroes, he thus doesn’t have a past to fall back upon in order to make sense of the present. By forgetting the significance of its past, Gormenghast has stopped being relevant to itself, and has

³⁶⁵ Mills, *Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake*, 220.

therefore been forgotten by its future. Titus's incomprehensibility at the absence of Gormenghast in the collective mindscape of the City is only a marker of the extent to which the selfhood of even a highly independent individual may be dependent upon communal identity. The experience of the City shakes Titus enough to almost return to Gormenghast. A lesser hero than him might have succumbed to the fear of the void and regressed to fanaticism. Mary's dismissal of authoritarian tradition in *The Cave* and the outrage she provokes by her beliefs suggests the sort of sacrilegious audacity and courage required to walk the lonely path to selfhood, for fighting a dead order is a frightening task: "Where there's belief I seem to break it down and build up nothing.... Nothing—nothing at all— nothing real, save that I fight stagnation."³⁶⁶ Yet confronting this terrible nothingness is necessary if humanity is to evolve from the cycle of violence and hate. As she tells Miles:

You, who look as though you had a heart and a brain of your own— why, you are sunk deep in it— in the grey sludge of uniformity.... You must know in your heart that it is not the creed— or the moon— that matters but man with his nerves and sinews, his dreams and his courage and his restless spirit. Man the Miracle.³⁶⁷

Titus's journey from Gormenghast to the City is not merely geographical, but also a movement in time, reflecting a historical shift in human civilization. This is a technique that Peake also employs in a more stylized manner in the play, *The Cave*. As Jung explains in *The Undiscovered Self*, as history progresses from the medieval to the modern, the position of authority shifts from the church to the more sophisticated state machinery. Both demand unquestioned loyalty from their subjects. But while the church, even in its conservative, dogmatic state allows for a degree of shadow release through scarcely understood rituals, the state has nothing to offer as a balance to the over-bright

³⁶⁶ Peake, "The Cave," 40.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 30.

consciousness of modern, rational urbanity. The individual, overwhelmed by the sense of his own insignificance begins to hide behind the collective identity, becoming thereby a function of the abstract society. This collective identity is maintained by a rigid conformity, and bolstered by hating those who do not belong or comply. “Thus the constitutional State drifts into the situation of a primitive form of society, namely the communism of a primitive tribe where everybody is subject to the autocratic rule of a chief or an oligarchy.”³⁶⁸ Disconnected from roots, or from a source of transcendence, the collective shadow lashes out in violence.

Tom Shippey discusses the impact of war in the works of five fabulist writers— Tolkien (*The Lord of the Rings*), C.S. Lewis (*That Hideous Strength*), George Orwell (*1984*), William Golding (*Lord of the Flies*) and T.H. White (*The Once and Future King*) — speaking about their ideas of evil and how that is engendered in man:

There can be little doubt, certainly, that compared with many authors and genres of the mainstream English novel... the group of post-war fantasists I have identified was remarkably strongly affected by the major issue of British politics 1900-1950, which was war; and remarkably determined to concentrate on the problem which for them it raised above all: I repeat, the nature and origin of evil.³⁶⁹

All of these writers, Shippey notes had been affected by war in one way or the other— four of them had actual combat experience— Orwell was shot in the throat in the Spanish Civil War, Golding served in the Royal Navy and wrote of the horror of seeing drowned corpses, Lewis was hit by shell splinters and Tolkien lost his best-friends in the first world war. White was the only exception who deliberately remained uninvolved by spending most of World War II in the neutral

³⁶⁸ Jung, *The Undiscovered Self*, 16.

³⁶⁹ Tom Shippey, “Tolkien as a Post-War Writer,” *Mythlore* 21, no. 2 (1996): 86.

Northern Ireland, yet his own work is obsessed with the subject of war and its possible antidote, rewriting the entire Arthurian legend to emphasize what he identifies as the true origin of evil—human nature itself, irrespective of politics or the nineteenth century loss of faith. Golding too speaks of evil as almost a reflex, genetic action in people whereas Orwell seems to offer no explanation at all except for the fact that evil exists. His projected dystopia however is a futuristic vision born of a negation of past values, both cultural and moral.

It is easier to discover a strain of nostalgia in the works of C.S. Lewis as he picks an anti-religious, pro-scientific attitude as the source of evil. However, “In Tolkien, horror tends to take place ‘offstage’... Shelob, the Ringwraiths and the Uruk-hai, while imaginatively threatening, do not make the same accusations about humanity that O’Brien, Filostrato and Merlyn do.”³⁷⁰ In other words, the evil depicted by Tolkien is not the “pointless, sterile, self-willed cruelty of evil”³⁷¹ that is to be found in the writers of these other works, but a balance between “two old and apparently contradictory views of evil.”³⁷² The first is the Christian idea of evil as an internal temptation—an evil that Galadriel fights and one that nearly overpowers Boromir and Frodo and completely overpowers Saruman. And the second is the Northern heroic idea of evil as an external force that needs to be defeated. The idea of a universal code of values that the ‘good’ men always follow is thus central to the fantasy of Tolkien’s Middle-earth. As Aragorn tells Éomer: “Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarfs and another among Men. It is a man’s part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.”³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Shippey, “Tolkien as a Post-War Writer,” 88.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 89.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 427-8.

This is an idea that seems to be missing from Peake's vision of the world in which the demarcation between good and evil is not as straightforward, and thus far more difficult to banish through war. Shippey concludes that the authors he discusses legalize violence as a definitive method to end evil because as direct witnesses and participants in war, "they were not prepared to accept that it had all been a mistake."³⁷⁴ It is a pity that he leaves Peake out of this discussion as another post-war writer who without fighting was yet able to experience it from close quarters as a war artist. Peake's hero fights Steerpike not so much to defeat evil as to avenge his personal grievances. And Steerpike is himself merely a by-product of the bigger malaise that is Gormenghast itself. While Shippey refers to a section in Chapter 8/III of Lewis's *That Hideous Strength* to exemplify the latter's attitude towards technology as the root of modern sterility and evil,³⁷⁵ Peake offers a similar scenario in reverse to show us that the evil had always been there, altered only in degree rather than in character. While Lewis' scientists from N.I.C.E. would like to "make our brains live with less and less body,"³⁷⁶ Peake's scientists destroy the mind and the soul in order to retain the bodies of a compliant labour-force. It is but a natural progression of civilization, from the faceless Grey Scrubbers to the indistinguishable zombies, both groups offering unquestioning, self-effacing service to the powers that be.

In Peake's world, technology has progressed from medieval to the modern, but the injustices entrenched within the fabric of society have remained the same in essence, and projecting these evils against an external enemy is only a ploy to distract the masses. The fascist

³⁷⁴ Shippey, "Tolkien as a Post-War Writer," 90.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 87.

³⁷⁶ C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength: a modern fairy-tale for grown-ups* (London: The Bodley Head, 1945), Kindle Edition 2019, 3275.

regime strengthens itself by vilifying the ‘other’, and the City’s extreme hostility to outsiders and ‘undesirables’ is a marker of its fascism that is built on centuries of unconscious discontent created by the stilted, joyless medieval societies such as Gormenghast. The reason Titus knows that the City is not for him is because he has already experienced its outmoded system in his own earldom, and he has learned that the defeat of an external enemy such as Steerpike does not necessarily make a repressive world more bearable, for Steerpike’s personal corruption had only adapted itself to the structural evil of Gormenghast. This lesson is hammered home for him and for the readers when he escapes to the Under-River and encounters darker echoes of Gormenghast amongst its fugitives— the brainy Zed and his bitter, disillusioned wife, recalling Bellgrove and Irma (Peake 906), the Black Rose recalling Fuchsia, culminating in the meeting with both his own shadow and the ghost of Steerpike in Veil, with whom he fights in familiar fashion with knives on a watery battleground: “Two-handed at the hilt he held it before him like a brand. The water was over his ankles, and to the minutest details he was mirrored upside down” (Peake 917).

Myths and symbols are created to help human beings cope with their own insignificance in an infinite universe, but it is in the nature of those symbols to wear out, leading to a didactic order as it happens in Gormenghast. The alternative is to experience rootlessness, as Titus does in the City. The safer path, the one he rejects is the security blanket of dogma which is maintained by labelling every deviant as a traitor or an enemy. This is a phenomenon we are experiencing all over the world right now. Peake, witness to the horrors of Belsen refused to let his hero be a part of this vicious cycle. At an event to commemorate the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, noted socio-biologist Edward Wilson made a remark that could be held as a surprisingly accurate description of the trajectory of humanity that Peake draws from Gormenghast to the City: “The real problem of humanity is the following: we have Paleolithic emotions; medieval

institutions; and god like technology... now approaching a point of crisis overall.”³⁷⁷ In the third novel, Titus finally overcomes the pull of Gormenghast and chooses to discard this medieval mindset. Flawed as he is, the slayer of Steerpike no longer justifies violence, not even to fight evil, and refuses to lead the revolution even when offered an army. At the Black House, Titus is made sick by a revenge-obsessed Muzzlehatch— the crazed look in the latter’s eyes serving as a warning of what he himself could become. In fact there are textual hints that his rejection of Muzzlehatch (and Juno) is also a repeat or at least a parallel rejection of Gormenghast (and Gertrude), for he almost conflates the two— the language in which he describes Muzzlehatch in order to explain his rejection of the latter, for instance, is curiously evocative of his ancestral home:

You are too vast and craggy. Your features are the mountains of the moon. Lions and tigers bleeding in your brain. Revenge is in your belly. You are too vast and remote. Your predicament burns. It makes me hanker for release (Peake 923).

Even though he admits owing his life to Muzzlehatch, labelling himself as ‘vile’ for his own seeming ingratitude, he cannot help but run from his vengeful friend, for he knows that revenge will only burn him up, as it indeed does to both Muzzlehatch and Cheeta later, each driven by their own private motives for vengeance. At the staging of the fake Gormenghast at the Black House, when Muzzlehatch finally appears after setting the factory to explode, Titus is appalled at “the embers in the eyes of his friend” (Peake 1004), and he tries, unsuccessfully to cure him of his obsession — “He could see at a glance how Muzzlehatch was bent upon death, that he was deranged. What was it then, in spite of his horror... that urged Titus forward until he blocked the torn man’s view of Cheeta’s father? It was a kind of love” (Peake 1005). But his love is too little

³⁷⁷ Edward O. Wilson, quoted in “An Intellectual Entente,” Harvard Magazine, September 11, 2009, <http://harvardmagazine.com/breaking-news/james-watson-edward-o-wilson-intellectual-entente>)

and too late to save Muzzlehatch, who has regressed into the primal hatred he had rebuked earlier in the warring camel and the mule in his zoo (Peake 824). As the alternate Father figure, Muzzlehatch thus represents a Logos that is no longer sustainable.

This is the danger that Peake is warning us about, the reason why Titus must put up “a barrier of foolery” (Peake 947) against everything the City stands for. As Johnson says, “We all decry war but collectively we move toward it. It is not the monsters of the world who make such chaos but the collective shadow to which every one of us has contributed.”³⁷⁸ Conversely, each of us have a latent monster that revels in the chaos. A conformist collective can justify great acts of violence by satisfying the primeval blood lust in all of us:

This is the year of Our Lord
One thousand and nine
Hundred years
And thirty-nine
Since the Blood was Wine
And the Flesh was broken like Bread.

And the men of the equal tread
Have come into their own
And their bayonets shine.
This is the year of Our Lord
One thousand and nine
Hundred years
And thirty-nine.³⁷⁹

This is the bloodlust that consumes Muzzlehatch in the end, one that Titus must not fall prey to if he is to be the kind of hero that Peake believes the world is in need of, a hero who can rise above the dichotomies of a violence-torn world by integrating rather than repressing the Shadow: “The

³⁷⁸ Johnson, *Owning One's Own Shadow*, 27.

³⁷⁹ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 47.

achievement of psychological maturity is an individual task— and so is increasingly difficult today when man's individuality is threatened by widespread conformity."³⁸⁰

The primary problem of Peake's novels, from a reader's point of view is the failure of mythology. Peake repeatedly baits the reader with mythic patterns only to disappoint as his characters consistently fail to fit within the mold of traditional fairytales, and he does so deliberately, even making Titus comment upon it. In the third novel, Titus tries to get physical with a reluctant Cheeta, while making the following detached observation: "They were riding on the wings of a cliché. Man pursues woman at dawn! Man has got to consummate his lust! Woman gallops like mad on the rim of the near future" (Peake 945). By evading this pattern, Titus is also evading the cliché of a happy ending in a binary world:

Traditionally quest stories have a happy ending: the hero achieves his goal. Often this means that he attains a treasure which he brings back to his home, thus bestowing a boon upon it. So Jason returns from Colchis with the Golden Fleece, Jim Hawkins and his friends bring back the pirates' gold, Marcus recovers the golden eagle which was the standard of his father's legion, Jack escapes from the land at the top of the Beanstalk with bags of gold, a hen that lays golden eggs and a magic golden harp, Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit* helps the dwarves to recover the horde of gold and jewels guarded by the dragon, Smaug. The golden nature of these objects suggests a special significance, and generally quest objects symbolize the values of the cultures to which the stories belong. The Golden Fleece comes from a ram which was the offspring of the god Poseidon and is therefore an incarnation of the sacredness of the earth itself as well as a symbol of Hellenic pride. The Holy Grail which the pure hero, Galahad, achieves in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* signifies the values of the Christian communion. The golden eagle in *The Eagle of the Ninth* is a symbol of the qualities admired by Roman and British imperialism, while the pile of money in *Treasure Island* is a fitting emblem of the values of nineteenth-century capitalism.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ Marie-Louise von Franz, "The Process of Individuation" in *Man and His Symbols*, by Carl G. Jung et al., 238.

³⁸¹ Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children's Literature*, 51.

Titus runs away from his happy ending, and has seemingly no golden treasure to show for his labours, thereby collapsing the mythic pattern.

Mythology fails when it is disconnected from ordinary life— leading to overtly rigid formality to make up for the absence of rapture in the collective imagination. The lack of a meaningful *weltanschauung* leads also to a nostalgic yearning for a lost golden age, and that is a comfort that Tolkien offers to the readers, and Peake doesn't. By consistently subverting narrative expectations, Peake refuses to offer the reader the safety net of a familiar story structure. In fact, by making life in the medieval Gormenghast as emotionally unbearable as in the modern City, he refutes the very idea of a golden age.

The story of the Golden Age, a very early and almost universal myth, was never intended to be historical. It springs from a strong experience of the sacred that is natural to human beings, and expresses their tantalizing sense of reality that is almost tangible and only just out of reach. Most of the religions and mythologies of archaic societies are imbued with longing for the lost paradise. The myth was not simply how they could return to this archetypal world, not only in moments of visionary rapture but in the regular duties of their daily lives.³⁸²

Titus knows when he leaves home that he cannot live there, thus propelling his escape. But once he actually leaves Gormenghast behind and encounters the nullity of modern life, the former becomes for him the Golden Age that he longs for. But he must not and cannot return there because it does not serve to remain lost in a mythical past. Gormenghast at the end thus becomes for him the experience or memory of the sacred, the spiritual longing with which he must try to shape his remaining life. The initial, picaresque sort of outline for *Titus Awakes* suggests a sort of prophet-like/Ancient Mariner figure that he will become, taking his memory and message to the world,

³⁸² Armstrong, *A Short History of Myths*, 10.

initiating people into the mysteries that they have forgotten, to make humanity aware of the violence that they have committed in their ignorance and oblivion: "...this tantalizingly enigmatic inventory included prospective episodes in which Titus would be found, for example among the 'snows', 'mountains', 'forests', 'archipelagos' and 'soldiers'."³⁸³ In this, the story of the errant, prodigal heir of Gormenghast becomes a commentary on contemporary world history.

Titus's longing for Gormenghast highlights humanity's tendency to idealize or glorify an imagined past in order to compensate for a discontent in the present, the emptiness creating a pathway for radicalization of the collective thought. Franz claims that the reason the collective German imagination was so quick to be caught up in a fury of brutal violence during the Second World War was due to Germanic culture's specific problem of the lack of the feminine, and the abrupt suppression of its pagan culture by the superimposition of monotheistic Christianity.³⁸⁴ In fact, a lot of fundamentalist violence in human history can be explained as projections born out of uneasy transitions between differing ways of life, conflicts created by a collective consciousness that can no longer keep up with a rapidly shifting culture.

It is such emptiness that leads to the nihilistic violence that we see first in Steerpike and later on a larger scale in the City's Under-River and its factory. Titus as the modernist hero rejects a spiritually dead past to find the same deadness in the present. The deadness of Gormenghast leads to the deadness of the City— they are two sides of the same coin. "What are these shapes that stare where once strong houses/Rose with their surrounding halls and rooms of breath?"³⁸⁵—

³⁸³ Brian Sibley, "Mervyn, Maeve and the Search without End: Introduction" to *Titus Alone*, by Maeve Gilmore (London: Vintage, 1960), 9.

³⁸⁴ Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 55.

³⁸⁵ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 83.

Peake asks in his poem about a war-ravaged London, titled ‘The Shapes’, lines that could as easily be applied to the ruins of Gormenghast. The reason the City has never heard of the castle is because the mythology of Gormenghast has failed and therefore faded. At the same time, echoes of Gormenghast are to be found in its Shadow, both in the forgotten ruins of the Black House in the forest and in the Under-River. An artist’s search of a new *weltanschauung* that can integrate the Shadow to the collective consciousness is needed to fill up the void of contemporary times, a void exemplified by Steerpike and the Lamb and the scientist. And Titus, with his craving for new sights and a penchant for wood-carving and boat-making akin to the Bright Carvers might just be the new kind of hero needed to achieve that goal. As Peake says:

...specialization seems to me to be a sterile thing unless, to return to the acorn, the specialist himself expands as he shrivels — breaks his bonds and perceives in the acorn not only the oak but the whole vegetable universe, and in the whole vegetable universe the vital source of all things, and in this matrix, a god — perhaps of beauty, or sublime indifference — at any rate, a god.³⁸⁶

Titus Groan refuses to fit into the mold of the mythological saviour hero thrice over— once after defeating Steerpike at the end of *Gormenghast*, the second time in *Titus Alone* when the three men from the Under-River attempt to make him a rallying point for their rebellion and for the final time when he turns away from the nostalgia of Gormenghast in the end. In turning away from his ancestral home, Titus is rejecting what Svetlana Boym in her essay ‘Nostalgia and its Discontents’ calls “a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetic failure. Nostalgia produces subjective visions of afflicted imagination that tend to colonize the realm of politics, history, and everyday perception.”³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶ Peake, “The Artist’s World,” 6.

³⁸⁷ Svetlana Boym, “Nostalgia and its discontents,” *The Hedgehog Review* 9, no. 2 (2007): 9.

By refusing to give in to this nostalgia to satisfy the demands of the story, Peake through Titus is opening up possibilities beyond those demands because humanity now needs to grow outside the fairytale world: “The enclave and its stifling rules has taught them all they needed to know, and it is bound to die with their departure, since Wonderland will become a dream without a dreamer, and Gormenghast an earldom without an earl.”³⁸⁸ Since both of these are “dream-locations,” “leaving the world means leaving the story space.”³⁸⁹ Titus leaves Gormenghast in order to reject the label of the hero/saviour, he then leaves the City by refusing the same role one more time, this time offered by the refugees from the Under-River. He then almost returns to Gormenghast, to his golden reward of the role of the ‘prodigal’ ruler, and turns away just in the nick of time. While Titus is far from a perfect hero, what Peake was perhaps trying to show was that the violent overthrowing of one order by another could not be the ultimate solution if the reasons behind the divisions were not addressed. By leaving the story space, Titus frees himself from the binaries taken for granted— right and wrong, good and bad, us and them — and finds his true reward— the Gormenghast within himself, which, as a symbol of the self we might also call the Golden flower.

In 1928, Jung drew a picture of a mandala “with a golden castle in the centre”³⁹⁰ and asked himself, “Why is this so Chinese?”³⁹¹ Shortly afterwards, he received the manuscript of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, a Taoist-alchemical treatise, from Richard Wilhelm, a work which helped

³⁸⁸ Licari-Guillaume, “Making Sense in Isolation: From Wonderland to Gormenghast,” 128.

³⁸⁹ Ibid.

³⁹⁰ Carl G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Vintage, 1961), 197.

³⁹¹ Ibid.

confirm Jung's own "ideas about the mandala and the circumambulation of the centre."³⁹² The Golden Flower is the residing place of the Heavenly Heart, the light upon which all changes of the spiritual consciousness depend. Wilhelm writes:

The Book of the Yellow Castle says: 'In the square inch field of the square foot home, life can be regulated.' ... In the middle of the square inch dwells the splendor. In the purple hall of the city of the jade dwells the God of Utmost Emptiness and Life. The Confucians call it the centre of emptiness; the Buddhists, the terrace of living; the Taoists, the ancestral land, or the yellow castle, or the dark pass, or the space of former heaven. The heavenly heart is like the dwelling place, the light is the master.³⁹³

This takes us back full circle to Peake's own childhood memories in China, to the Forbidden City of Beijing as the possible conscious or subconscious inspiration for Gormenghast. Like all ancient castles of China, the Emperor's palace at the Forbidden City too is an encircled, mandala structure, "placing the Emperor as an Earthly likeness of the North Star round whom the heavenly sphere revolves."³⁹⁴ This is Titus's golden treasure, the epiphany he receives at the end of his journey.

Gold is also the alchemist's goal, whose true value is not in the metal itself but in the realization of the self: "You could call alchemy a work of active imagination made not by painting or writing but with chemical substances.... an experiment with their own inner psyches, a religious experiment they were making with their own personality."³⁹⁵ For Peake, self-fulfillment comes when a person manages to make the 'real' world they live in reflect or participate in their inner

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Richard Wilhelm trans., *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, with Commentary by C.G. Jung (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1962), 22. First Published in the United States in 1931.

³⁹⁴ Abraham Akkerman, *Phenomenology of the Winter City: Myth in Rise and Decline of Built Environments* (Saskatoon: Springer, 2016), 130.

³⁹⁵ Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 18.

world, so that there is a sense of continuity or flow between the two, as in Peake's creative process: "As I see it, or as I want to see it, the marvels of the visible world are not things in themselves but revelations to stir the imagination... The world includes the whole physical and spiritual alphabet from the A of a distilled glory to the Z of vileness."³⁹⁶ In this world of one's own, a person feels free to express themselves most fully (though not necessarily with ease), so that there is a sense of wholeness and of plenitude. This state is another of the loves that Peake describes and is clearly akin to Fuchsia's love for her secret room: "It is the love of a man or of a woman for their world. For the world of their centre, where their lives burn genuinely and with a free flame" (Peake 58) or to Keda's love for the whole world that sets her free from fear: "I am in love with all things— pain and all things, because I can now watch them from above, for something has happened and I am clear— clear" (Peake 188-9). Winnington points out that "One of the memorable characteristics of Gormenghast is its determination to deny difference and remain the same forever"³⁹⁷ and even though difference through artistic expression is permitted amongst the Bright Carvers, barring the three winners, all their works are nevertheless burned every year. Thus the Gormenghast Titus finally discovers is a site of inner transformations where these 'vast alchemies' may flow:

Storm, harvest, flood or snow,
Over the generous country as I go
And gather helplessly,
New wealth from all I see
In every spendthrift thing—
O then I long to spring
Through the charged air, a wastrel, with not one
Farthing to weigh me down,
But hollow! foot to crown

³⁹⁶ Peake, "The Artist's World," 6-7.

³⁹⁷ Winnington, *Voice of the Heart*, 153.

To prance immune among vast alchemies,
 To prance! and laugh! my heart and throat and eyes
 Emptied of all
 Their golden gall. (From 'Coloured Money'³⁹⁸)

The golden centre might also be called “the highest stage of illumination [or]... the coveted goal of all desire,”³⁹⁹ represented in the language of initiation by the number seven,⁴⁰⁰ a number which crops up a few times in Peake’s novels. Titus is the ‘seventy-seventh’ earl, the custom of address ensuring a degree of harmony in the relationship between Gormenghast and the Bright Carvers was introduced by the ‘seventeenth’ earl (Peake 69), and the birth of Titus is preceded by an omen of “seven clouds like a group of cherubs or sucking-pigs” (Peake 52) against a slate-grey sky, noticed only by the brooding and sensitive Fuchsia, who later asks, to an indifferent Nanny Slagg: “Why seven? Seven is for something. What’s seven for?” (Peake 53) The fact that she can remember almost the whole of the number doggerel from one to ten, but stumbles pointedly at seven suggests the degree of Gormenghast’s collective amnesia in the quest for integration, and her repeated insistence on the question indicates the urgency for remembrance. Titus is thus meant to be the hero and complete the quest that his sister, hindered by the crystallized patriarchal system fails to complete despite early potential. This quest is not about external conquests but an inner revelation— that of the golden flower.

Despite the overwhelming impression that Gormenghast makes, the novels are not so much about the ancient castle as they are about Titus Groan and the significance of his journeys in the

³⁹⁸ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 23.

³⁹⁹ Carl Jung, *Dreams*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, with a foreword by Kathleen Raine (London: Routledge, 2012), 137. Originally published by the Bollingen Foundation (1953-1969).

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

context of Peake's own world. Titus, as Everyman makes an uneasy transition from a medieval world order that is no longer functional to a new emerging order where, to approximate the words of W.B. Yeats— things are falling apart in the absence of a central axis of civilization. If Gormenghast was plagued by a lack of memory, the City offers the alternative of an absolutely rootless, alienating existence, and Titus's personal, individual sense of disorientation can thus be conflated with the Modern Man's sense of rootlessness in the rapidly evolving twentieth century world. Several modern writers such as Joyce and Eliot have attempted to fill this void by imposing a mythic structure from the past on the chaotic uncertainty of the present. Peake, in contrast begins in the past and then, with his 'Wandering Jew' protagonist brings us to the present. Peake's perception of the changing world would also be coloured by not simply the European experience but also by his childhood impression of the transforming Orient from the stories he must have heard from his Chinese caretakers. In addition, he had his own personal experience of uprooting from his childhood to a new, unfamiliar world where he had to learn to fit in— his own individual quest for home that is reflected in his adult goal of setting up an artists' colony at Sark.

Thus in Peake's depiction of Titus Groan's journey, the collective search for a new, meaningful world order becomes also the search for individual growth and integration. As Jung declared, "the goal of psychic development is the self. There's no linear development; there is only a circumambulation of the self."⁴⁰¹ The search for selfhood thus must essentially lead him back home: "You will only tread a circle, Titus Groan. There's not road, not a track, but it will lead you home" (Peake 807). But this home is no longer the physical experience of the stone towers, but rather an inner voyage, the psychological experience of wholeness, the sense of belonging to

⁴⁰¹ Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, 196.

himself that he must find within himself. This he must do by breaking away from the existing system to find his own.

...the *élan vital* that breaks away from the collective unconscious attains a spiritual, not a visible or concrete, purposiveness. This is a decisive, creative moment. This kind of creative energy would not lead to, say, a political revolution; that would be an earthly purpose. Rather, it would lead to a psychic revolution, a change that takes place on a higher level.⁴⁰²

In Jungian thought, the unit for social cohesion is the individual. Thus Titus's failure to have a stable, balanced, reciprocal relationship with a woman is not simply a fall-out of his own unresolved Mother Complex but also of the separation of the civilization from its Anima Mundi, as evident in both Gormenghast with its repressed women and in the City with the "sexless metal birds" and the overwhelming stench of deadness emanating from the factory. Throughout the *Titus Groan* novels as well as elsewhere, Peake depicts the repression of the feminine as the malaise affecting the modern world. Thus the bombed London of the Second World War becomes a ravaged woman in 'London, 1941': "Half masonry, half pain; her head/ From which the plaster breaks away/Like flesh from the rough bone..."⁴⁰³ In *The Cave*, the mystique of the Goddess is reduced, through an increasing disconnection from one's roots and a simultaneously increase in the fear for the unknown transformed into hate. Thus the feminine from a life-giving entity becomes the heretical witch and then an enemy of the State. This parallels the journey of humanity and the gradual split from the unconscious as rituals lose significance and become dogma. Truths

⁴⁰² Franz, *Archetypal Patterns in Fairytales*, 34.

⁴⁰³ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 88.

become “a possession of consciousness... a formality”⁴⁰⁴ that is enforced with rigid violence to the detriment of the individual to ensure collective conformity. What saves Titus is his own strong individualism, his emotional will that resists subjugation to an authoritarian system, both at Gormenghast and the City.

Even at a moment of extreme mental distress, as Cheeta and her cohorts mock him and his ancestral home in *Titus Alone*, Titus is temporarily distracted from his anger by his love for Muzzlehatch—the individual emotion staying the mob-induced rage. And in Muzzlehatch he spots the dangers of obsession, the latter’s craze for revenge curing his own. Muzzlehatch is the failed woodland god of this new world devoid of flora and fauna: “There had been a time when he was the lord of the fauna.... In his house by the mulberry tree.... And there was the second Muzzlehatch, vague yet menacing, lord of nothing” (Peake 935). His sacrifice paves the way clear for Titus to begin his journey—he cannot be a hero either in Gormenghast or in the City because he must find a new framework of living. In her continuation of Titus’s story, Maeve Gilmore expressed her belief that the journey to find the Gormenghast within would culminate in Sark—where Peake himself had found home and an artistic community for a while. If we accept Gilmore’s view, then the journey of Titus becomes circular both in fictional and autobiographical terms— from Gormenghast to Gormenghast renewed, from the yellow castle of his childhood to the Golden Flower of an integrated inner centre.

Thus self-knowing is what Peake is suggesting— in fact, Gilmore actually makes Titus meet his maker, Mervyn Peake himself—which is a far more difficult path than the satisfaction of a quick-fix of victory in physical battle or the defeat or death of an external foe. This is a rather sobering and relevant idea in the present context of rising fanaticism and mob-mentality all around

⁴⁰⁴ Franz, *Cat: A Tale of Feminine Redemption*, 24.

the world. Like Tolkien's Valinor, Peake is in search of an ideal realm, but unlike Tolkien whose Valinor seems to be a cross between Eden and Valhalla, Peake's ideal realm is not grounded in any religion. Nor does he put his faith in the idea of a lost golden age, once again contradicting the likes of Tolkien, but in a new awareness of the Self. This is a far more difficult idea to comprehend due to the natural limits of the average collective consciousness, and even more difficult to realize— but the Impossible Task is the hero's role. "Medieval heroes had to slay their dragons; modern heroes have to take their dragons back home to integrate into their own personality."⁴⁰⁵

Peake gives us three novels, three turns in which narrative expectations are inevitably belied. We began this thesis by seeking the reason for the stasis of *Gormenghast*, trying to figure out its nature, and expanded the question to ask why the novels repeatedly fail to offer any sort of a traditional closure to the readers. Now arriving at the end, we finally have our answer. *Gormenghast* is mired in its own stasis because it has lost its connection to the Self, and to its life-giving, creative feminine principle, becoming in its rigidity and deadness the image of every declining civilization failing to transform itself in response to an altered reality. The novels' failure to offer any closure is thus a deliberate choice. To abide by the narrative expectations of an outmoded system would be tantamount to validating the very dead order that has caused the stasis of *Gormenghast*, and by default, that of the City in the first place.

In fact, Peake disapproves of this order by revealing the ineffectualness of external changes. *Titus Groan*, the first novel shows a change of state through a shift of power from father to son— a traditionally powerful metaphor of renewal in mythology. However, in spite of the change, *Gormenghast* essentially remains the same. The crowning of the new earl does not remedy

⁴⁰⁵ Johnson, *Owning One's Own Shadow*, 51.

the intrinsically hierarchical structure of the castle, nor does it serve to breach the various discords and divisions amongst its inhabitants or better the physical and emotional states of its deprived members. The last part is equally true for the Grey Scrubbers or the Bright Carvers as collectives, as it is for Fuchsia or Keda as individuals. In the sequel, *Gormenghast*, Titus ends up committing the ultimate heroic act— the slaying of the monster, Steerpike. To drive the symbolism home, this climax occurs as the castle and its surroundings is overwhelmed by an apocalyptic flood. Nevertheless, *Gormenghast* remains the same in its essence— rhetorical, didactic and rigid, leading to the sort of soulless and authoritarian future that we encounter in the third novel. In *Titus Alone*, Titus travels away from his kingdom in search of adventure, but achieves no grand victory or treasure. Nor does he return home— triumphant or repentant. Instead he finds his mother's final words unwittingly coming true. There are no places beyond Gormenghast because all places are equally repressed. Thus punishing an external enemy or physical, superficial changes in technology or for that matter in government does not alter the entrenched structure of oppression which is the real root of our collective discontent. With the world expanding, it no longer serves to hold on to a medieval mindset by projecting the discontent on an 'other'. As Joseph Campbell says: "The national idea, with the flag as a totem, is today an aggrandizer of the nursery ego, not the annihilator of an infantile situation. Its parody-rituals of the parade ground serve the ends of Holdfast, the tyrant dragon, not ... God..."⁴⁰⁶

Peake was born and spent his early years in a war-torn China, a country that was negotiating a shift from a medieval, monarchial, didactic political system towards what was to become a twentieth century, socialist but equally totalitarian system of governance. He arrived in England in the aftermath of the First World War and experienced the Second as an adult, from close

⁴⁰⁶ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 335.

quarters. Sebastian Peake writes of his father's experience as a war-artist in *A Child of Bliss*: "My father's experiences in Belsen... remained in his conscious and subconscious mind from that visit until he died."⁴⁰⁷ He talks about how the war-criminal, Peter Back saluted and thanked Mervyn after being sketched by the latter a few hours before being hanged and how a senior S.S. wardress from Auschwitz had spat all over his face.⁴⁰⁸ Sebastian goes on to claim that the experience altered his father, and that the latter "suffered and later died as a result of seeing manifest the antithesis of joy, love and beauty..."⁴⁰⁹

Whether Peake's illness was a result of or was exacerbated by his war experiences or not, they must have made him painfully aware of its futility, of the capacity for humanity and monstrosity on both sides. In the only poem he wrote expressively about Belsen ('The Consumptive. Belsen 1945'), Peake curses the merciless irony of creating art out of the suffering of a dying girl, tracing 'Earth's desolation' in her last weak cough.⁴¹⁰ In 'Fort Darland', written earlier in 1940, he speaks of the unnaturalness of a soldier's pose: "If my head droops, or my hands are not forced/Into my sides... I am insulting England."⁴¹¹ Violence, whether sanctioned by authority or ideology is essentially a futile exercise in stemming the true source of the disease within us. In interpreting a dream about a "ferocious war between two peoples,"⁴¹² Carl Jung states that the conflict is a manifestation of the conscious mind trying to suppress the unconscious. This

⁴⁰⁷ Sebastian Peake, "A Child of Bliss," in *Two Lives* by Maeve Gilmore and Sebastian Peake (London: Vintage, 2007), 210-11.

⁴⁰⁸ S Peake, "A Child of Bliss," in *Two Lives* by Maeve Gilmore and Sebastian Peake, 211.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 212.

⁴¹⁰ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 133-34.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 80-81.

⁴¹² Carl Jung, *Dreams*, 230.

fear of the unknown unconscious is what defines the violence of Miles in *The Cave*, the violent fanaticism of Barquentine and the petty malice of the twins in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, or the impersonal cruelty of the scientists and the state machinery in *Titus Alone*. And as Peake repeatedly shows, a reciprocal violent response such as the death of the informer (in *The Cave*), or the death of Sepulchrave resulting in the earling of Titus or the death of Steerpike or even the explosion at the factory does not truly heal the root of the malaise.

This is the reason why Titus Groan cannot be the traditional victorious hero, for to be such a hero is to conform to the dominant Logos, a Logos that is stunted by its increasing separation from the Eros principle through the history of human civilization. According to Jung, “Instinctively the modern man leaves the trodden ways to explore the by-paths and lanes, just as the man of the Græco-Roman cast off his defunct Olympian gods...”⁴¹³ This new path “turns inward and leads us to give our thoughtful attention to the unconscious psyche.”⁴¹⁴ Titus thus must continually escape, first from the burden of legend as the slayer of the beast in *Gormenghast*, then as the messiah of the Under-River, then from the City itself in order to not succumb to this conformist politics of external identity, and finally from *Gormenghast* again, in order to find the inner wholeness of the Self he had set out to discover in the first place. Thus if Peake’s novels repeatedly fail to satisfy narrative expectations or to fit into the well-worn patterns of mythology, it is because he has created a hero who must discover a new narrative. As demonstrably proved by contemporary world events, the existing patterns of myths had turned out to be inadequate, a new order was required to

⁴¹³ Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, trans. W.S. Dell and Cary F. Bayness (London: Routledge, 2012), 222. First published in 1933.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

restore the world, one in which his hero, in his own words, would be able to end the war within his own heart and ignore the lures of the sounding bugles, as he declares in this 1939 poem:

Oh I must end this war within my heart
 This civil war and I the battleground—
 But who to cry the truce? To wrench apart
 The gory bayonets that give the wound?
 And who can calm me when the bugless sound— ⁴¹⁵

To break free of the temptation of the communal identity and of the easy fix of shadow projection is the modern hero's task. Tolkien's Aragorn is allowed to plant the sapling of his lineage as a symbol of his new world order,⁴¹⁶ fulfilling old mythic patterns with the help of his fellowship. Peake's Titus has a more difficult path ahead of him, for the modern hero, as Campbell tells us, travels alone to find a new pattern in a world where the spell of the past is broken, carrying the cross of his "personal despair" as he estranges himself from a society too caught up in its "slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding."⁴¹⁷ "The modern hero-deed must be that of questing to bring to light again the lost Atlantis of the coordinated soul."⁴¹⁸ Much of this journey is in the unconscious, and it is there that Titus must now seek his inner Gormenghast or his own lost Atlantis, for 'the heart indeed holds memories older than the mind.'⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁵ Peake, "Oh I Must End This War within My Heart," in *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 71.

⁴¹⁶ Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, 950-1.

⁴¹⁷ Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 337.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

⁴¹⁹ Peake, *Collected Poems*, ed. R.W. Maslen, 155. See also Page-1 of this work.

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