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SECRET GODS: EPIC REVELATIONS OF THE AESTHETIC IMAGINATION

An Investigation Into The Epic And The Novel As Exemplified By Mervyn Peake's Postmodern 'Pantechnicon' Titus Groan, Gormenghast, And Titus Alone

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ABSTRACT

SECRET GODS: EPIC REVELATIONS OF THE AESTHETIC IMAGINATION
An Investigation into the Epic and the Novel
as Exemplified by Mervyn Peake's Postmodern 'Pantechnicon'
Titus Groan, Gormenghast, and Titus Alone

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This thesis investigates the relationship between the epic and the novelistic modes in literature by developing the socio-psychological and metaphysical implications of their formal aesthetics. More specifically, I test Georg Lukacs' projection of 'the form of the renewed epic' in a qualitatively Postmodern novel: Mervyn Peake's Titus Groan, Gormenghast, and Titus Alone are used as an example because of the implications of an aesthetic 'pantechnicon' of the imagination found therein.

Chapter One focusses on theoretical support for the fusion of the epic and novelistic modes in Postmodernism. The epic novel is defined as the epic of a potential society, necessarily expressed through aesthetics as an epic of the imagination because of the alienation of the individual from the monological social appropriation of language, i.e., a redefined epical immanent totality exists despite the surplus repression imposed on the individual by the demand for submission to a performance principle (ideological subjectification). Chapter Two closely analyzes all aspects of the Peakian aesthetic, exposing its implicit pattern of significance, in order to demonstrate the equivalence of 'being' and 'becoming' in an aesthetic ontology.

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INTRODUCTION

Many works of profound originality have at first appeared eccentrically separate from the main current of literary development, isolated by a critical incomprehension of the unfamiliar that is sometimes implicit in an over-reliance on tradition, or, worse, marooned by wilful blindness on an island of facile judgement. Often, when the tides of history shift the sands of taste, that departure from ordinary channels is discovered to be an illusion, to have been all along a landbridge linking the known world to some new continent.

Mervyn Peake's Titus Groan, Gormenghast and Titus Alone deserve rescue from assigned oblivion, as an extraordinarily sustained flight of the imagination, if for no other reason. Yet, the 'Titus books' have much more to offer than the naked fact of their fantasy, for these novels are cloaked with an epic grandeur unlike those of more fashionable authors borne forward upon a stream of glib popularity. [1] Indeed, the charted course of literary history owes more to those works which stand against the current trends,

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[1] See John Batchelor, Mervyn Peake: A Biographical and Critical Exploration (London: Duckworth, 1974) p.73. In the controversy over the appelation 'Gormenghast Trilogy', I agree with Batchelor's argument for authorial intention, not artefact. Only Peake's illness and death prevented the continuation of Titus' development in a fourth novel.

strangely deflecting the pell-mell rush with tradition's demand for creative authority, than those swept along by the turbulence of the flood:

> The authority, as it were, of a chorus of voices; or of a prince, who with a line of kings for lineage can make no gesture that does not recall some royal ancestor....For tradition is the line that joins together the giant crests of a mountain range -- that links the great rebels, while in the morasses of the valleys in between, the countless apes stare backwards as they squat like tired armies in the shade. But we expect, also, the authority of the single, isolated voice. That the body of a work is common heritage in no way drowns the individual note.[2]

While every literary age proclaims new values and re-evaluates its past, there usually remain a few anomalies contentiously resistant to easy classification and, quite often, provoking a subsequent change in values. The 'Titus books' should, I think, be ranged among them.

Writing of the first novel in comparison to more well-known contemporaries, Anthony Burgess remarked:

> One book, however, resisted and still resists the shelling out of a central sermon or warning. The world created in Titus Groan is neither better nor worse than this one: it is merely different. It has absorbed our history, culture and rituals and then stopped dead, refusing to move, self-feeding, self-motivating, self-enclosed. This is the world of Gormenghast. [3]

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[2] Mervyn Peake, Introduction to The Drawings of Mervyn Peake (Grey Walls Press, 1949), in Mervyn Peake: Writings and Drawings, eds. Maeve Gilmore & Shelagh Johnson (London: Academy Editions & New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974) p.80.

[3] Introduction to the Penguin edition of Titus Groan, p.9.

The resistance identified by Burgess illuminates the chaotic state of critical attempts at classification when confronted by this unusual work. The 'Titus books' have been variously interpreted as modern Gothic (David Punter), Dark Romantic (Tanya Gardiner-Scott), pure Fantasy (C.N. Manlove), pure Fantastic (Peter Stap, Cristiana Rafanelli, Jacques Favier), Fairytale gone wrong (Margaret Ochocki), Folktale (David Sutton), a kind of Prelude (Elizabeth Blignaut, Peter McKenzie), Bildungsroman (Bruce Hunt, Herman Servotte), Social Satire (Colin Greenland), Political Allegory (Jacques Caban, Frederic Vitoux), Modern novel (Rosemary Jackson, Andre D'hotel), Postmodern novel (Gary Wolfe), Surrealism (Bryn Gunnel), Epic of the Imagination (Anthony Burgess, Hugh Brogan), or some stylistic combination of these elements, such as that Colin Greenland implies in "From Beowulf to Kafka: The Difficulty of Titus Alone".[4]

Burgess' description, however, only applies to the first volume, the preface, as it were, of a work which was to have spanned at least four books, and would have taken over twenty years to complete, were Peake not to have succumbed to the debilitating effects of Parkinson's

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[4] Mervyn Peake Review (Spring, 1981) 12:4-9. Sources not indicated in my bibliography are from various issues of the Mervyn Peake Review; I merely wish here to suggest the wide range of critical interpretation. The Mervyn Peake Review will hereafter be abbreviated throughout this thesis as MPR.

disease. The self-sufficiency Burgess describes is also a stasis which Peake consciously elaborates, struggles against, denies, returns to, and finally absorbs into a new synthesis with life through what I will provisionally call the aesthetic imagination -- the artistic attempt to recreate, or recapture, Coleridge's primary imagination. [5]

Nor is this a case of the emperor Crusoe's new clothes. Rather, Peake's ostensibly outlandish Fantasy creates a novelistically-renewed epic style, one more suitably conveying the cultural values of the individual alienated from contemporary society. This stylistic difference, despite its paradoxical, alien aspect, is thus based in an old tradition, the past being what Andre D'hotel says of Titus' 'nostos', "an absolutely necessary point of departure." [6]

E.M.W. Tillyard suggests that the "epic...must have faith in the system of beliefs or way of life it bears

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[5] Though the aesthetic imagination and Coleridge's secondary imagination are roughly equivalent, I want to distinguish between the conscious and unconscious operation of the latter. Coleridge's secondary imagination is, I believe, in continuous, if unconscious, use during every human act; its willed deployment, on the other hand, almost always pursues some higher aim than the ordinary actions of day to day living. A person crossing a field while his or her thoughts are elsewhere, for example, will still make aesthetic choices, quite unconsciously, in deciding a path. The mental distraction which causes one to stumble more properly belongs to a lack of complete physical control in following the chosen course.

[6] Preface to French translation of Titus Alone, trans. Peter Stap, MPR (Spring, 1980) 10:29.

witness to." [7] Peake was attuned to the public desire for some continuation of pre-war values, but not nostalgically unexamined, not simply to escape from the horrors of a world seemingly gone mad. Attuned, then, to a public quest for meaning that transcended the simplistic judgements of wartime propaganda, he expressed the unconscious desire to be free of a social system wherein Fascism could arise, and to be free of the dehumanizing effects (standardization to a common denominator, empty consumerism, internally homogenous social stratification, etc.) of a near mythic belief in the promises science proffered to the post-war world. It was to be free in such a way as to redefine all of life in order to ensure the survival of those human values worth preserving. The 'story' of Titus is the archetypal story of a way of life based on the aesthetic imagination; Peake's faith in this comes across so strongly through his pantechnicon -- that melange of artistic methods we call, when fused, a style -- that some critics, such as Peter McKenzie, have seen its adapted Gothicness as a kind of metaphor for the author himself, a kind of Prelude.

When asked whether he fitted Titus Groan into "any known literary form", however, Peake explained his intent as the creation of a form:

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[7] E.M.W. Tillyard, The English Epic and Its Background (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976) p.13.

> No, none at all....There are two kinds of books, one of which is on the classical side, where there is the mould -- the mould which one accepts, then pours one's words into....And there's the other, which is not, I think, necessarily a formless thing -- it can be just as formed, but it creates its own form....When I say that I didn't know its form, I knew for instance what the thing wasn't going to be; I knew the mood rather than the form, the total mood of the book I wanted. [8]

Indeed, his professed goal was to allow his imagination an entirely free rein, as long as the whims of creation did not interfere with the 'mood' of the work, which was set from the start. Altering a sense of Romantic inspiration, then, is an obviously anti-Romantic practice, the Romantics often choosing a well-known form in order to be the freer in self-expression. Peake's Romanticism, though traditionally subjective rather than objective, is often expressed technically.

A superb craftsman, whether drawing or writing, Peake's technical mastery of a medium was yet only the prerequisite for the revelations of the imagination. While he was influenced by the Neo-Romantic school of the late 1930's and early 40's, he generally followed his own heart in this regard, his self-professed goals suggesting, as Batchelor says, "that he was a Romantic without egotism, an authoritative but not self-righteous artist." [9] Romanticism

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[8] "The Reader Takes Over", a radio discussion of Titus Groan, with introduction and notes by G. Peter Winnington, MPR (Spring, 1980) 10:14.

[9] Mervyn Peake, p.60.

was not so much a position with him but a way of life, totally realizable because totally real. Such a pragmatic Romanticism was part and parcel of the aesthetic filter through which he screened all experience, even agonizing over the automatic vision of a great painting when he comforted a dying victim of the Holocaust. [10]

Poet, playwright, novelist and story-teller, painter, illustrator, costume and set designer, Peake's multi-faceted artistry channelled the fertile imagination of a man who experienced life intensely. Accounts of him bear witness to an unusual openness to the joy and pain of sheer living, as summarized by C.N. Manlove:

> Peake was a man of passionate intensity rather than of intellect or 'rational' convictions.... His experience often lacerated him, but one never loses the sense that he remained in direct contact with life....Peake seems also to have lived almost all his life at full emotional stretch: with him the burst of passion is no momentary thing....His demand for a lifetime in every moment gives Peake a sense of eternity and transience fused in the instant...but also often a feeling of desperation.[11]

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[10] See Peake's poem "The Consumptive. Belsen, 1945" in The Glassblowers (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1950). His tour of the concentration camps in the capacity of a war artist, recording the unprecedented scale of human suffering and inhumanity, traumatized him forever. I believe the experience led him to shape the work he had started at the outbreak of the war toward a stronger indictment of society.

[11] C.N. Manlove, Modern Fantasy: Five Studies (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1975) pp.210-11.

Such descriptions are not unusual among artists; what sets Peake apart is his aesthetic success in so many disparate undertakings. Moreover, his creative efforts in, and comprehension of, these various media interpenetrated each other, in particular an adaptation of artistic methods to the techniques of the wordsmith.

Peake's emphasis on the aesthetic medium, strengthened by an overdetermination of traditional symbolism, confuses exclusively rational approaches that rely on represented content in the narrative, such as any strictly monological, or dualistic, allegorical, or symbolic, interpretation. Concomitantly, he evokes a powerful emotional response by touching upon estranged pre-verbal memories and unconscious, or semi-conscious, experience. While the primary appeal is to associational and affectional logic via sensory cognition, it should not be thought an anti-intellectual approach. As Burgess points out, "It is an intellectual book, in which wit -- in the old sense of cerebral play -- operates at times when we expect only the nerves to be engaged." [12] Peake's method therefore transcends the literary traditions he does employ by incorporating them into a metafictional dimension toward which he adopts an ironic stance. Thus, besides his evocative remembrance of things past, echoes of a literary heritage are also present.

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[12] Introduction to Penguin edition, p.13.

From Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy Peake may have adopted his initially static temporal scheme and tangential interpolations, as well as his typographical vagaries. The fictionalized autobiographical approach of Charles Dickens' David Copperfield, [13] and the centralizing leitmotif of Bleak House are present. Much has also been superficially made of Peake's debt to the Dickensian techniques of caricature and grotesquerie in this regard, although they are distinguishable in both their stylistic method of creation and the implications of their narrative function, as we shall see.

Other favourite works with a more peripheral influence are Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine, Voltaire's Candide, Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island (which Peake could recite verbatim as a young teenager, and whose theme of 'a boy alone', akin to Voltaire's innocent observer, is found throughout Peake's work), Herman Melville's Moby Dick, and James Joyce's Dubliners, Ulysses and Finnegan's Wake. [14]

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[13] Indeed, the villainous Steerpike recalls Uriah Heep physically, though he acts more like, and probably thinks of himself as, the Romantic dandy, Steerforth.

[14] See: MPR (Autumn, 1978) 7:8; Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, pp.14, 114; Tanya Gardiner-Scott, "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic" (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Toronto, 1986) Notes to pp.24, 51 - Interview with Peake's widow, Maeve Gilmore, June 29, 1981. To be published in American University Studies Series IV: English Literature and Language, vol. 105, ed. Peter Lang. Permission to quote from Gardiner-Scott's thesis is gratefully acknowledged.

While it is not the purpose of this essay to establish literary precedents with certitude, it is important to realize Peake's powers of assimilation as a reader. Recognized in his time as 'the greatest living illustrator', a title not to be achieved without profound empathy with the spirit of another's work, his illustrations of Lewis Carroll's Alice books have been said to rival Tenniel's, and his "Ancient Mariner" to supersede Dore's depiction of Coleridge's poem. [15] Such a gift argues an assimilative level of artistic sophistication that seems odd for a writer as well known for children's literature and nonsense verse as for social naiveté. [16] Yet, for Peake, being judged 'childlike' was not an epithet of reprobation; it was perhaps the price paid, quite consciously, for remaining open to the fullest experience of life, a studied innocence that can by no means be related to ignorance.

The child of medical missionaries in China, Peake was more than familiar with the Bible; it was, indeed, an enduring background in the moral sensibility of all he created. His religious beliefs, however, were not a matter of outward show, but, like his Romantic tendencies, practised as a way of living. He always mistrusted organized

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[15] By Tim Mitchell and Peter Stap among others in issues of MPR.

[16] Batchelor, Mervyn Peake; John Watney, Mervyn Peake (London: Michael Joseph, 1976).

institutions, attracted artistically to their ritual expression but repelled by the social implications for human freedom, and preferred to express his faith through what can only be called a love of life:

> How foreign to the spirit's early beauty
> And to the amoral integrity of the mind
> And to all those whose reserve of living is lovely
> Are the tired creeds that can be so unkind.

As Batchelor comments on these lines:

> [T]he faith in a notion of love which is free from all moral laws, is an important element in his attitude to Christianity and prevents him from making a full commitment to any one 'coven' of Christians....[H]e is a natural pantheist. [17]

It is not irrelevant, then, that Peake altered two lines from "An Author's Apology for his Book" in John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress when he chose an epigraph for the 'Titus books': "Dost thou love picking meat? Or woulds't thou see // A man in the clouds, and have him speak to thee?" The alteration, from 'hear' to 'have', switches responsibility from external to internal source, from introjection to projection, an indication that Peake, in a logically extreme concordance with his Congregationalist upbringing, distanced himself from belief in divine Providence by favouring total personal responsibility for beliefs and acts. The epigraph also

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[17] "How Foreign to the Spirit's Early Beauty", A Reverie of Bone, cited by Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.162. See also p.108 for discussion of Peake's personalized Christianity.

polarizes a choice between unconscious instinctual drives and an abstract, reified religious response to the human condition; it is a choice resonating throughout the 'Titus books', situating a contextual ambiguity, and encapsulating the interpretive dilemma, as we shall see. Moreover, these two antithetical poles inform all Peake's work, a dichotomy that he is aware of, but often unable to resolve:

> (Irreconcilable, an april angel
> Dazing one half of me and that triumphant
> Pagan of thoughtless hooves and violent laughter
> Filling the other.) [18]

Peake's symbolic signification is characteristically overdetermined to the point of logical inconsistency, but for a purpose of emphasizing the understanding conveyed by the senses and the heart before that of the mind. Thus, critical interpretation of the 'Titus books' cannot achieve more than an approxima ion to a central meaning unless the subliminal aesthetic vehicle for the story forms the base of a gradually evolving apprehension. This means of comprehension, present at all times, is the subversive force behind the inadequacy of all constrictively rational critical interpretations to deal fully with the work. Burgess suggests this central paradox of Peake's Postmodern novel:

> And it is as we near the end of Titus Groan that

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[18] "They Move With Me, My War-Ghosts", Shapes and Sounds (Village Press, 1974). Cited from Laurence Bristow-Smith, "Mr. Pye, or The Evangelist and the Dead Whale", MPR (Autumn, 1978) 7:17.

> we realize the propriety of applying the term 'epic' in an exact sense. The book is closer to ancient pagan romance than to traditional British fiction....And the magnificence of the language denotes an epic concept. [19]

The assertion is true, I think, not exactly in the generic sense Burgess implies here (he continues with a description of represented content which should be understood as metaphoric), but in the literary sense of the aesthetic medium's service as the vehicle for cultural values in an epic. Especially with such Postmodern epic novels as the 'Titus books' where an ontological concern with modes of being dominates the work rather than the epistemological explorations of Modernism.

Obviously, I have an interest in adding to the reputation of a favourite writer who, I feel, has been underestimated because critically misunderstood. At the same time, an altered view of Peake's method in his main work, the 'Titus books', allows several interesting theoretical problems, both social and literary, to be addressed.

Socially, some contemporary psychoanalytic and Marxist theory, such as that espoused by Jaques Lacan and Louis Althusser respectively, has denied the very possibility of an autonomous self, claiming that, because the self is constituted by and in not only a linguistic capacity but a

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[19] Introduction to Penguin edition, p.11-12.

culturally constrained language, the sense of an individual self is the modern myth par excellence. Using Herbert Marcuse's philosophical development of Freudian theory, this thesis attempts to demonstrate that an ontological faith is grounded in the aesthetic imagination.

The second, and more interesting problem from a literary standpoint, stems from the first by developing the consequences for aesthetic creations. In particular, this allows for a greater understanding of the novelistic form in contrast to the epic. While theorists such as Georg Lukacs and Mikhail Bakhtin describe the epic and the novel as antithetical forms, I attempt to apply their historically limited analyses to the Postmodern novel, and thus demonstrate a contemporary formal fusion, the historical reasons for this evolution, and the social significance of such a literary sport as an epic novel.

CHAPTER ONE

AESTHETIC ONTOLOGY IN THE EPIC OF THE IMAGINATION

> They say there is enough to last a man a lifetime in the study of...an acorn;...But specialization seems to me to be a sterile thing unless...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.
>
> 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 --
>
> - Mervyn Peake

The Critical Problem

While in-depth analysis of the Peakian aesthetic follows in Chapter Two, demonstrating how his stylistic pantechnicon effects significance in the 'Titus books', a brief outline of Peake's general stylistic tendencies will, I hope, situate the theoretical discussion which complements the later interpretation.

Peake pointedly reverses the traditional hierarchy of literary composition, moving from a stylistic representation of basic human experience toward abstract themes comprehendable by the intellect, rather than proceeding from designed skeletal framework to fleshed-out mimesis of reality. It is creation from the ground up, if you will, with maximum allowance for the free development of the imagination, yet with a simultaneous internal consistency that both flavours the sequence of events with inevitability and supports an almost private symbolism. The single avenue for any possible apprehension of the latter is aesthetic.

But herein lies a major problem. Instead of a simple, overt thematic conveyance of significance, Peake not only creates extensive description, beggaring extratextual topicality by contrast, and imagery of such power as to make the term 'painterly' applicable to few others, but all intellectual concepts are invariably 'illustrated', or actively shown, rather than superimposed directly as narratorial commentary upon the work.

Overall, the novels' events are organized by a number of metaphorically analogical structures: a history of human psychological development, a Twentieth Century history of England, and a history of literature. The aesthetic result is never comparable to allegorical 'still life', however, because his stylization incorporates the perceptual relativity which stems from a representedly fallacious

visual mimesis. This conceptually concrete but stylistically fluid approach toward composition of episodes which, structurally, form a complex network of metaphorical significance, appeals to the intellect on a level neither easily grasped nor, therefore, amenable to easy classification.

Thematic evidence is thus somewhat opaque. Because topical intrusion in his narration is minimal, usually restricted to textual effects -- problems of vision or character reliability -- that have extratextual significance only metaphorically, the reader becomes responsible for the direct attribution of a causal system, such as a sociological interpretation. Nor can interpretation rely on the slight narratorial explanation of character motivation because the level of irony in the presentation forestalls judgement, to the extent that, if ignored, it entraps the reader in a self-romanticized delusion comparable to that of the characters. In other words, the Romantic idealism of the characters is equivalent to a monological, or factually one-to-one, approach to interpretation. Peake's sparse, enigmatic comments concerning his novels complicate the task by forcing the critic to rely on the author's theories of art, generally aligned with the Neo-Romantics of the late 1930's and early 1940's.

It is a Romanticism that has assimilated the social revolutions of Marx and Freud, if you will, for no other

reason than historical situation. Apolitical, unlike Orwell and other post-war authors, Peake nevertheless understood the ideological subjectification implicit in socio-economic systems: "We do not see with our eyes, but with our trades....We only see what we understand; and we are thus very nearly blind. But total blindness is reserved for those whose vision is functional." [20] The metaphor refers to blinkers rather than Marx's chains, and the orientation is artistic, not sociological, but the insight is identical: "It is not so much the blindness as the love of blinkers that spells stagnation." [21] Peake's brand of Romanticism, then, is infused with self-reflexive awareness of the 'blindness' vision can be. He expresses profound thought indirectly, as 'illustration', in a Romanticism always opposed to the cynical: "There is no essential difference between the vision of a dog and a practical man." [22] With evident artistry of a high intellectual standard, verbal wit that never spoke mundanely nor pandered to the marketplace but demanded the full involvement of its audience, Peake's work always sought to provoke an imaginative response.

Intellectually compact and stylistically extravagant

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[20] "The Artist's World", a talk in the BBC radio series "As I See It", MPR (Spring, 1979) 8:3.

[21] Introduction to The Drawings of Mervyn Peake, in Mervyn Peake: Writings and Drawings, eds. Gilmore & Johnson, p.81.

[22] "The Artist's World", MPR (Spring, 1979) 8:3.

all in a breath, his Romantic style seems not so much to be projected outward onto the world, but a result of the world forcing itself upon him, a world which "includes the whole physical and spiritual alphabet from the A of a distilled glory to the Z of vileness." [23] Everything, including sociology and psychology, is filtered through an aesthetic perception of the world's sheer polyphony:

> The endless generous profligacy of every sliding second -- and nothing moves but has its repercussions. A hundred tales, and labelled ways of life, each with its rhythms and jargons. But how few they are, these trades, compared with the subtle, secret nameless paths that, once upon a time, shone like a sun-glance in the early mind. The paths, the phantom-trades, or trails, have been lost forever. The talents that never bore fruit or even flowered: the forgotten talents; the murdered talents; the shamefaced talents; the talents of such uniqueness that they have no bearing upon the theme of keeping alive or of embodiment; the talents that were so original that they were broken beneath the stamping feet of boyhood as something too delicate to be allowed.
>
> Where are the inklings gone? The sapling notions? The unflamed oracles of the obscure? Where are the masterpieces of such strange colour that there was no form of art could gather them in -- no playground for them; no garden for the alabaster urchin?
>
> Oddities of speech, forsaken, buried for ever. An aunt with dyspepsia heaped the black earth of her irritation and stupidity over the phantom plant -- the coined speech of a child who is now a grocer in Hounslow. There is nothing left of the Yorrick tongue, and no rebellion in the man, for he has forgotten wherein lay the tyranny. Yet there is something in the rakish lock of hair he trains across his forehead. He does not know it, but it is the gesture of something lost. His mind has never pushed through the black earth which his aunt once heaped upon it. She who has long since died still lives in the death of her

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[23] Ibid, p.5.

nephew, the scissor'd grocer. [24]

This excerpt from a boulevardier extravaganza exemplifies everything Peake stood for, and against; in particular, for the preservation of uniqueness, variety and multiplicity, celebrated in tone and aesthetic if bewailed in content, and against any repressive social reduction of the individual. The fluid shifts of perspective, now internal, now external, the associative links in construction, the 'illustrated' conceptions, the overt tragi-comic tone of conscious exaggeration, and the underlying simple emotional appeal are all typical of Peake's prose, the vehicle for what he called 'equipoise':

> Those threadbare terms 'classic', 'romantic', have little meaning when the finest examples of any master's work are contemplated, for the first thing one finds is that they have that most magisterial of qualities, 'equipoise'. They are compelling because they are not 'classic' and because they are not 'romantic'. They are both and they are neither. They are balanced upon a razor's edge between the passion and the intellect, between the compulsive and the architectonic. Out of this fusion there erupts that thing called 'style'....It is as though they paint, draw, write, or compose with their own blood. Most artists work with other people's blood. But sooner or later aesthetic theft shows its anaemic head.
> * * * *
> This is the problem of the artist -- to discover his language. It's a lifelong search for when the idiom is found it has then to be developed and sharpened. But worse than no style is a mannerism -- a formula for producing effects, the fruit of suicide.

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[24] "London Fantasy", in Mervyn Peake: Writings and Drawings, eds. Gilmore & Johnson, p.78. Also reprinted in MPR (Spring, 1983) 16:11-15. First appeared in World Review (1949).

> If I am asked whether all this is not just a little 'intense' -- in other words, if it is suggested that it doesn't really matter, I say that it matters fundamentally. For one may as well be asked, 'Does life matter?' -- 'Does man matter?' If man matters, then the highest flights of his mind and imagination matter. His vision matters, his sense of wonder, his vitality matters. It gives the lie to the nihilists and those who cry 'Woe!' in the streets. For art is the voice of man, naked, militant, and unashamed. [25]

The blunt assertion of the last sentences indicates the Postmodern leanings in Peake's variety of Romanticism. Fully aware, as an artist, that perception affords no final surety, Peake responds directly to epistemological doubt with the faith that imaginative projection and perception 'matters fundamentally'. His overall goal of 'equipoise' is, I think, a term for the concrete aesthetic apprehension, and comprehension, of life.

While Peake's Romanticism has its roots in the more abstract theories Coleridge propounded in his Biographia Literaria, the difference is in the degree of self-consciousness accompanying their embrace of an ideal that is, on Peake's part, a self-conscious acquiescence leading, not to idealism, but to the construction of a program for

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[25] Introduction to The Drawings of Mervyn Peake, in Mervyn Peake: Writings and Drawings, eds. Gilmore & Johnson, pp.81-2. Elsewhere, Peake has defined art as magic, or diffuse eroticism: 'For art is ultimately sorcery'; 'Art is sex in another guise'.

'ts realistic attainment. [26] Gary K. Wolfe pinpoints the difference in "The Encounter with Fantasy":

> [C]ognitive recognition of specific impossibilities may serve to signal us that a given work is a fantasy, but it will not sustain us through multiple volumes of narrative -- and in some cases, as with the Gormenghast Trilogy, it is difficult to pinpoint any such cognitive impossibility at all. [27]

This strange anomaly is explainable through the terms of Brian McHale's analysis of Postmodern fiction, in which he concludes that its variety of the Fantasy/Fantastic format is primarily differentiated from Modernist by "the shift of dominant from problems of knowing to problems of modes of being -- from an epistemological dominant to an ontological

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[26] S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, vol. 1, ed. J. Shawcross (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) While the 'Titus books' as a whole might be seen as agreeing with Coleridge's definition of Fancy rather than Imagination, (see chap. XIII, p.202) the fluidity of Peake's metaphorical analogies aligns his work with the latter. Moreover, I would suggest that Coleridge's definition of the Primary Imagination can be equated with pre-verbal sensory cognition, his definition of the Secondary Imagination with Freud's basic repression and Jaques Lacan's Imaginary Order, and of Fancy with Lacan's Symbolic Order and Herbert Marcuse's surplus repression (see Section Two of this chapter). Peake concretizes the distinction textually with the opposition between Steerpike and Titus, who represent the 'head' and the 'heart' respectively: it is the surplus repression of Steerpike's imagination which ultimately usurps the 'cerebral beast', the generative power of Titus' imagination which allows him to escape, not unscathed, the social dynamic of organized domination.

[27] In The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art, ed. Roger C. Schlobin (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1982) p.4.

one." [28] Peake shockingly confronts the reader with precisely this shift in 'dominant', for he not only presents the viable alternative of a fully realized world, but forces that problem into an overt thematic concern by creating another as different and as isolated from the first as the first is from ours. The problem raised by Peake in juxtaposing two worlds without points of contact is essentially a question of ontological uncertainty and instability. Resolution of this problem is especially critical to any interpretation because the more overt social satire of the third book reflects retrospectively on the purpose of the first two with their more enigmatic suggestion of structural analogies.

Further, the aesthetic presentation of Gormenghast is not an epistemological exploration. Peake curiously dwelt on the difficulty of remaining in contact with what he envisioned ontologically:

> ...I made drawings...which helped me to visualize the characters and to imagine what they would say. The drawings were never exactly as I imagined the people, but were near enough for me to know when their voices lost touch with their heads. [29]

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[28] Brian McHale, Postmodern Fiction (New York & London: Methuen, 1987) p.10. McHale's emphasis; all emphasis is that of the cited author unless otherwise indicated.

[29] "How A Romantic Novel Was Evolved", in A New Romantic Anthology, Stefan Schimanski & Henry Treece, eds. (Grey Walls Press, 1949).

This undertaking would be perfectly understandable in the case of an ordinary author, but not for the 'greatest living illustrator'; we might well ask why Peake achieved near perfect empathy with others' work, but had great difficulty with the illustration of his own.

The Peakian aesthetic is grounded in an artistic opposition: the visual fallacy in literary mimesis provokes an intellectual response of verbal wit and conceptual 'illustration'. Consequently, Modernist epistemology is superseded:

> Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability....the sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bidirectional and reversible ....In postmodernist texts...epistemology is backgrounded, as the price for foregrounding ontology.[30]

The aesthetic medium is foregrounded, then, in such a way as to reserve a fundamental ontology for the work, while forcing any epistemological exploration to be the enterprise of the reader. Because how an object or act is described in Peake's prose is at least as important as what he is describing, the reader is confronted with an established existence, an ontological fact, and, hence becomes responsible for the attribution of significance, indeed must epistemologically recreate the way that fact is known. Consequently, if the world presented in Titus Alone is a

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[30] McHale, Postmodern Fiction, p.11.

somewhat more bitter social satire of our own in contrast to the submerged satiric undertones of Gormenghast, the more surrealistic tone and theme of its presentation also question the implicit assumptions of the reader concerning the reality of the Castle on an ontological level. Thus, the divergent interpretations of the 'Titus books' are directly due to Peake addressing problems of pluralistic ontological status by backgrounding epistemological concerns. This tendency in Postmodernism is easily confused with its source in the Gothic novel, the first genre in the form to foreground epistemology.

David Punter includes Peake in a broad list of Modern Gothic writers by claiming that Gothic as a descriptive term has become widely diffuse. [31] Though the Gothic is an obvious influence on Peake, it is so, first, as part of his literary background -- literally derived from Dickens and Melville, and more generally as the historical ancestor of Postmodernism; second, as part of his artistic background as painter, illustrator, etc.; [32] and finally, as it is

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[31] David Punter, The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day (London & New York: Longman, 1980) p.373-4. The list includes: Isak Dinesen, John Hawkes, Joyce Carol Oates, William Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, etc. While the Modern and Postmodern novels owe an obvious debt to their Gothic heritage, the past does not define the present, even though an understanding of the Gothic genre may help us understand later developments.

[32] It is easy to see, for example, a link between John Ruskin's social theorizing in The Stones of Venice and Peake's comments on functional vision cited earlier.

historically distanced, having passed through a temporal filter. In regard to the last, William Patrick Day's analysis of Gothic as parodying contemporaneous Realism by exposing inherited Romance attitudes toward masculine and feminine identities surely implies that modern Gothic would be partly aware of such a trend. [33] It parodies its ancestral parodies, as it were. Further, this development is applicable to Peake's use of the grotesque. When the grotesque appears in a fiction with at least the intent of realism (a necessary prerequisite to achieving the desired effect), its effect is a revelation of the existential Absurd. What, on the other hand, is its effect in a work having as its first premise that it exists in the Absurd? Is it not a revelatory reversal?

At the least this dilemma focusses the problems of a critical approach to Peake: on the one horn, it seems misguided to apply the standards of Realism to a work with no such overt intent; while, on the other, we become impaled on a descriptional power so enthralling as to eclipse the efforts of many celebrated Realists. C.N. Manlove comes to

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[33] William Patrick Day, In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1985). Day's analysis of Gothic fiction is the most complete dissection of literary techniques in Fantasy I have yet read. His reader response theory of textual enthrallment in the Gothic genre supports my critique of critical interpretations of Peake by allowing fine distinctions between aesthetic presentation and purpose.

mind as the perfect example of a critic so goring himself. Bullish on the lack of distance between Peake and his fantasy, Manlove incredulously chastizes every fantastic occurrence. [34]

Punter, despite pigeonholing the 'Titus books' as modern Gothic, at least recognizes their purpose:

> ...within the field of fantasy itself...one text stands out, not least because it clearly has as its origin a partly traumatised attempt to deal with the war...and with the issues of social organization associated with it." [35]

In the final analysis, however, he, like Manlove, projects his own attraction to Peake's loving depiction of an enclosed world, interpreting the author's aesthetic as a personal escape, without noting his careful elaboration of that world's implicit faults in the events of the subsequent story, a process repeated by Peake in the third book. To ignore the ironic presentation throughout is to blithely consign the 'Titus books' to the bin of escapist Fantasy as a simple story of Romance. It is a defect of judgement exacerbated by the very claims of subtle social habit, custom and ritualized thinking which Peake elaborates only

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[34] See his Modern Fantasy for an example of the almost schizophrenic reaction Peake's 'Titus books' provoke when approached from an angle of traditional criticism. At the outset of his argument, Manlove states: "There can be few fantasies so immune to the charge of escapism as Peake's trilogy, unless we so indict the author for trying to cut himself free from his own imaginary landscape." [p.217] His argument, however, attempts precisely that.

[35] The Literature of Terror, p.376.

to prove their culpability in diminishing humanity.

In response to those critics who regard Peake's excentric work as merely eccentric, as a simple escapist Fantasy, I find that the irony in his verbal wit, extended word play, 'illustration' of abstract conceptions, etc., do not allow the reader anything but an uneasy involvement with such metafiction. What the narrator says of the "Masque of the Four" holds true for the entire work:

> For although a strong strain of the ridiculous ran through everything, this was not the dominant impression....there was no laughter but only a kind of relief, for the grandeur of the spectacle, and the godlike rhythms of each sequence were of such a nature that there were few present who were not affected as by some painful memory of childhood. [36]

Peakian Fantasy always threatens a dangerous involvement for the lax reader. Reminders that this is a verbal construct, permeating the novels on multiple levels, should balance the tempting attraction of the visual appeal.

Thus, to see the characters as Rosemary Jackson does, simply "as romance agents in a magical narrative of good (Titus) against evil (Steerpike)", despite her claim that Peake "offers no false promise of redemption", ignores the self-reflexive lessons of the aesthetic imagination and, hence, falls prey to textual temptation, enthralled with an

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[36] Mervyn Peake, Gormenghast (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1974 [Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1950]) p.331. All subsequent references will be to the Penguin edition, and will be incorporated into the body of the text in an abbreviated form [G].

illusion of Romance in exactly the same way as the characters. [37] As we shall see, Peake's initial structure of binaries in the first volume receives figural representation in the theme of conflict in the second, and the ironic undercutting of such black/white moral propaganda supports Titus' realization of how hollow the victory over an evil 'scapegoat' actually is, ultimately leading to his rejection of Gormenghast's valorized tradition.

Jackson is correct in identifying Peake's work as "a literature with an excess of signifiers deprived of meaning", but the effect is due more, I think, to ontological instability. [38] The 'Titus books' are close to a Kafkaesque overdetermined indeterminacy, but by reason of their Postmodernism: "Everything is potentially allegorical, but nothing is actually an allegory." [39]

She rightly asserts, "Unlike the marvellous or the mimetic, the fantastic is a mode of writing which enters a dialogue with the 'real' and incorporates that dialogue as part of its essential structure." [40] However, irony in the

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[37] Rosemary Jackson, Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion (London & New York: Methuen, 1981) p.163. In formulating an overall theory of Fantasy, Jackson does not take historical developments into account vis-a-vis the evolution of the novel.

[38] Ibid, p.162.

[39] McHale, Postmodern Fiction, p.141.

[40] Fantasy, p.36.

Fantastic is an unstable tool when applied to the novel's Postmodern variant. Jackson claims, "Namings of otherness in fantasies betray the ideological assumptions of the author and of the culture in which they originate...they inscribe social values within the text...." [41] Peake's method complies with her formulation on a simple moral level, linking Steerpike with Satan, for example, but then questions the identification, erasing the 'naming' in such a way as to confront the reader with the process, just as Gormenghast's 'inscription of social values' is ontologically problematized by Titus Alone.

Like any other human product, the conservative and subversive tendencies inherent in the epic and the novel respectively were originally socially determined. What had, epically, been externalized in social institutions -- whether a tradition of oral myths, or state or religion -- becomes novelistically internalized in the individual because of a profound, though often unconscious, loss of faith in society to provide meaningful identity. As we shall see, civilization is an unavoidable part of human development; a particular culture or society, however, is neither determined, impervious to change, nor capable of completely determining its subjects.

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[41] Ibid, p.53.

Nor does Titus 'end' as Jackson claims, "on an endless quest for meaning" in a picaresque adventure story. [42] Peake presents his 'picaro' in Titus Alone as a fusion of the Modern hero's quest for identity with the epic hero's descent to the hellish underworld, and his plan for the fourth book is picaresque only on the surface. As McHale suggests, Postmodernism adopts the picaresque from Modernism but, because the former shifts the dominant from epistemology to ontology, "the quest of the picaro is animated throughout by a visionary or Utopian hunger for a more perfect social order." [43] Peake symbolizes Titus' synthesis by erasing the social imposition (his titles) on an identity which is emotionally preserved through Titus' memory (his name), for he has internalized his past totally, proclaiming 'I AM' in a kind of Coleridgian godhead. [44] A rejection of Romantic Transcendentalism (the mountain) as much as literary epic totality (Gormenghastian ritual), Titus' subsequent departure entails redemptive freedom precisely because he has returned to liberate himself from the vicious circle of social subjectification; his alien discourse will continue to displace the hierarchies encountered because they, not he, are alienated. Titus'

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[42] Ibid, p.164.

[43]. Postmodern Fiction, p.172

[44] Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Thesis VI, 3-12, p.183.

final 'incorporation' of his past, then, should be understood in the Bakhtinian sense of the word, as an imaginative synthesis of carnivalized public identity with the selfhood of private memory, an incorporation which internalizes reified, or institutionalized, values in order to activate them; values, by definition (or, rather, non-definition) existing only in acts. [45]

This indicates Titus' continuance as the founder of a new cultural order, if not as Redeemer, for Titus Alone's concluding revelation of a synthetic imagination equates the hero's self-discovery with the values implicit in Peake's aesthetic of the imagination, and the living, active nature of the latter is such as to preclude the nostalgic redemption of the past. What Titus does 'redeem' is "what postmodern fiction imitates, the object of its mimesis,...the pluralistic and anarchistic ontological landscapes of advanced industrial cultures." [46]

Tanya Gardiner-Scott identifies the deepening pessimism of the 'Titus books' as the vision of a Dark Romantic, despite her in-depth analysis of perceptual relativity in the author's aesthetic, because she takes Titus' return for

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[45] See Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

[46] McHale, Postmodern Fiction, p.38.

the ascending curve of Romance. [47] It seems to me, however, that Titus' surfacing from a metaphorical underworld of ontological doubt is more Nietzchean. Herbert Marcuse, in describing Nietzchean philosophy, describes the pattern Titus traces: "The consummation of being is, not the ascending curve, but the closing of the circle: the re-turn from alienation." [48] But, as with Nietzche, "the centre is everywhere" because of the mediatory aesthetic imagination's grounding in the widely diffuse, polymorphous eroticism of sensory cognition: "The eternal return is the will and vision of an erotic [hence, active] attitude toward being for which necessity and fulfillment coincide." [49] Fantastically, Titus both 'closes the circle', and does not. [50]

Because Postmodernist fiction is an 'indirectly realistic' development stemming from both idealistic

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[47] See "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic" for the applicability to the 'Titus books' of the pattern of Romance as expounded by Northrop Frye, The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1976).

[48] Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry Into Freud (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966 [1955]) p.118.

[49] Ibid, p.122.

[50] To be fair, Frye's Romance pattern is not far off the mark; themes of ascent indicate "the creative power in man that is returning to its original awareness." [p.157] The continual resurgence of this traditional pattern, however, is due to social surplus repression; its repetition, therefore, is not nostalgic regression, but caused by an artifical blockage of ontogenetic progress.

tendencies in Romanticism and the failure of the 'Realistic' novel, it is not incidental that it "has close affinities with the genre of the fantastic....", for:

> ...these texts hesitate between the literal and the allegorical -- just as, from another perspective, they hesitate between the representation of a world and the anti-representational foregrounding of language for its own sake.[51]

The 'hesitation' is similar to Tzvetan Todorov's structural definition of the Fantastic as the boundary of hesitation between the natural (uncanny) and the supernatural (marvellous) that, with Peake, is tied to the interpretive attribution of meaning, but again it demonstrates the shift of dominant from the epistemological.[52] It is, in this sense, a hesitation akin to the tragi-comic grotesque, a generic 'antithesis without synthesis' due to the suspension of both elements in an unresolved dynamic tension. Its purpose is to displace concentric social influence, under which the aesthetic imagination relapses into either tragedy or comedy, both these literary resolutions to expression of the human condition remaining inside a hierarchy of social domination over the individual. Though ontology is thus equated with a linguistic formation of the individual

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[51] McHale, Postmodern Fiction, pp. 74, 82-3.

[52] Tzvetan Todorov, The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre, trans. Richard Howard (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1973).

subject, monological socio-codification, or ideological subjectification, does not necessarily valorize promoted values absolutely. The ambiguity implicit in language ensures the failure of any social attempt to appropriate its shaping factors entirely. Only the ex-centric, then, can truly renew the social circle; this is tne aesthetic 'message' of the Postmodern novel.

Jackson's conservative argument that "[t]he uncanny expresses drives which have to be repressed for the sake of cultural unity" fails to see that those drives are expressed in that manner precisely because of cultural surplus repression. [53] This is the submerged rock of social disquisition in Peake's aesthetic upon which many interpreters' outmoded theories of Fantasy and the Fantastic have foundered, and which I hope to avoid by charting its Postmodern presence.

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The Socio-political Problem

The philosophical exposition of Peake's aesthetic finds its corollary in the postulates of Herbert Marcuse, a theory which not only provides a finely-tuned tool for literary

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[53] Fantasy, p.70.

criticism, especially of the novel's literary history and reflection of social history, but is the more advantageous because of its development -- through a socio-philosophical critique of Freudian psychodynamics explicitly and Marxist socio-economic theory implicitly -- of Kantian and Hegelian aesthetics, from abstract theory to a realizable, if idealistic, program. Marcuse offers a workable alternative to an impossibly mystical Romantic ideal, such as that Coleridge attempted to define in his Biographia Literaria;[54] he offers an aesthetic utterly conscious of ideology: "The discipline of aesthetics installs the order of sensuousness as against the order of reason." [55]

To paraphrase his philosophical theory, Marcuse first reiterates Freud in the following way. Civilization, as we know it historically, is necessarily based on a hierarchical privileging of reason over appetite because the individual's uncontrolled desires must be regulated by submission to a reality principle in order to ensure survival in a world where conditions of scarcity prevail. Such basic repression is for the good of the individual as well as the community. Further, basic repression is the natural developmental course of humanity by definition, phylogenetically and

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[54] I suspect Coleridge of duplicity in leaving the reader to imagine the later development of his theory. The self-addressed letter and the Miltonic reference which conclude the Biographia seem deliberate; a proof by example.

[55] Eros and Civilization, p.181.

ontogenically. Marcuse's philosophical development of Freudian psychology is socio-economically oriented. He claims that in a society or culture where even the potential for removing the conditions of scarcity exists, the biological necessity for basic repression is confused with cultural repression by historically contingent social institutions, and actually is expressed as the organized domination of hierarchical privilege:

> While any form of the reality principle demands a considerable degree and scope of repressive control over the instincts...the specific interests of domination introduce additional controls over and above those indispensable for civilized human association....The power to restrain and guide instinctual drives...increases rather than decreases gratification....Such restrictions of the instincts....have become the privilege and distinction of man which enabled him to transform the blind necessity of the fulfillment of want into desired gratification. [56]

Beyond the need for, and benefits of, basic repression, however, individual desires are forced into submission to a performance principle, with an effect of surplus repression, an artificial subjectification which ensures only the survival of hierarchical privilege, such as in patriarchy or Gormenghast, and depersonalizes the individual, such as in Peake's perfect example, the "Grey Scrubbers" [57], whose

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[56] Ibid, pp.37-8.

[57] Mervyn Peake, Titus Groan (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972 [Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1946]) p.27ff. All subsequent references will be to the Penguin edition, and will be incorporated into the body of the text in an abbreviated form [TG].

hereditary function has so ironed out their features as to erase any wrinkle of humanity. The resulting effect of centuries of social domination is explainable only in terms of surplus repression: "Within the total structure of the repressed personality, surplus-repression is that portion which is the result of specific societal conditions sustained in the specific interest of domination." [58]

Philosophically, a disproportionate, because socially organized, domination of reason over appetite has simultaneously entailed domination over sensory cognition and associational, affectional logic. This artificial privileging of the abstract intellect and pure logic (monological thought) leads to the social reification of ideals, and their institutional valorization. Culturally, while the glories of civilization can be attributed to basic repression, the artificial imbalance privileging intellect, leading to the organized domination of the individual, must take the blame for the horrors of recorded history.

More important for my purpose here, the aesthetic implications of the novel are historicized in a profoundly socio-psychological dialectic: the rise of the novel with its implicit 'raison d'être' of Bakhtinian carnivalization[59] is directly tied to the Industrial Revolution, and the death

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[58] Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p.85.

[59] See Section Three of this chapter.

of the 'Realistic' novel is as foreordained as the fall of Empires, as is the survival of its Fantasy/Fantastic line of development in post-industrial society. We can observe the growth of the novel from the Gothic soil of Romantic excess, through the subversive stem of Dickens' social conscience, to the bud of epistemology in the Modern novel, and its ontological flowering in Postmodernism. What fruit is to be produced? What strange fruit but the epic of the aesthetic imagination:

> The truths of imagination are first realized when phantasy itself takes form, when it creates a universe of perception and comprehension -- a subjective and at the same time objective universe. This occurs in art. The analysis of the cognitive function of phantasy is thus led to aesthetics as the 'science of beauty': behind the aesthetic form lies the repressed harmony of sensuousness and reason -- the eternal protest against the organization of life by the logic of domination, the critique of the performance principle.[60]

Sociologically, this means escaping the social dynamic by displacing the hierarchy, if there is to be any chance of true regeneration. Because this is the ethico-metaphysical meaning toward which the novelistic form tends in its historical development, the Postmodern epic implies aesthetically an 'atopia', which, initially, refuses social rationality and morality, tragic re-integration to society, comic restoration of society, and nostalgia for the past,

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[60] Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp.143-4.

but eventually redefines them. [61] I prefer the term atopia in order to distinguish the kind of metafictional reality I have in mind from: first, the traditional good/bad dichotomy of utopian/dystopian fiction, as accomplished by an amoral displacement: second, from the extremes of an idealized construct (though this might be construed as splitting hairs) or a great disillusionment. [62] An atopia, then, is what I describe elsewhere as a culture alienated from the physically existing culture, but extant in the imagination, a culture existing no less than a sense of self exists. From a Marcusian perspective, Postmodernism is thus the bastion of the unadulterated aesthetic imagination in a post-industrial age.

The problem for Postmodernism, and the problem for Peake, is how such a subversive ideological aesthetic can be represented in language that has been monologically appropriated by social traditions. As Douwe Fokkema

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[61] The fear of anarchic excess subsequent to the displacement, not the replacement, of rational order is an illusion of the very hierarchy which causes such excesses, operating in a manner akin to Michel Foulcault's explanation of how social institutions retain the means of sustaining themselves through the artificial exclusion of a certain sector of their makeup. See The Use of Pleasure, vol 2 of The History of Sexuality, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1986). Though I have not read them, I understand that his Madness and Civilization and Discipline and Punishment follow the same line of argument.

[62] Indeed, the utopian/dystopian distinction brings Georg Lukacs' division of the novel into Abstract Idealism and Romanticism of Disillusionment to mind. See Section Three of this chapter.

suggests, the Postmodernist grants "an ontological status to objects that exist merely in the mind"; however, "In the universe of Postmodernism, words invent our world, words shape our world, words are becoming the sole justification for our world." [63] It is a conundrum Peake poses for the reader as much as for himself, and, typically, the irony cuts both ways, for Steerpike's insincere flattery of the Twins applies metafictionally to all human communication:

> After a long silence during which Steerpike had been warming his hands at the blaze Cora said, 'Do you mean that I'm glorious?'
>
> 'That's not what he said,' came Clarice's flat voice.
>
> 'Glorious,' said Steerpike, 'is a dictionary word. We are all imprisoned by the dictionary. We choose out of that vast, paper-walled prison our convicts, the little black printed words, when in truth we need fresh sounds to utter, new enfranchised noises which would produce a new effect. In dead and shackled language, my dears, you <u>are</u> glorious, but oh, to give vent to a brand new sound that might convince you of what I really think of you, as you sit there in your purple splendour, side by side! But no, it is impossible. Life is too fleet for onomatopoeia. Dead words defy me. I can make no sound, dear ladies, that is apt.'
>
> 'You could try,' said Clarice. 'We aren't busy.' [<u>TG</u>, 287]

Impossible or not, Peake tries to suggest 'new sounds' via his aesthetic by closing off traditional avenues of literary signification in order to propose an alternative route to

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[63] Douwe Fokkema, <u>Literary History, Modernism and Postmodernism</u> (The Harvard University Ersasmus Lectures, Spring, 1983) <u>Utrecht Publications in General and Comparative Literature</u>, vol. 19 (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Co., 1984) p.45.

the entrapped reader. To this end, he is enforced to employ 'dictionary words', but he escapes imprisonment through the self-made tunnel of their stylistic combination, much as James Joyce did, though obviously by applying a different method.

At the beginning of Gormenghast, Peake explains the necessity for the prefatory first volume, Titus Groan, in order to comprehend fully the life of the main character in spite of the latter's only being eighteen months old at its close. He reviews a ghostly gallery of characters, some dead, though present, some yet among the living, though absent from the Castle. Peake, however, only employs the Gothic tradition of ghosts in order to indicate the influential childhood memory of pre-verbal experience:

> These, then, in thumbnail, the Lost Characters. The initial few, who, dying, deserted the hub of the castle's life before Titus was three. The future hung on their activities. Titus himself is meaningless without them, for in his infancy he fed on footsteps, on the patterns that figures made against high ceilings, their hazy outlines, their slow or rapid movements, their varying odours and voices.
>
> Nothing that stirs but has its repercussions, and it may well be that Titus will hear the echoes, when a man, of what was whispered then. For it was no static assembly of personalities into which Titus was launched -- no mere pattern, but an arabesque in motion whose thoughts were actions....[G, p.11]

Sequentially, the reader is placed in the same position as Titus, for the powerful primary appeal to sensory cognition in the first volume creates a backdrop, working

unconsciously, and unconsciously apperceived for the most part, which adds a pre-verbal layer of significance to the action of the second.

Now, in contrast to Marcuse's libertarian (if not anarchistic) leanings, Jacques Lacan is an apologist for organized hierarchical domination, believing unquestioningly in the superiority of rational order as represented by the social super-ego, not the individual ego. He sees self-consciousness, or subjectification as arising from the insertion of the undifferentiated self into language because language is the unavoidable vehicle of culture:

> ...the 'experience of the community'....has as its essential dimension the tradition which the discourse itself founds. This tradition...creates the elementary structures of culture. And these structures reveal an order of possible exchanges which, even unconscious, is inconceivable outside of the permutations authorized by language. [64]

In Lacanian psychology, any potential for natural experience is always-already screened by the conditioning, shaping force of traditional discourse in cultural semiology: "The unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual; what it knows about the elementary is no more than the elements of the signifier." [65] Actually, what the conscious mind knows about the unconscious is no more than the elements of the

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[64] Jacques Lacan, "The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious", in Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader, ed. David Lodge (London & New York: Longman, 1988) p.82.

[65] Ibid, p.100.

signifier.

The premise for Lacan's statements is the definition of humanity solely and purely as ideologically subjectified through language by the reigning cultural system, a denial of linguistic and social historical contingency. It is to raise the relativity of culturally reified absolutes to the level of biological necessity in basic repression's original definition of humanity. Lacan privileges those abstract, hence unassailable, intellectual constructs over any other reality: "The content of the unconscious with all its disappointing ambiguities gives us no reality in the subject more consistent than the immediate; its force comes from the truth and in the dimension of being:" [66] Apparently, this is not enough.

The problem of escaping the limitations of language in this regard (institutionally monological, ideological subjectification) becomes the paramount focus of the aesthetic imagination. Paradoxically, this is solved not by escape, but by incorporation (carnivalization of discourse), for, if words are the very vehicle by which the unknowable self objectivizes itself in order to know itself, this may also involve a self-reflexive, and therefore ironic, consciousness of the process.

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[66] Ibid, p.97.

The Lacanian insertion of the subject into discourse (initiation into an Imaginary Order during ego formation) involves the basic repression of "a kind of pre-verbal register whose logic is essentially visual," which, as Frederic Jameson explains, "for Lacan...marks a fundamental gap between the subject and its own self...which can never be bridged." [67] Jameson cites Edmond Ortigues in his objection to Lacan's assertion:

> Imagination and desire are the realities of a finite being which can emerge from the contradiction between self and other only by the genesis of a third term, a mediatory 'concept' which, by determining each, orders them into a reversible and progressive relation which can be developed in language. [68]

I would suggest this 'third term' is the aesthetic capacity in the imagination.

More insidious is Lacan's assertion that the subject is ineluctably inserted into a Symbolic Order, a cultural dimension of figurative language, for "the Imaginary itself is assumed into the Symbolic Order by way of its alienation into language itself." [69] Thus, experience is always-already screened not only by language's inhibitory effect on sensory

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[67] Frederic Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject", in Literature and Psychoanalysis - The Question of Reading: Otherwise, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) p.353. Originally appeared as a double issue, nos. 55/6 of Yale French Studies.

[68] Ibid, p.378.

[69] Ibid, p.357.

cognition, but by a second, definitive process of socio-codification subsuming the first. However, initiation into the Symbolic Order is an absolute ideological subjectification when, and only when, discourse has been monologically appropriated by social institutions in its entirety from its naturally polyphonic course, i.e., when "[t]he ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production." [70]

If Althusser's notion of ideological subjectification cited above is adapted to psychoanalytic theory, the cultural necessity for the reproduction of the means of production in a post-industrial society can especially be seen as the retention of privilege for the sake of the dominant element in an hierarchically organized system, a retention enabled by surplus repression in enforced submission to a performance principle. Over and above the basic repression of drive discharge (id) by drive restraint (ego) is the surplus repression of drive restraint in the socio-codification of the hierarchy (superego), whether parental or institutional; over and above the necessary acquiescence to a reality principle is a monolithic

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[70] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", in Lenin and Philosophy, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1971) p.123.

behavioural codification. [71]

In literature especially, authorial subscription to a particular socio-code does not necessarily follow from its inscription, for every work's particular aesthetic also contains an ideology, one that, by the very presence of ambiguity in language, opposes a one-to-one relationship between a word and its referent, opposes monological interpretation. For example, Jameson's distinction between "the experience of immediate sense perception and the various systems of abstraction into which the name of an object allows it to be inserted...." is elided by the Peakian aesthetic through associational logic in perceptual relativity, overdetermination of traditional symbolic significance, and the achronotopical dissociation which makes the whole work one macrocosmic metaphor. [72] Even basic repression is tenuous. Though insertion of a subject into an Imaginary Order during ego formation necessarily entails the repression of sensory cognition (primarily visual) by a linguistic capability which categorically filters experience, not only is perceptual sensibility disturbingly retained in the unconscious, but perceptual relativity is

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[71] Milton's distinction in Paradise Lost, Book XII, between a morality enforced by law and one innate in love seems to me a similar complaint, though not reached by the same line of argument.

[72] "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan", p.377. See Section Three of this chapter for explanation of the Bakhtinian 'chronotope' in relation to the 'Titus books'.

conveyed by linguistic ambiguity. Moreover, Lacan's further stage of a Symbolic Order, or the insertion of the subject into a particular culture's socio-code, can be seen as equivalent to surplus repression, to organized domination of the individual according to a performance principle.

The question is to what degree is this last operation even necessary? And if it is, what are the various forms it can take? For the form it has assumed without check or interference, guided only by its own internal dynamic, is precisely that of depersonalization and, at its extreme, inhumanity. Under the post-industrial system, surplus repression has grown to the extent that it is as if the ego itself were to be erased, leaving only a more subtly pervasive, socially anonymous, totalitarian control and its interdependent eruptions of raw instinctual drives:

> The restrictions imposed upon the libido appear as the more rational, the more universal they become, the more they permeate the whole of society. They operate on the individual as external objective laws and as internalized force: the societal authority is absorbed into the 'conscience' and into the unconscious of the individual and works as his own desire, morality and fulfillment. [73]

If it is no longer possible to accept the idea of an autonomous ego informed by, and balancing, the extremes of id and superego, except in Postmodern Fantasy, we have only ourselves to blame.

The problem is redressable through the displacement of

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[73] Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p.46.

the hierarchy of logic over instinct by the aesthetic; Marcuse asks us to consider that "...artistic work, where it is genuine, seems to grow out of a non-repressive instinctual constellation and to envisage non-repressive aims...." [74] The very possibility is due to the inability of ideological subjectification to account completely for creative human variety. Gad Horowitz, who provides a more detailed grounding in psychology for Marcuse's philosophical postulates, describes the theoretical background for realizing this potential:

> ...though humans must be moulded by culture to be human, some cultures require less repression than others, and it is possible to conceive of a culture in which repression is reduced to a relatively painless 'basic' minimum for the formation of a fully developed personality. [75]

From the vantage of the Bildungsroman aspect of the 'Titus books', each volume's literary point of view affords an interesting psychological schematic: Titus Groan's epic bent may be seen as presenting the pre-verbal experiences influencing the child; Gormenghast's Romance structures create the imaginary theatre for the development of the adolescent mind, with typical self-delusions playing a more active role; and Titus Alone's Modern novel stance is

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[74] Ibid, p.84.

[75] Gad Horowitz, Repression: Basic and surplus repression in psychoanalytic theory: Freud, Reich, and Marcuse (Toronto & Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1977) p.8.

concerned with the symbolic problems of the young adult, whose external separation from childhood home is no guarantee of successfully sublimating the internal traumas of severing affectional ties. In other words, while Titus appears picaresque in the third book, a roving Candide-like innocent eye, the guilt of abdication, indeed memory itself, colours every observation in his quest for identity.

A psychological archetype, an Everyman of the aesthetic imagination, Titus' uneasy initiation into the Imaginary Order and outright rejection of the Symbolic Order are also reflected perfectly through two other structural media: discourse and socio-historical traditions. This is the metaphorical implication of the two initiatory ceremonies in Titus Groan: the Christening specifically emphasizes Titus' involvement with traditional language, "the pages that are heavy with words shall be bent in and over him, so that he is engulfed in the sere Text encircled with the Profound, and is as one with the inviolable Law" [TG, p.116]; the Earling attempts to insert him into the socio-historical codifying traditions of the Castle, in order that he "will forever hold in sacred trust the castle of his forefathers ....That he will in letter and in spirit defend it in every way against the incursions of alien worlds." [TG, p.493] As Manlove complains, however, "the child is made to behave

like a deliberate, knowing agent...." [76] Almost as if he were the hero of a Postmodern Fantasy?, the hero of an epic of the aesthetic imagination? What other 'language' could Titus possibly learn? What 'language' could he possibly teach us?

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The Generic Problem

The epic originated as a chronicle, a record of oral tribal tradition, that entertained while it educated. [77] If we take origin as our definitive standard, then we have to agree with Georg Lukacs that, "strictly speaking, his [Homer's] works alone are epics", for all others can be distinguished from Homer's compilation of oral tradition by the term literary epics, i.e., 'written', not in the aesthetic sense of selection of material and formal organization, but in the historical sense of relying on a literary tradition. [78] Literary epics are always glancing back at their formal paternity, whether for reassurance, or

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[76] Modern Fantasy, p.235.

[77] Paul Merchant, The Epic (London: Methuen, 1971).

[78] Georg Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1985 [1920]) p.30.

in rebellion. A definition of epic restricted to its traditional formal markers (invocation of muse, beginning in 'medias res', etc.) finds its source in this primal difference between oral and literary. Granting oral epic its generative capacity, however, it is literary epic that forms the historical tradition to an overwhelming extent.

Theoretical disagreement arises because the tradition of literary epic is historically contingent, its form inherited yet unpetrified, for it is susceptible to growth in human knowledge and consciousness which, in turn, culturally conditions the production of an epic. What had been a satisfactory vehicle for the expression of particular cultural values must necessarily be overhauled when those values change. Behind the arguments for inclusion or exclusion of a certain work in the epic tradition, then, lies the primary historical displacement of 'oral' by 'literary', thereafter continuous. [79]

Such a displacement consciously reflects the historical development of the human community, from the self-regulated

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[79] For example, the displacement of Classical ethics by Christian in Paradise Lost or The Divine Comedy; the Christian gloss on folk traditions in Beowulf; or even a problematic division in the Homeric pattern because of the projected disparity between The Iliad, The Odyssey, and the lost comic epic, The Margites. Thus, John Newman in The Classical Epic Tradition traces an alternative path of development, one that ignores the spurious imitations of the long heroic poem, from Homer's lost comic masterpiece, through Callimachus and the Alexandrian influence, to Henry Fielding's Tom Jones, Thomas Mann's Dr. Faustus, and even the films of Eisenstein.

worth of the individual, with a concentric world view, to a socially evaluated worth, with a socially concentric, individually ex-centric, world view. The notion of the epic as a fluid stylistic form is important because both Lukacs and Bakhtin claim it represents a static view of social relations, especially in contrast to the novel. Moreover, a history of formal displacement surely alters definition of the epic. When certain conditions are met, then, the epic may appear in the novelistic form, a form generally considered to be inimical to it.

The problem with relying on traditional markers becomes clearer when works with epic pretensions are considered, as John Newman, E.M.W. Tillyard and others have done. [80] These works have the outward guise of an epic, some even the topical substance, but a key element is felt to be lacking. Hence, redefinition of the epic quality moved away from external indicators toward internal substance. C.M. Bowra and J.M. Steadman point out that as early as the Renaissance the Classical virtues of wisdom, fortitude, leadership, love and magnanimity were reviewed, charity replacing magnaninimity as the essential value. [81] Indeed, the

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[80] John Kevin Newman, The Classical Epic Tradition (Madison:: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986); E.M.W. Tillyard, The English Epic and Its Background.

[81] C.M. Bowra, From Virgil to Milton (London: Macmillan, 1957); J.M. Steadman, Milton and the Renaissance Hero (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1967).

separation of Church and State reserved the epic for the ecstasies of the Christian soul while relegating martial glory to heroic Romance. [82]

With acceptance of the possibility of change in the cultural values conveyed by the epic, definition was deflected even further from external features towards the ethical, metaphysical, and sociological implications of a particular aesthetic. Abstraction of the epic 'spirit' based on changes in the formal aesthetic came to dominate theoretical discussion, as E.M.W. Tillyard, Georg Lukacs and Mikhail Bakhtin, attempting to resolve the antipathy between its traditonal form and the rise of the novel -- a form simultaneously similar and utterly different, demonstrate in our own century. [83]

Better versed in the epic than in theories of the novel, E.M.W. Tillyard can serve to represent a more traditional viewpoint in contrast to Lukacs and Bakhtin, despite the later date of his work, especially as his avenue of theoretical comprehension is closer to thematics than

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[82] Of course, this oversimplifies the role played by Romance as a vehicle for social values. Still, identification of the king's health with the state of the land is a vestige of the Classical epic transferred to Romance in the same manner as the unity of the human soul with Christ came to inform the Renaissance epic.

[83] Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination; Georg Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel; E.M. W. Tillyard, The Epic Strain in the English Novel (London: Chatto & Windus and Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1967 [1958]).

aesthetics.

Tillyard incorporates historical awareness by emphasizing the altered role played by authorial intention in the epic novel. Epic tradition is not utterly rejected, for elevated language and selection and organization of material are retained in his theory. However, the high purpose, unswerving control, and sustained effort of the author become paramount in differentiating true epic from imitations. Most important for Tillyard is the choric expression by the author of "the feelings of a large group of people living in or near his own time." [84] It is as if the intermediary of the Muse were erased in the epic novel, the author inspired directly by some process of socio-historical osmosis: "The 'accepted unconscious metaphysic' is the essential starting point, but the method of conveying it must vary from age to age." [85] While this assertion might be attributed to a reluctance to admit the irrelevance, or inapplicability, of the epic mode in the last few centuries, replaced by the ironic awareness of relativity so prevalent in that most modern of literary modes, the novel, Tillyard claims the epic novel is possible because the novel is not a genre, but a form like Drama: "It can belong to the tragic or the satiric or the picaresque or the idyllic or the epic

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[84] E.M.W. Tillyard, The English Epic and Its Background, p.12.

[85] Ibid, p.13.

kind." [86] Unfortunately, Tillyard does not substantiate this claim with any more precise definition of the novelistic form.

In regard to Tillyard's 'choric expression of an accepted unconscious metaphysic', the 'Titus books' are structured by a loosely analogous history of England in the Twentieth Century. Always remembering that in Postmodernism 'everything is potentially allegorical,' these analogies are not promoted with the intention of excluding others, nor are they an attempt to monologically define the 'Titus books'. Such a pattern is discernible, but Peake's organization was first and foremost organic, perhaps even unconscious. Be that as it may, Titus Groan can be seen as reflecting the decline of British Imperialism: the ritual valorization of the past represents metaphorically the reactionary nostalgia for a Golden Age of unquestioned certainty, with anxiety arising from the fear of change which must inevitably confront the personal stagnation attendant on social stasis. After this prefatory background, metaphorically revealing the historical roots of the human and social condition, Gormenghast records, in broad outline, the rise and fall of

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[86] E.M.W. Tillyard, The Epic strain in the English Novel, p.24. The analyses of most theoreticians of the novel run counter to his blunt assertion, and it must be considered with reservations. It is a view of the novel, for instance, completely at odds with the theories of Bakhtin, who holds that, while the novel may parodically incorporate, or carnivalize, other kinds of literature, it and the epic are antithetical modes.

Fascism through the Machiavellian Steerpike's totalitarian ambitions, violent appropriation of power, and final defeat when the destructive flood reaches its height. Titus Alone reflects the post-war social standardization that afforded an easy, unthinking means of relief from any sense of guilt or complicity in wartime atrocities. More important, Peake also attacks the abnegating belief in the scientific myth of pure logic, or total rationality; he attacks its effect of depersonalization due to individual submission to a performance principle, in the same manner as the internal homogeneity of exclusionary social stratification is due to surplus repression. Increasingly satirical in each successive novel, the ultimate purpose of Peake's social disquisition is to reveal a subtler form of social totalitarianism, and to suggest, through and in the aesthetic imagination, a possible alternative.

Although Peake certainly did not begin with any professed intent to produce a national epic, he satisfies Tillyard's four requirements for epic in an unique way. [87] As regards 'high quality and seriousness of language', his prose style, as literally due to his artistic eye as James Joyce's was to his musical ear, is one of the most powerful media in all literature. Moreover, it is infused from the start with a profound aesthetic purpose to reveal the new

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[87] E.M.W. Tillyard, The English Epic and Its Background, pp.5-13.

epic of the imagination.

As regards 'amplitude, breadth and inclusiveness', the wealth of detail in the 'Titus books' is never extraneous. Despite the seeming disparity of his aesthetic pantechnicon -- his term, I think, for a multifaceted, metaphorical stylistic complex -- it demonstrates a unified purpose.

Tillyard's stress on the psychological strength and normality of the epic writer is contentiously vague -- "he must exemplify that sanity which has been claimed for true genius", sanity these days arguably isolating one from human society. [88] He seems to mean that the writer of epic should have a solid grasp of his or her own fundamental truth and, simultaneously, a broad experience of humanity, as well as the chameleon-like capacity for compassion, so that "ideally he should be able to range from the simple sensualities to the numinous." [89] Peake's openness to experience, a matter of record, was perhaps heightened by wartime extremes; his ability to empathize is indicated by his assimilative powers as an illustrator of others' work; the 'range' expressed in the 'Titus books' is metaphorically inclusive, and his aesthetic actually equates the numinous with the ontological sensuality of a diffuse, polymorphous eroticism. In other words, the revelations of the aesthetic imagination are

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[88] Ibid, p.8.

[89] Ibid, p.8.

radically grounded in sensory cognition.

Tillyard demands a heroic temperament on the part of the author, whose epic project necessarily requires a superhuman exercise of the will in sustaining artistic control and quality over an extended period, in order to achieve "the structural ideal":

> [T]hat the whole, however long, should remain fluid and unset till the last word has been written, that the writer should have everything simultaneously in mind and keep it open to modification throughout the process of composition. [90]

Peake's attainment of this ideal is fluid to the point of reversing the paradigmatic expectations.

In 1946, Peake listed retrospectively the original factors of his inspiration:

> 1) No initial conception of plot.
> 2) The characters 'took their way'.
> 3) On the qui vive...for opportunities for the imagination to take its own course -- as long as that course didn't hurt the mood of the work.
> 4) Hard to make characters talk on the same scale that they look.
> 5) The scale of the book -- its slow pace -- and its fantasy -- allow me the choice to say practically anything... -- a kind of pantechnicum. [sic] [91]

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[90] Ibid, p.9.

[91] Hugh Brogan, "The Gutters of Gormenghast", Cambridge Review, vol. 95, #2217 (23 November, 1973) p.39. Brogan interprets Peake's intent as "complete freedom" for his "volcanic fancy", but the retrospective list also implies a later 'conception of plot', and stresses the fixed 'mood of the book.' See also Watney, Mervyn Peake, p.128.

It is a Romantic ideal of the highest order; though no epic intent is discernible here, certainly the effort required to sustain control over such a project must have been enormous. Examining a list in Peake's manuscript of completed chapters (to Chapter 62) headed 'Goremenghast.(sic) Part One. Background for Titus.', Batchelor concludes: "'Goremenghast' existed in Peake's imagination at this time as a project so vast that no single man could hope to finish it, if it was to be written on the same scale as the 'introduction'." [92]

Peake's problem, and the main objection to an accord with Tillyard's condition of epic control, was to allow his creations as much freedom as he possibly could, and yet retain creative power. In a letter to Maurice Collis, he stated his ideal as an author: "To be in half control of them, that is the thing. Like the human race ones characters must have free-will without undue interference from the Authorjehovah." (sic; Peake's punctuation was always weak at best) [93] Paradoxically, such freedom evoked a tremendous effort merely to remain in touch with the characters of his vision. Peter McKenzie, examining Peake's espousal of the

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[92] John Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.72.

[93] "Letters to Maurice Collis", compiled by John Watney, MPR (1985) 19:15. See also Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.96, for a related manuscript note: 'Present everywhere, like God, but visible nowhere (Flaubert)'. There is, as well, an obvious allusion to Joyce's position on the role of the author in Peake's poem "When God Pared His Fingernails" (cited in Batchelor, p.161). It seems to me Peake realized that authorial omnipresence was conveyed aesthetically.

imagination in the 'Titus books' from a self-reflexive, universalized Bildungsroman aspect, talks of the effort involved:

> For Peake, the journey was likewise a search for identity. In these books, Peake originated a world under laws of his own making, and made it stick. To compel public assent to a set of intuitions whose artistic viability must have seemed, to the very end, doubtful, risky, was to become himself, just as Titus painfully does. It was a massive, heroic act in which personal identity, imagination and courage were simultaneously vindicated. [94]

Thus, the 'Titus books' required a 'superhuman exercise of the will' on the part of their author.

While Tillyard's equation of the epic quality with a reflection of the temper of an age is historically sound criticism, his promotion of authorial intention as an essential element is less sure, especially in his facile acceptance of epic novels. It is possible to reflect the temper of an age without attaining the level of epic, as the failure of the Realistic novel to attain epic status perhaps demonstrates. There is an inbuilt awareness of relativity in the novelistic form's repetition of episodes that corrodes any attempt at mimetic totality with the conscious, or unconscious, acid of irony. Yet, the Homeric epic, which is also structured on repetition, sidesteps the problem because it never attempted perfect mimesis. Rather, it employed stylization of description, action and thought, in order to

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[94] Peter McKenzie, "Mervyn Peake: Sketch for an Overview", MPR (Spring, 1978) 6:9.

aesthetically suggest an immanent totality, as in Erich Auerbach's succinct description of "the basic impulse of the Homeric style:"

> to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations. Nor do psychological processes receive any other treatment....[95]

The method of mimetic totality common to the Realistic novel was a misguided attempt to reproduce epic significance in the new form. Whereas epic creates episodic comparisons stylistically in order to remove its subject from time, the novel relativizes its subject in time by repetitive contrasts. Though the Age of Empire sought to express the solidity and permanence of its institutionalized values through the novel, the choice of vehicles was ironically inept.

Still, consciousness of relativity -- most fully exposed by the epistemological concerns of the Modern novel, though indubitably undermining the social institutionalization of human values, does so for the purpose of activating them. Ethical and metaphysical implications of the novelistic form do not, therefore, necessarily lead to Lukacs' despair in the face of the existential Absurd, nor precisely to Bakhtin's anarchic

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[95] Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974 [1946]) p.6.

celebration of joyful relativity. In Postmodernism, and especially in the Peakian aesthetic, consciousness of relativity is incorporated into stylization in such a way that the representation of phenomena and psychological processes is fully internalized synergistically, i.e., a sense of ontological surety based in aesthetics expresses immanent totality through the human imagination. In order to grasp the social significance of this posited literary fusion more fully, let us rework the argument from the viewpoint of theorists of the novel who employ the epic as an antithetical contrast.

In The Theory of the Novel, Lukacs identifies the formal difference between epic and novel -- "The epic gives form to a totality of life that is rounded from within; the novel seeks, by giving form, to uncover and construct the concealed totality of life" -- but also claims:

> The duality of interiority and the outside world can be abolished for the subject if he (the subject) glimpses the organic unity of his whole life through the process by which his living present has grown from the stream of his past life dammed up within his memory. The surmounting of duality -- that is to say the successful mastering and integration of the object -- makes this experience into an element of authentically epic form.
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> And the insight which grasps this unity, because it is thus related to the object, rises above mere analysis; it becomes an intuitive, premonitory comprehension of the unattained and therefore inexpressible meaning of life -- the innermost

core of all action made manifest. [96]

An uncommon experience because of the individual's domination by modern social systems, this is, nevertheless, prevalent in Postmodernism's ontological assertions, which are not retreats to a blind Nineteenth Century faith but the results of those who have forged ahead, propelled on the crest of Modernism's epistemological wave. I will argue that Peake both attains and successfully expresses such a 'meaning' as Lukacs contends is possible, by a demonstrable (though stylistically submerged rather than floating on the thematic surface) 'process' of the aesthetic imagination in Titus Groan, which subsequently becomes the Romantic 'story' in Gormenghast, and rises to the thematic surface, involved with a Modern quest for identity, in Titus Alone. The 'Titus books' are an epic dislocated in novelistic relativity, as it were, because of the dislocation of alienated humanity in modern society; Peake promotes a re-cognitive synthesis, through imaginative metaphor, of 'being' and 'becoming', knowingly resolving past and future in an interminably relative present.

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[96] pp.60, 127, 129. It seems a mistake that what is often denounced as mystical simply because it is not reducible to rational apprehension is thereby ignored. If such statements are considered as tainted with backwards looking Organicism, illusory Phenomenology, or unfounded Positivism, let us remember that Lukacs is quite aware of describing a potential for living in harmony with reality that anyone seldom achieves, and far less often communicates.

Lukacs incorporates the traditional distinction between oral and literary epic in his primary formal identification of epic and novel, but in such a manner that the epical 'immanent totality' of Homer, based on the self-regulatory principle of magnanimity, is already displaced by an abstract social institution in the literary epic (the Roman State in Virgil, or the Christian Church in Dante or Milton, for example) rather than any individual principle. The nostalgia for epic totality and surety that underlies individual novelistic visions of a utopia is thus directly attributable to this historical development. It is not surprising, then, that Lukacs identified only two possibilities -- the novel of Abstract Idealism (utopian), or of the Romanticism of Disillusionment (dystopian) -- stemming from his implicit division of the forms. Moreover, this nostalgic quest for totality informs the distinction:

> ...the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence. The inner security of the epic world excludes adventure in this essential sense: the heroes of the epic live through a whole variety of adventures, but the fact that they will pass the test, both inwardly and outwardly, is never in doubt....Hence the passivity of the epic hero...: the adventures that fill and embellish his life are the form taken by the objective and extensive totality of the world; he himself is only the luminous centre around which this unfolded totality revolves, the inwardly most mobile point of the world's rhythmic movement.[97]

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[97] Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, p.89.

Titus' passivity, especially in the third 'picaresque' novel, is not merely the attribute of a confused child. Instead, Peake gives indications from an early stage that Titus is predestined to 'pass the test' of aesthetic adventures. Even his aggression in his heroic battle with Steerpike is deflated by Peake's ironic stance toward self-romanticized delusions based on simplistic morality.

Certainly, Titus' final, paradoxical, simultaneous rejection and incorporation of his past perfectly matches Lukacs' projection of the "form of the renewed epic" in the novel: "This world is the sphere of pure soul-reality in which man exists as man, neither as social being, nor as an isolated, unique, pure and therefore abstract interiority." [98] In absorbing the lessons of the aesthetic imagination, Titus has also learned to rely on the associational and affectional logic of sensory cognition. His internalization of his past does not, therefore, entail 'abstract interiority', but 'immanent totality'. The revelation is of the equivalence of ontological status with the aesthetic medium, a synergistic fusion of 'being' with 'becoming'.

While Lukacs allows only the extant categories of Abstract Idealism and the Romanticism of Disillusionment, Mikhail Bakhtin's joyful embracement of relativity leads him to see not quest, but carnival, as the essential purpose of

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[98] Ibid, p.152.

the novel. Bakhtin's formal distinction is primarily spatio-temporal: whereas the epic valorizes an absolute past absolutely, both spatially and temporally, the novel carnivalizes, or debases, reified social institutions by confronting them familiarly in a relative present. These "valorized temporal categories" imply that the epic relies on the memory of tradition in contrast to the novel, where "epistemology becomes the dominant discipline." [99] Clearly, Bakhtin's distinction relies on an aesthetically expressed attitude toward setting rather than setting itself: the epic reifies the past, while the novel relativizes social tradition.

It is not, then, that I disagree with Bakhtin's fundamental, historically sound analysis, but his attribution of 'purpose' seems only the laying of the foundation for a new vision of reality, a discovery of the beginning, not the end goal, of the novel's evolution as a literary form. The Postmodern variant of the novel may be considered as a literary epic despite the claims of Bakhtin, who holds that novel and epic are antithetical modes because of inherently opposed 'chronotopes' (spatio-temporal aesthetic complexes), and consequently opposed extrapolations on the human condition. It must be said that Lukacs and Bakhtin developed their theory during the age of

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[99] Bakhtin, The Dialogic Imagination, p.15.

Modernism, before the advent of Postmodernism's ontological focus. Bakhtin's disagreement with Lukacs is not so much in their analysis of formal differences, as in their attitudes towards similar conclusions. Either theorist might have written the following, "Nature is alive inside man but, when it is lived as culture, it reduces man to the lowest, most mindless, most idea-forsaken conventionality." [100] The conventionality of Gormenghast's ritualized traditions concretely expresses Bakhtin's view of the epical valorization of an absolute past; Lukacs' opinion, as it relates to Peake's epic 'chronotope', is implicitly similar:

> The world of convention is essentially timeless; an eternally recurring, self-repeating monotony, it proceeds upon its course in accordance with meaningless laws of its own; eternal movement without direction, without growth, without death.[101]

Like Lukacs' identification of two possibilities for the novel, which is based on whether the hero is still questing or has made a virtue of failure, Bakhtin also claims, "The individual is either greater than his fate, or less than his condition as a man." [102] Unlike Lukacs' nostalgia for epic surety, however, Bakhtin is excited by the possibilities for the novel's development toward "free experimental fantasy"; yet, strangely enough, even he suggests "the novel should

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[100] Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel, p.18.

[101] Ibid, p.150.

[102] The Dialogic Imagination, p.37.

become for the contemporary world what the epic was for the ancient world." [103] Given the date of Bakhtin's theory, akin to Lukacs', and the influence of this attitude, such a statement accurately predicts the shift of dominant from Modernism's epistemological to Postmodernism's ontological concerns. [104]

In any case, Peake's novels fulfil Bakhtin's formal identification of the epic genre in an unusual manner:

> (1) a national epic past...serves as the subject...(2) national tradition (not personal experience and the free thought that grows out of it) serves as the source for the epic; (3) an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality.... [105]

Peake addresses a bifurcated epic past through the analogies of British history and human psychological development. The source for his epic novel is the tradition of English Romanticism. Finally, if we substitute the term 'fantasy' for 'epic' in the third feature, in accordance with Bakhtin's prediction, we may clarify the chronotopos of Peake's metaphorical work, for a spatio-temporal conundrum is the focus of the 'Titus books' as a whole, the first two presenting some parallel world ostensibly of the past, while

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[103] Ibid, pp.23, 10.

[104] Still, this can hardly be reconciled with Bakhtin's overall view of the novel as a living, organic form in contrast to the lifeless shell of the epic. Or, can it? Does he not imply that the novel feeds on literary traditions in the same way the epic first fed on oral traditions?

[105] The Dialogic Imagination, p.13.

the third abruptly shifts to a post-apocalyptic future, with only Titus linking the two.

Although the 'Titus books' open with what Bakhtin would identify as a typically carnivalistic transference between 'Heaven and Hell' in the novelistic mode (the Hall of the Bright Carvings, like some absurd reference to Beowulf, and the Great Kitchen, with its overpowering heat, reek, and confusion), Peake's Postmodern adaptation of the Fantastic bears a curious relationship to the Bakhtinian 'chronotope', for Gormenghast is achronotopic; its spatio-temporal complex is purely imaginative, metafictional. Geographically, not only is "our reality...simply never mentioned", but the world external to the closed world of the Castle, encountered in Titus Alone, is also as separate from ours as it is from Titus', the stronger sense of social satire providing only indirect equivalence. [106] Our present is perhaps suggested in that flickering boundary between a comparatively vast and weighty sense of the past in the first two books, and the relatively fluid, insubstantial sense of the near future in the third.

A temporal dislocation, however, in which two factors annul each other, exacerbates this confusion of locus. Rottcodd apparently deprives the birth of Titus, the Seventy Seventh Earl, of extratextual historical significance with

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[106] C.N. Manlove, Modern Fantasy, p.217.

his reply to Flay's "puzzling", but "intriguing" query as to the exact day: "It is the eighth day of the eighth month, I am uncertain about the year." [TG, 21] [107] Though a seasonal cycle plays a natural role in the work, and we are given the certainty of our lunar calendar [TG, 305], the precise historical situation is deliberately withheld. On the other hand, the very fact of seventy-seven generations closely approximates the duration of recorded human civilization. Yet, this implies a relation with our present somewhat at odds with those critical interpretations of the 'Titus books' as antiquated curiosities of Gothic or Romance.

Peake himself, commenting on his artistic ambition, illuminates his metaphorical chronotopos:

> After all, there are no rules. With the wealth, skill, daring, vision of many centuries at one's back, yet one is ultimately quite alone. For it is one's ambition to create one's own world in a style germane to its substance, and to people it with its native forms and denizens that never were before, yet have their roots in one's experience. As the earth was thrown from the sun, so from the earth the artist must fling out into space, complete from pole to pole, his own world which, whatsoever form it takes, is the colour of the globe it flew from, as the world itself is coloured by the sun. [108]

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[107] I have been unable to ascertain whether this date held any private significance for Peake; its public significance is ambiguous.

[108] Introduction to The Drawings of Mervyn Peake, in Mervyn Peake: Writings and Drawings, eds. Gilmore and Johnson, p.82.

The Romantic status of the artist as mediator between the world of experience and that of the imaginative vision, readily apparent here, is equivalent to the author's replacing of the externalized figure of a divine muse with private inspiration. More important, such a 'chronotope in potentia' directly affects Bakhtin's concept of the novel as a mode inimical to epic.

The private world of the author's imagination unavoidably reflects the public world of experience, and, hence, may simultaneously carnivalize the traditions of the dominant culture while promoting an alternative, imaginative, but aesthetically concrete, epic vision of reality. As Douwe Fokkema points out, "The Modernist wrote about conceivable, possible worlds; the Postmodernist writes about conceivable, at least thinkable, but impossible worlds, worlds that -- so reason tells us -- can exist only in our imagination." [109] His interjected qualification, explaining the logical impossibility, gains leverage when we consider that the 'reason' Postmodernism's ontological assertions are expressed through the forms of Fantasy or the Fantastic is the surplus repression of a society organized by the inappropriate overprivileging of rationality. The level of abstraction realized in emphasizing the constructed nature of the Postmodern novel, ironically drawing attention

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[109] Douwe Fokkema, Literary History, Modernism and Postmodernism, p.54.

to the projected world as a metafictional one of words, has the ultimate purpose of exposing what Fokkema terms 'socio-codification', i.e., a social system's ideological subjectification through monological appropriation of language. Thus, a distinction between socio-codification in surplus repression and linguistic codification in basic repression supports Postmodernism's metafictional assertions of an aesthetic ontological reality. Imagination is therefore the metaphoric mediator of reality, actively promoting the complete perceptual identity of the intellectually abstract and the materially concrete. 'Reality' in this sense is both concrete and abstract: the object of experience is always actually experienced, placing due emphasis on experience as an act. Imaginative perception, even self-perception, involves aesthetic choice because any act of perception is simultaneously a self-created and self-creative act.

Marcuse's development of Kantian aesthetics explains why "[t]he basic experience is sensuous rather than conceptual; the aesthetic perception is essentially intuition, not notion:"

> The nature of sensuousness is 'receptivity', cognition through being affected by given objects ....The aesthetic perception is accompanied by pleasure....[which] derives from the perception of the pure <u>form</u> of an object, regardless of its 'matter' and of its (internal or external) 'purpose'. An object represented in its pure form is 'beautiful'. Such representation is the work (or rather the play) of the <u>imagination</u>. As imagination, the aesthetic perception is both

> sensuous and at the same time more than sensuous...: it gives pleasure and is therefore essentially subjective; but in so far as this pleasure is constituted by the pure form of the object itself, it accompanies the aesthetic perception universally and necessarily -- for any perceiving subject....[110]

An aesthetic which grounds ontological certainty on an epistemological base, incorporating a 'way of knowing' with what is known, whatever its ideological relativity, is, to put it simply, a means of activating values by assuming personal responsibility for one's acts outside of their reification, or absolute valorization, in cultural institutions.

Despite an admittedly awkward achronotopicality, then, Peake's created world has many metaphorical points of contact with ours, as long as we subscribe to the loosely analogous schemes and the ideological implications of an imaginative actuality. In league with the generational time frame of the 'Titus books' and each volume's historical structural analogy, a rough history of literature may also be deduced from the three novels, for, as Bakhtin states, "a reliance on tradition is immanent in the very form of the epic, just as the absolute past is immanent in it."[111] In this case, the tradition is relied on as a form against which to define the new form.

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[110] Eros and Civilization, p.176.

[111] The Dialogic Imagination, p.16.

The conflict between stasis and change in Titus Groan encapsulates the dilemma of the epic's valorization of an absolute past when incorporated into the novelistic mode; Titus and his living present are inserted into the 'medias res' of an epic chronotope. Thus, the first book may be understood as a challenge to literary epic, for though the object of representation -- the Castle and its society -- is arguably an epic subject, the means of representation is already undermining the ancient walls. The epic values of Gormenghast are belied by the epic values of the Peakian aesthetic, if you will, an expression of ineluctable change that conflicts with the novel's roots in the literary epic's definition of civilization -- at least for the 'Realistic' variant of the novel prevalent in the Nineteenth Century, the Age of Empire.

Gormenghast, in turn, challenges the traditions of Romance. After exploring the tragic and comic alternatives of Romance's response to a loss of faith in the literary epic's displacement of immanent totality by a social abstraction, Peake refutes their social resolutions of the human condition by exposing the self-delusions implicit in their Romantic idealism. [112]

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[112] Generalizing broadly, Lukacs' division of the novel into Abstract Idealism (comedy's utopian social re-integration) and Romanticism of Disillusionment (tragedy's dystopian submission to social rationality's repression) is necessary before their synergistic fusion -- the epic novel's atopian, tragicomic displacement of any social hierarchy.

Titus Alone works through the tragi-comic Grotesque sublimity (the existential Absurd) that is revealed by the epistemological relativity found in the Modern novel. In this sense, it is anti-novel, for it concludes with a Postmodern ontological revelation of its main character. While writing Titus Groan, Peake suggested a similar pre-occupation:

> Damn novels in the sense of being NOVELS. I want to create between two covers a world, the movements of which -- in action, atmosphere and speech -- enthrall and excite the imagination.[113]

Neither theoretician nor literary or social historian by trade or inclination, Peake's sensitivity to others' works and his assimilative powers as reader and illustrator support my contention of generic incorporation here. Because Peake's work fits neither Lukacs' nor Bakhtin's theories precisely, though having affinities with both, a redefinition of the epic quality becomes important. More generally, it is necessary in light of the development of the Postmodern novel.

If it is true that a Freudian understanding of fantasy in the Postmodern novel seems antithetical to the externalized values of the literary epic, the reasons are twofold. First, the Homeric 'immanent totality rounded from

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[113] Letter to Gordon Smith, 24 October, 1943, in his Mervyn Peake: A Personal Memoir (London: Victor Gollancz, 1984) pp.103-4. Cited from Tanya Gardiner-Scott, "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic", p.12.

within' is not now individually possible unless one becomes conscious of, and surmounts, the present social conditions of subjectification. Second, the society whose epic is to be found in the Postmodern novel is not the extant one, but does exist in the imagination's reserve of potentiality, and not merely individually but, because the imagination operates universally 'for any perceiving subject', communally. Thus, the Postmodern novel implies the fully realizable epic of a culture outside of the surplus repression demanded by the ideologically monological submission to a performance principle.

The key to reconciling the two modes, as suggested in Section Two, is partly to be found in Bakhtin's promotion of pluralistic polyphony in the novel, a mimesis of social heteroglossia (specialized discourses of class, discipline, sex, etc.), or even linguistic relativity (the paradigmatic historical contingency of words being inconsistent with their syntagmatic cultural meanings). "Epic language," according to Bakhtin, "is not separable from its subject, for an absolute fusion of subject matter and spatio-temporal aspects with valorized (hierarchical) ones is characteristic of semantics in the epic." [114] Now, if the 'Titus books' loosely incorporate a history of literature, they do so because Peake was writing a novelistically renewed epic, for

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[114] The Dialogic Imagination, p.16.

one thing remains constant and is constantly valorized throughout the three books, whether in implicit opposition to the representedly 'epic' world, in supporting the psychological development of the Romantic adolescent, or in resolving the Modern quest for identity. That constant is Peake's aesthetic style and its implications for the imagination. In a metafictional sense, the story of Titus' growth and identity is precisely his discovery and gradual assimilation of what has been present from the day of his birth, an 'heroic' feat of which there was never any doubt. Moreover, because of the achronotopic generational parallels, the 'Titus books' not only suggest a national past, but a universal past, as if an analysis of the roots of Western civilization were the archetypal background to the epic 'story' of Titus. However, because Peake's chronotopos is metaphorical, his 'epic language' informs the subject matter in an alienated fashion.

Technically, if the epic valorizes an absolute past, and thus, in 'medias res', reflects an indifference to beginnings and endings, so that the whole is contained in each part, then each part must surely contain in microcosm the presence of the whole. The single element common to each part of any epic is necessarily the predominant rhetorical or stylistic technique as it aesthetically conveys a particular, historically contingent, cultural ethics and

metaphysics. [115] Peake's stylistic pantechnicon, with its revelation of the transforming and regenerative power of the imagination, therefore, not merely conditions but is the very vehicle of an 'accepted unconscious metaphysic'. The theoretical conflict between Lukacs and Bakhtin is thus resolved when the awareness of relativity present in the irony of the Modern novel is considered as an exploration of ways of knowing that ultimately renewed a Postmodern 'faith' in the synthetic powers of the imagination -- that aesthetic ontology which has choice at its core, encompasses will and desire, and employs associational, affectional logic based on sensory cognition to mediate and synthesize instinctual drives and the abstract, intellectual knowledge based on rational logic. Epistemological uncertainty reflected in the ironic opposition of unresolvably polarized binaries is displaced entirely by a new ontological system. I do not mean that the hierarchy of reason over appetite is anarchically reversed, but that an imbalance, upon which all the subsequent problems of civilization were founded, is

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[115] From this point of view, the sense of Fate that presides over even the Gods in The Iliad is directly attributable to the concrete effect of Homer's natural similes, reflected both externally, in a concomitant stylization of action, and internally, in 'winged speeches' which explain present acts as an ineluctable summation of a factual past. Alternatively, Milton's argument 'to justify the ways of God to man' is informed by the translation of Italian artistic perspective into Protestant verbal architecture; thus, a sense of human freedom is implicit in his use of point of view to construct an epic argument, also reflected in his blank verse.

redressed.

Further, the history of the novel tends toward this point, for epistemological uncertainty in the Modern novel is a development of the features implicit in the Gothic novel, and not the Realistic; indeed, it was this Romantic inheritance which exposed the latter's claim of mimetic totality as false. It is not surprising, then, that Postmodernism has a great affinity with Fantasy and the Fantastic; nor is this result a matter for disparagement or regret. Rather, it signifies the true liberation of human values from their reification in social institutions to their actively effective role in interpersonal relationships. What was, at best, a valiant, though doomed, social effort to preserve values through the hierarchical privileging of pure reason becomes, at worst, the only grounding for a realizable community, thought, from the restricted perspective of pure reason, to be utopian.

It is in regard to the structural analogy of a literary history that Titus' development may be seen as a reflection of the author's involvement with his projected fantasy, as a kind of allegorical Wordsworthian Prelude with the problems of Titus standing in lieu of Peake's self-exploratory aesthetic quandaries as they are expressed through his artistic endeavours. Extrapolating authorial intent from an overt narratorial presence in such passages as "Where is he now? Titus the Abdicator? Come out of the shadows, traitor,

and stand upon the wild brink of my brain!" adds weight to the interpretation of a very private vision in Peake's tendency to emphasize the artistic construction of his creation. [116] However, because the emphasis is that of the narrator, elaboration of a metafictional sense must take into account the possibility that the author is assuming an ironic stance toward its overt representation. The danger of this position becomes clear with interpretations like that set forward by C.N. Manlove, who argues that Peake identified so strongly with his original vision that he struggled to escape, only grudgingly developed the inevitable consequences he had set in motion, and then felt guilty for succeeding. [117] While this may agree with the potential in the aesthetic imagination for personal freedom from social domination, it hardly meets the ideal standard Peake set himself as an author -- to allow maximal freedom to his creations. The bizarre 'invocation' cited above also suggests Titus' freedom from his 'Authorjehovah'. Manlove, I think, projects his own nostalgic fascination with the first book onto Peake -- who is satirizing the ethics and metaphysics of Gormenghastian society --and thereby

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[116] Mervyn Peake, Titus Alone (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin Books Ltd., 1970 [Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1959]) p.9. All subsequent references will be to the Penguin edition, and will be incorporated into the body of the text in an abbreviated form [TA].

[117] See his Modern Fantasy: Five Studies, pp. 207-57.

restricts his critical insight into the subsequent aesthetic development.

This serves to raise an interesting question, one which squarely addresses the problem for strictly allegorical interpretations of Peake's overdetermination of symbolism in the text: Who, in our world, 'colours' Titus Groan? Is he purely a figure of literature, a metaphorical, archetypal Everyman? Did Peake see himself in Titus? Or is the character drawn from the author's first son, whose historical birth and lifespan are roughly equivalent? Any of these factors may be originary or influential, yet there are also allusive literary significances to the name, much as the other characters' names carry an obvious linguistic significance, that suggestively correspond to the metaphorical structures under discussion.

In the first book, Titus is the harbinger of change: a possible permutation for the near Biblical arrival of the "New One" [TG, 22] might be Titus, son of Vespasian, and sacker of Jerusalem, in accordance with its epic conflict. In Gormenghast, a Romance polarity exists between the natural 'green' world and the Castle's civilized society: Titus aptly seems closer to Shakespeare's vengeful Andronicus. The hero's guilty memory and quest for surety of his identity dominate Titus Alone: his nominal significance here perhaps rests in its being a transliteration of Dysmas,

the Penitent Thief crucified with Christ. [118] Finally, more in line with the purpose of my essay, Titus etymologically means 'of the giants', an indicator of the Titanomachy in which the sky gods first vanquished those with closer ties to the earth. Titus Groan, then, primarily signifies for me the revivified epic hero of the aesthetic imagination in the novel, rather than the old of reified social abstraction who dethroned the earlier Titan. But the point of dwelling on these possible incarnations is not to establish definitive interpretations, but to emphasize how strongly change is incorporated into the 'Titus books' by means of a traditional indeterminacy. Peake may have had any or all of these meanings in mind. Titus' family name, however, indubitably illuminates the enslavement of humanity to tradition and the past.

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[118] E.C. Brewer, Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, Centerary ed., rev. [1981] by Ivor H. Evans (New York: Harper & Row, 1981). See also Gardiner-Scott, "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic", p.288 for deleted material from manuscript: '...he let fall his head upon his breast in a kind of ecstasy, as much as to say "Do what you will with me."'; as well as p.362 where she compares the conversation of Crabcalf, Slingshott and Crack-Bell with Titus to the Gospel of St. Mark, chap. 8, verse 29. Also, see Juno's dream in Titus Alone, p.212.

CHAPTER TWO

THE NEAR AND THE FAR; THE NIGHT AND THE DAY; THE YES AND THE NO

If I could see, not surfaces,
But could express
What lies beneath the skin
Where the blood moves
In fruit or head or stone,
Then would I know the one
Essential
And my eyes
When dead
Would give the worm
No hollow food.

If I could hear
Beyond the noise of things
Those Happenings
That stir the seed of sound,
And know the springs
Of Eden flood the round
Chasms of my twin shells, and beat
Old water-hammers on the hidden drums,
Then would I know my music wells
From the hot earth, and comes
Astride the long-sea-organ
Of man's ocean.

- Mervyn Peake

The purpose of the Peakian aesthetic is to reveal a relation between imagination and the universal sense of a natural ontology; the creative means he adopted was his stylistic 'pantechnicon'. He alludes to this desire in "The Reader Takes Over": "I really wanted to make a kind of pantechnicon book, in which I could shove in any mental

furniture, however horrible -- or however beautiful -- if I could do so." [1] Proof of his awareness of one meaning of the word -- 'a moving van' or 'furniture warehouse', as an artist he would have been aware of another meaning -- 'a bazaar of varied craftwork', though his interest in words may qualify the latter etymologically, pan (all) techne (skills) indicating a kind of complicated, unified aesthetic. Gardiner-Scott, commenting on Peake's pantechnicon in regard to the temporal loops in his narrative, notes, "A pantechnicon is, above all, labyrinthine, as the time warps suggest: a place of perception, of looking at the wares offered and making decisions about them." [2] She bases her own study of perceptual relativity in the author's prose upon an understanding of its importance to him as a definitive term, and I see no reason not to follow. However, of the two 'acts' which conclude the above quotation, I will place more emphasis on the notion of choice for two reasons: Peake's metafictional prose confronts the reader with dilemmas; choice is the agent of mediation in any aesthetic.

Peake's pantechnicon includes every facet of narrative stylistics, and some newly minted: 1) latinate, old-

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[1] MPR (Spring, 1980) 10:6.

[2] "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic", p.17. For discussion of the significance of narrative temporal loops see p.121 of this thesis.

fashioned words, and phrasing, which, along with the density of the language, adds to the sense of the Castle's size and age; 2) a traditionally-indeterminate, private symbolism; 3) narrative structure (including episodic parallelism, and character binaries and doubles) and prose structure (including a stylized perceptual relativity, exposing the mimetic visual fallacy through external and internal shifts of perspective, and poetic rhythm); 4) a conscious adoption of chiaroscuro to express ethics [3] ; 5) rhetorical techniques, especially simile and metaphor; and 6) the parodic carnivalization of previous literary forms -- classical and literary epic, comedy and tragedy, heroic Romance, the Gothic and the Modern novel, as well as isolated generic episodes, e.g., stream of consciousness in "The Reveries".

That Peake spices his prose with an antiquated vocabulary (words such as 'rabous', 'spilth', etc.) certainly indicates his adoption of certain tendencies in the Gothic novel. It does not, however, accurately delimit the work's literary category. Rather, his use of language estranges Gormenghast from the contemporary reader in the

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[3] Even colour symbolism is used by Peake according to Francoise Roussety, "Mervyn Peake: An Artist of Life", MFS (Spring, 1976) 2:11-16. Though colour is obviously important in some chapters of Titus Groan, such as green and red in "'The Body by the Window'" and "'Ullage of Sunflower'", it is difficult to trace any sustained use throughout the 'Titus books'.

same manner as the alien chronotopos does.

Moreover, the achronotopicality of the 'Titus books' agrees with Peake's pandemic overdetermination of traditional symbolic signifiers, the resulting indeterminacy further heightening the effect of estrangement. Potential indicators to allegorical meaning lead nowhere, or suggest interpretations that find little support in inconsistent patterns. When Peake must enumerate objects, actions or people, for example, he almost invariably uses either 'seven' or 'twelve' throughout the 'Titus books'. Whether this is private symbolism or not, he certainly plays with expectations for significance, sometimes satisfying them, but in such a way that the reader is confronted with shadows which dissolve when the blinding light of reason is trained upon them. The reader is placed, quite ironically, in the position of intuitive Fuchsia, impatiently wondering about some circumstantial clouds, "Why seven?...Seven is for something. What's seven for?" [TG, p.70] Potential answers are sprinkled throughout the three volumes (especially in relation to the Seventy-seventh Earl), but their patternless overdetermination of significance withholds the attribution of a singular rational meaning. Like the unintelligible ritual that rules their lives, the key to meaning has been lost.

"'The Burning'", for example, offers clues to a significance other than the mere circumstances of events,

clues that are carefully prepared beforehand but ultimately indecipherable. The unprecedented ceremony complies with tradition, for real difference is impossible in Gormenghast:

> Although it was Lord Sepulchrave who had summoned the Gathering, it was to Sourdust that the party turned when they had all arrived in the library, for his encyclopaedic knowledge of ritual gave authority to whatever proceedings were to follow. [TG, p.303]

Peake then draws attention to the true nature of the event, as artistic construct, in two ways: irony and private symbolism.

Sourdust's knowledge of religious ritual, stemming from his familiarity with the ancient tomes, is juxtaposed against the ontological uncertainty of literature en masse:

> His hoarse and quavering voice wandered through the library like something lost.
> The long shelves surrounded them, tier upon tier, circumscribing their world with a wall of other worlds imprisoned yet breathing among the network of a million commas, semi-colons, full stops, hyphens and every other sort of printed symbol. [TG, p.305]

By extension, contextual symbolic significance becomes extratextual, for a situation similar to that of the characters here ironically applies to the relationship between the reader and the work. (Or, we might say that the irony reflects the reliance of the individual on society for ontological surety when such surety is historically contingent, never mind that literature itself proves the opposite.) In case this point is glossed over by the dramatic turn of events, Peake employs irony more openly to

remind the reader, distancing involvement with the action in order to emphasize the productive and apprehensive artifice.

When the first invisible tendrils of smoke alert the company, Prunesquallor's reply to the Countess contains an ambivalence which turns implicit comprehension in the reading process outwards, breaking simple involvement with a metafictional sense: "The matter?...It is a case of atmosphere,...as far as I dare to judge, ha, ha, ha! It is a case of thickening atmosphere, ha, ha!" [TG, p.307] The readers' expectations having been whetted to receive a revelation of some importance, their wits attuned to Peake's metafictional channel, he responds with the Doctor's ambiguous emphasis of a seemingly irrelevant detail:

> Take him nevertheless...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 Lordhip's lungs something to get on with. [TG, p.309]

Disconcerted by 'THAT'S' estranged symbolic effect on 'the keyhole', the reader tentatively projects potential meanings, perhaps remembering Peake's multiple use of the object in the preceding chapter, "'Meanwhile'". [4]

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[4] In regard to analysis of Peake's method of prose composition as painterly, his technique of entitling chapters like 'Meanwhile' as if they were paintings is also disconcerting, especially in light of chapter titles more apt to serve as paintings receiving no apostrophes. See Gardiner-Scott, "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic", pp.14-5, for an interesting interpretation of this phenomenon as part of the pantechnical bazaar.

First Sourdust, completing another inane ritual, accidentally catches his beard when inserting a key into a keyhole, and must "sever the strands...after which he set fire to the grey tufts of his alienated hairs that protruded from the keyhole like a fringe around the key." [TG,p.295-6] The slight sexual undertones in the imagery gather force when it is immediately followed by the relief to his melancholia Sepulchrave's 'conception' of this unusual ceremony brings, as well as relieving his fear of failing the line of succession with thoughts of Titus "as the symbol of the Future." [TG, p.296] Next, we are presented with Gertrude reading aloud to her cats the story of a young prince, "with stars for his eyes and a new-moon for his mouth", unconscious of, and unconcerned with, the threat of imprisonment that seems prophetic to say the least. [TG, p.297-8] Then, Irma projects a complaint of tardiness through a keyhole to her brother lounging in the bath, his reply questioning temporal meaning:

> What is Time...that you speak of it so subserviently? Are we to be the slaves of the sun, that second-hand, overrated knob of gilt, or of his sister, that fatuous circle of silver paper? A curse upon their ridiculous dictatorship! [TG, p.300]

Meanwhile, Steerpike assiduously applies the corkscrew (another kind of key?) to a bottle of wine in order that he and the Twins may toast a quite different, dictatorial Future. [TG. p.301-3]

If the thematic 'key' in these related episodes of preparation for the ceremony concerns Time (ritual, literary, natural, hypothetical), how does THAT apply to Prunesquallor's emphasis? Is the 'key' to significance as mundane as an illustration of 'Save Titus while there's still time'? Or is it, perhaps, a privately symbolic reference to the metafictional birthing of a hero from 'among the network...of printed symbol', one related to the deliberate achronotopicality of Peake's Fantasy? Because of such problematizations of interpretation, critical approaches must inevitably turn to examine Peake's prose, the aesthetic vehicle of his imaginative vision, for the 'key' to the work's meaning.

An initial structure of systematized polar binaries supplies the framework for a rare and beautiful prose in the first book. [5] The binary structure is dual in effect, existing not only between the characters, but between interiority and exteriority in each, to the extent that each character's personal domain reflects a socially imposed function, but not a humanistic interiority.

Rottcodd and Doctor Prunesquallor are 'caretakers', both isolated from, but integral to, the life of the Castle. [6]

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[5] See C.N. Manlove, Modern Fantasy, for a different point of view on this structural phenomenon.

[6] In a note to Jacques Favier's review of the French translation, Titus d'Enfer, G. Peter Winnington points out that "during the war, Peake's father's car bore an inscription on the windscreen. From inside the car, it read

Their polarity lies in the relevance/irrelevance of their functions, for the social system of Gormenghast provides, or imposes, identity as function. Rottcodd's is "an ideal existence, living alone day and night in a long loft" [TG, p.18]; forgotten himself, he is responsible for those forgotten symbols of art, those symbols of the aesthetic imagination's sensual spirituality, the carvings of the

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...[inverse mirror image] or ROTCOD." [MPR 1:8] What status incidental origins achieved in Peake's imagination, however, is matter for conjecture. This private joke may have suggested the binary system of reversed polarities, but to attribute its artistic transformation to a concrete event in the author's life explains little: indeed, it makes the complexity of Peake's literary creation more conspicuous. Relatedly, the manuscript for "The Dark Breakfast" and "The Reveries" is contained in a notebook headed 'Occupational Therapy', written during Peake's nervous breakdown in Summer, 1942 [Batchelor, pp.71-2], while "'The Burning'" was produced at the same time as Peake was being courtmartialled "for accidentally setting fire to his room at Chelsea Barracks." [MPR 1:14] Thus, Batchelor's argument for interpreting a more private vision, rather than Peake's reflecting "war-time experience" [pp.82-3], while it agrees with some of the author's statements about his work, fundamentally disagrees with the biographer's own assessment of Peake as a Romantic.

Winnington rightly chastizes Batchelor's "critical method. It is one thing to note how an author uses autobiographical material in his fiction, but it is quite another to establish a relationship of cause and effect between the life and the work." [from Winnington's review of Batchelor's biography, MPR 1:14] Which is to say, 'everything is potentially allegorical; nothing is actually an allegory.' Batchelor's attribution of the novels' organization "round metaphors of birth" to the birth of Peake's sons and daughters [pp. 82-6, 94], not only lacks textual support in some cases [Winnington, MPR 1:15], but the overdetermination of significance in the textual repetition of birth imagery implies the challenge of change confronting the Castle's ritual in another, metafictional manner; one that symbolizes a continual aesthetic moral growth. [Batchelor, p.128]

Outer Dwellers, which, excluded from a life dominated by ritual, represent an extraneous capacity for beauty in mankind under the laws of Gormenghast. The Doctor, leading a bourgeois existence in a Georgian mansion incongruously ingested into the body of the Castle, is responsible for the physical and mental well-being of its inhabitants. Yet, this relevant, even necessary function is only present on the barest of sufferance, as the poorly tolerated attendance of the Prunesquallors at official ceremonies attests. Both characters are examples of the social structure of Gormenghast, for there is no middle class per se, these two the sole possible members.

Gardiner-Scott's identification of the social structure as medieval, with the Groans playing the role of feudal barons, everyone else a retainer, can be attributed to the Gothic illusion. [7] No peasantry exists; the Outer Dwellers, who should occupy that class, are entirely absorbed in artistic creation. The Groans themselves have no authority other than their hereditary function as symbolic figureheads. Power in Gormenghast lies solely in the abstract, anonymous, empty tomes of inane ritual, while every single inhabitant of the Castle is part of a great service industry. Thus, the relevance or irrelevance to

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[7] "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic", chap. 4, iv, "The 'Estates Satire' of Mervyn Peake", pp.367-77.

human life of designated function has no relevance in itself to the life of Gormenghast, which designates functional identity. The situation corresponds exactly with Bakhtin's concept of an epic chronotope as the valorization of an absolute past, and, simultaneously, the surplus repression of a society essentially post-industrial despite its medieval trappings.

That the Earl and Countess are no more than figureheads is an important part of their external characterization, but also carries overtones of a cleverly disguised creation myth. Gertrude, whose room has all the grace of an animal's den, seems an earth-mother in more than her overwhelming presence, but an earth-mother whose traditional role has been displaced by the system. Her talent for communicating with birds and cats, representing a capacity for reconciling inimical forces of nature, does not extend to her own species. Sepulchrave, living entirely in the intellectual realm of his library's worlds of words -- his sole retreat from ordained rounds of ritual actually only the substitution of another tradition, is, in contrast to his estranged wife, a sort of 'sky-god'. That both are alienated from normal human values and their fellow creatures is not so much due to belief in themselves and their 'divine right', as it is an effect of the system to which they are bound: "How could he <u>love</u> this place? He was a part of it." [<u>TG</u>, p.62]; "...there won't be another child if I know

anything about it but now here is a son for Gormenghast which is what the Castle needed..." [TG, p.398]

In psychological terms, Gertrude's misplaced love and Sepulchrave's melancholia represent the consequences of an artificial division of Eros and Thanatos, enforced by their submission to a performance principle. As symbolic figureheads of a traditional system, they also belong to an industry which services only the system, a system which demands subjectification, giving assurances of purpose and identity in the process, and tangentially allowing a few subjects the exercise of hierarchical privilege (demonstrated by Gertrude's inordinant banishment of Flay), but ultimately ensuring only its own survival.

Again, those critics who become enthralled with Peake's presentation of this world, ignoring his subtle elaboration of all its dangers, will react all the more vehemently to the startling juxtaposition in the third book of a coeval world slightly futuristic in its chronotopos. The retrospective effect of Peake's achronotopical vision is to transpose a world whose essence is that of literary epic to the present with all its limitations intact, initially exposing those limitations by employing the novelistic mode. But, if the consequence for the first volume is to lend the appearance of anti-epic to the work, then the unfinished story of Titus' development tends toward the quest for a new epic, perhaps Homeric in the sense of rediscovering an

'immanent toality rounded from within', though never regressively, naively nostalgic because of the implications of Peake's aesthetic.

Is it any wonder, then, that the history of this strange society should seem so enigmatically familiar, having followed a pattern of development from habit to convention to ritual to religion to full-blown social institution? Manlove notes that the Castle appears to grow in size, suggesting a living organism [8] ; however, this seems to me to reflect the social institution's flexible capacity for assimilating its creators when ontological status is granted to an historically contingent culture. Moreover, it is difficult to agree with Manlove's position that Peake does not provide enough motivating reasons for Titus' desire to be free. [9]

Freedom to change the social system traditionally belongs to youth, but that promise is blasted in Fuchsia and Steerpike, who stereotypically represent passive feminine intuition and active masculine intellect. [TG, pp.158, 163, 274] Both their potentials are betrayed by the Castle:

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[8] Modern Fantasy, pp.218-20.

[9] Manlove's difficulty with accepting the events of the 'Titus books' as written stems from his preconceptions concerning Fantasy literature. This can also be seen in the way his definition of Fantasy (in the Introduction to Modern Fantasy, pp.1-3) immediately chokes when he attempts to ingest Peake, who puts him on a defensive tack from the start.

Fuchsia's capacity for redemptive human love remains unnurtured to the extent that she 'hates everyone', and eventually is wasted. [G, p.452] She turns to Steerpike almost out of desperation -- the 'Prune' does not respond to her shy display of a growing erotic awareness [TG, pp.180-1, 483-4], and her love for her brother is slightly incestuous -- but they are too far apart for any compatibility:

> She seemed too much alive -- alive in so different a sense from the glittering and icy vitality of her companion -- 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....She admired all that she was not. [G,p.350-1]

She admires Steerpike's intellectual potential, which, when separated from emotional involvement, is itself drawn to occupy the vacuum created by the meaningless ritual. (He will be dealt with more fully later.) While both characters may be seen in the light of Day's theory that the Gothic parodies inherited attitudes of masculinity and femininity, their metafictional presence here effectually parodies those parodies. Fuchsia's childishness is exaggerated in order to incorporate those previous incarnations of feminine passivity; Steerpike is an amalgamation of past villains of literature: Milton's Satan, Dickens' Steerforth and Uriah Heep, even his "forehead [that] shines like a bloody iceberg" [G, p.168] recalling the great white whale.

With the binary of the Poet and Sourdust, Peake can investigate two types of literature, the artistic and the religious, as well as two approaches to literature, the creative and the interpretive. Like the Carvers', the Poet's work has been assimilated by ritual; his poetic complaint to "Beauty" ostensibly concerns his "loneliness" without his "love", but when he discovers an audience: "The effect was electric. 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." [TG, pp.141-2] His fear of real communication is perhaps a result of actual incommunication. Certainly, Steerpike's reaction -- "after the end of the second verse [he] ceased to pay any attention to the words" [TG, p.141] -- is a response quite similar to that afforded to the Poet's 'official declamation' in Gormenghast, where the functional definition of creativity might have been written by a civil service bureaucrat:

> ...to all of varying duties whose observance of the tenets justify their presence at this ceremony, I dedicate this poem which as the laws decree shall be addressed to as many as are here present in all the variance of their receptivity, status and acumen, in so much as poetry is a ritual of the heart, the voice of faith, the core of Gormenghast, the moon when it is red, the trumpet of the Groans. [G, p.176]

One wonders what 'dreaded dreams' he would have 'Beauty dispel'? [TG, p.140] The dread of being no more than a book upon a shelf, read only by the Earl? The Poet, like

Rottcodd, is a caretaker of irrelevant beauty: "An all-but-forgotten figure in his room above a precipice of stone. No one reads his poems, but he holds a remote status -- a gentleman, as it were, by rumour." [G, p.13] It is fitting, then, that he becomes Master of Ceremonies after the flood, for that is what his art tended toward in celebrating Gormenghast:

> His high order of intelligence which had up till now been concentrated upon the creation of dazzling, if incomprehensible, structures of verbiage, was now able to deploy itself in a way which, if almost as incomprehensible, was at the same time of more value to the castle. The Poetry of Ritual had gripped him and his long wedge-shaped face was never without a speculative twist of the muscles -- as though he were for ever turning over some fresh and absorbing variant of the problem of Ceremony and the human element. [G, p.505]

Religious interpretation fully satisfies any craving for artistic beauty Sourdust might harbour in his wheezing chest, and becomes the sole literature of his son's fanatical zealotry. All possible human variation is subsumed by the 'bible' of Gormenghast:

> The left hand pages were headed with the date and in the first of the three books this was followed by a list of the activities to be performed hour by hour during the day by his lordship. The exact times; the garments to be worn for each occasion and the symbolic gestures to be used. Diagrams facing the left hand page gave particulars of the routes by which his lordship should approach the various scenes of operation. The diagrams were hand tinted.
>
> The second tome was full of blank pages and was entirely symbolic, .hile the third was a mass of cross references. If, for instance, his lordship, Sepulchrave, the present Earl of Groan, had been three inches shorter, the costumes,

> gestures and even the routes would have differed from the ones described in the first tome, and from the enormous library, another would have had to have been chosen which would have applied. Had he been of a fair skin, or had he been heavier than he was, had his eyes been green, blue or brown instead of black, then, automatically another set of archaic regulations would have appeared this morning on the breakfast table. This complex system was understood in its entirety only by Sourdust -- the technicalities demanding the devotion of a lifetime, though the sacred spirit of tradition implied by the daily manifestations was understood by all. [TG, pp.66-7]

The potential effect of natural differences on the human personality has been systematized by ritual, short-circuiting the change implicit in biological variety. Paradoxically, the three requisite volumes might be considered a metaphor of textual relation: the exact procedures of Peake's novels and the multiplicity of our world's infinite variety are mediated by overdetermined 'blank pages entirely symbolic', which readers interpret as they will. The above description also supports interpreting Titus' Christening and Earling as a Lacanian insertion of the subject into traditional discourses.

Opposed to hierophantic literature in an epistemological sense is the binary of Pentecost, head gardener, and the Brown Father. Both express an ideal of living in harmony with the natural world, though Pentecost's practice is shaped by its social setting, while the Brown Father's is in fundamental unity with nature. The latter, who seems more like a tree come to life "as though Autumn

was standing beside her [Keda], or an oak," [TG, p.351] could never be imagined "polishing the apples into a mirror-like gloss," for example.[TG, p.100] Though Pentecost "understood and cared for....the earth" [TG, p.99], the beauty he cultivates is artificial, "for he had been born in the mud huts and had in his marrow the love and understanding of colour that was the hallmark of the Bright Carvers." [TG, p.98] As Peake's ironic use of 'hallmark' here indicates, Pentecost remains aloof from human contact, employing his knowledge in a way that is not part of Gormenghast, and yet has been tainted by it:

> Of flowers he had a knowledge beyond that of the botanist, or the artist, being moved by the growth rather than the fulfillment, the organic surge that found its climax in the gold or the blue rather than in the colours, the patterns or anything visible. [TG, p.99]

Free of the pernicious influence of the Castle, the Brown Father is completely attuned to nature: "All was brown, a symphony of brown, a brown tree, a brown landscape, a brown man....Peace like a cloud enveloped her [Keda] and she knew that she was in the presence of a strange selflessness." [TG, p.352] Almost surrealistic in contrast to the claustrophobic density of the Castle's presentation, Keda's interlude with the Brown Father shows what Pentecost's knowledge could become were it freed from society: "Their communion of silence which from the first they had recognized to be a common language was with them

perpetually flowering in a kind of absolute trust in the other's receptivity." [TG. pp.357-8] Pentecost's empathic capacity is limited to the vegetable world in this regard: "To all growing things he brought this knowledge and love, but to the apple tree he gave himself up wholly." [TG. p.99] It is almost as if Peake were signalling the path to Eden, but by a path that, in becoming concrete in the second book's structural binary of city and 'green' world, as symbolized by the Castle and the Thing, is problematized by Romantic self-delusion and nostalgic enthrallment.

Keda serves a multiple purpose in Peake's binary system. As a mother, her natural instincts contrast with the well-intended but querulously smothering love of Nannie Slagg, and the displaced affection of Gertrude. As a woman, her sexual awareness and deep insight are the opposite of Irma's near-sighted repression. Despite having recently lost a husband and child, [10] Keda chooses life when looking out a

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[10] Her old husband's death as "he carved the child of leaves" and Keda's "unborn" moves for the first time [TG, p.144] suggests an empathic, if not supernatural, connection that supports the fantastic events at the Earling. Manlove's argument that Peake's linking of Titus and the Thing "is imposed upon the story" [Modern Fantasy, p.235] does not hold up, for he has here prepared for its feasibility. Moreover, I fail to see why Manlove, who has spent some effort in pointing out the separation of this fantasy from reality [Ibid, p.217], cannot accept a fantastic occurrence. Indeed, it is because he misapplies the critical standards of Realism that he misreads Peake's work, and becomes enthralled with the first volume's powerful realization of a world. His analysis of the latter's binary structure is strong in consequence, but the comprehension of the implications of Fantasy is paltry to the extent that he projects his own preoccupations onto his interpretation.

window at "the great wall that held in Gormenghast. The wall that cut her own people away, as though to keep out a plague." [TG, p.96] Her silently effective action, unconsciously knowing the child's desires, is in direct contrast to Nannie's childish attempts at distraction. As Titus', "crying grew and grew in spite of Mrs. Slagg's dangling a necklace in front of his screwed up eyes and an attempt at singing a lullaby from her half-forgotten store", quite naturally, Keda:

> ...parted the dark brown material from her throat and freeing her left breast, took the child from the shoulders of the old woman....Then as she turned and sat at the window a calm came upon her as from her very centre, the milk of her body and the riches of her frustrated love welled up and succoured the infant creature in her keeping. [TG, p.97]

Peake's juxtaposition here identifies the excluded 'plague' of the Outer Dwellers as love, whether sexuality, natural passion, or simply compassion for a fellow creature.

Keda's singing 'wild bird' [TG, pp.352-6], the metaphor for her love, contrasts with Irma's "tiny imprisoned bird" [TG, p.188] which, when it does break out, is externalized as the garish parrot of her party dress, much as he contrasts Keda's "white goat.... sitting with one frail white foreleg curled to its heart" [TG, p.360] with "the roaring repression that could do no more than bleat through

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Attributions of authorial intent are often self-projections of this critic.

her [Irma's] voice." [G, p.29] Keda's bird sings from her heart of joyous completion, the opposite of Irma's "forehead which was like the smoothly plastered front of an empty house, deserted save by the ghost of a bird-like tenant which hopped about in the dust and preened its feathers in front of tarnished mirrors." [G, p.29] Peake hilariously indicates Irma's lack of self-knowledge, her blindness to her own repression, during her reverie by her peculiar method for judging the whiteness of her skin; inside the Castle walls, even a black/white morality is reduced to "exactly the same tone of grey...darker and very often black." [TG, p.396]

Keda thematically focusses what is otherwise a polymorphous eroticism diffused throughout Peake's sensorial prose. She is a centre of life around which revolve the elemental forces which challenge Gormenghast's stasis. Burying her husband, she reveals the force which drives her: "I could not think of death. Only of life. I could not think of stillness, only of movement.... It was all a dream. I was alive, alive, and two men watched me standing." [TG, p.194] However, the love of life that Keda experiences is something as alien to the Outer Dwellers as to the denizens within the wall: "They stood beyond the grave, on the other side." [TG, p.194] Perhaps foreshadowing her suicide, Peake implies a knowledge greater than the merely physical, instinctual drives of her lovers, one that fuses Eros and Thanatos,

unalterably isolating her from both the Castle and the 'outcasts' who live beneath its shadow: "Keda felt her heart was breaking with a love so universal that it drew into its fiery atmosphere all things because they were." [TG, p.232] It is as if, in her, the 'disease' had become virulent:

> Her breast rose and fell, and she was both weak and strong. She could feel the blood flowing within her and she felt that she must die or break forth into leaves and flowers. It was not passion that she felt: not the passion of the body, though that was there, but rather an exultation, a reaching for life, for the whole of the life of which she was capable, and in that life which she but dimly divined was centred love, the love for a man. She was not in love with Rantel: she was in love with what he meant to her as someone she could love. [TG, p.236]

Peake alters his usual style in the Keda-Braigon-Rantel subplot, employing a more surrealistic approach in an attempt, I think, to aesthetically suggest the values he is promoting by capturing the impassionate carving of the Outer Dwellers in his net of words:

> Distance had no meaning. The tangled glittering of the forest roof rolled away, but its furthermost reaches were brought suddenly nearer in a bound by the terrifying effect of proximity in the mountain that they swarmed. The mountain was neither far away nor was it close at hand. It arose starkly, enormously, across the lens of the eye. The hollow itself was a cup of light. Every blade of the grass was of consequence, and the few scattered stones held an authority that made their solid, separate marks upon the brain -- each one with its own unduplicated shape: each rising brightly from the ink of its own spilling. [TG, p.281]

Indeed, the rutting battle of the jealous males is described in terms that reveal the different attitudes of Braigon and

Rantel to their art, one trying to conquer the material with the single-minded fierceness of his onslaught, whittling away from the outside, while the other empathically enters into union with the form of his foe, constructing from within. [TG, "Knives in the Moon", pp.281-4] Further, it is a battle juxtaposed stylistically with the mock-epic confrontation between Flay and Swelter, who, together, are to Braigon and Rantel as love for the stones is to love for a woman.

The two ironically named servants, forming a binary of self-denying loyalty and self-indulgent sycophantism, are enemies from first sight. It is as if Flay unconsciously recognized rebellion in every billowing fold of the chef's impossible bulk, while Swelter is horrified by his skeletal foe's ascetic self-sufficiency. Both are, in their way, utterly dominated by their assigned roles, extending even to their private habitats -- the stark labyrinth of the Stone Lanes, the insane Epicureanism of the Great Kitchen -- though both are outdone by Peake's paradigm of surplus repression to a performance principle, the Grey Scrubbers. As Peake makes clear when the two servants are shocked by the Earl's madness, they experience "the same emotion translated, as it were, into two very different languages." [TG, p.366] Their battle personalizes the conflict in Titus Groan between stasis and change, for there is no room in which private emotions like revenge can become public. Yet

both are encompassed by another struggle, a conflict between the static structure of the book and the aesthetic prose, which conveys action through the implicit change of subversive metaphor. Theirs is an epic struggle on a literary scale, its ironic overtones mocking the classical epic.

Peake foreshadows this battle by challenging a near perfect Homeric simile: "The chef, a mixture of emotions competing within him as might a group of worms make battle for sovereignty in the belly of an ox, peers over Fuchsia's shoulder." [TG, p.364] He then deliberately exaggerates his own subsequent description of emotions on the epic scale:

> Swelter's eyes meet those of his enemy, and never was there held between four globes of gristle so sinister a hell of hatred. Had the flesh, the fibres, and the bones of the chef and those of Mr. Flay been conjured away and away down that dark corridor leaving only their four eyes suspended in mid-air outside the Earl's door, then, surely, they must have reddened to the hue of Mars, reddened and smouldered, and at last broken into flame, so intense was their hatred -- broken into flame and circled about one another in ever-narrowing gyres and in swifter and yet swifter flight until, merged into one sizzling globe of ire they must surely have fled, the four in one, leaving a trail of blood behind them in the cold grey air of the corridor, until, screaming as they fly beneath innumerable arches and down the endless passageways of Gormenghast, they found their eyeless bodies once again, and re-trenched themselves in startled sockets. [TG. pp.364-5]

That Peake is parodying the Gothic tradition here is evident in the quickened rhythm of the long sentence which ironically effaces the opening qualification ('Had') by

supporting this flight of the imagination with a technical recreation affecting the reader. Further, because Peake's aesthetic relies on an essentially relative visual metaphor, it is comparable to the function of the Homeric simile, but implies the opposite, i.e., implies the involvement of the imagination in the perception of reality instead of a factually concrete natural similitude. While both methods are heavily stylized, their ethico-metaphysical implications are opposed.

The great battle of the servants mocks epic values by investing morality in personal animosity. That Flay wins does not ensure victory for the traditions of Gormenghast, but eliminates the challenge Swelter's Epicureanism represents to Peake's aesthetic ontology as a philosophical evolutionary dead-end. [11] Technically, novelistic irony in this episode's narratorial intrusion punctures epic immanence in such a way as to keep the constructed artificiality of the battle foregrounded, distancing the dramatic turns of event by playing verbal wit against concrete sensory cognition and affectional logic. Both servants and readers are entangled like flies in the webs of Peake's prose:

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[11] Swelter's obvious Epicureanism, the old philospher's Stoicism, and perhaps even Sepulchrave's involvement with Hegelian 'owls of Minerva' make me suspect that Peake dealt with rival philosophies tangentially, illustrating them aesthetically rather than presenting any rational argument.

> When Flay judged the silhouette a good twelve paces distant he began to follow, and then there began the first of the episodes -- that of the stalk. If ever man stalked man, Flay stalked Swelter. It is to be doubted whether, when compared with the angular motions of Mr. Flay, any man on earth could claim to stalk at all. He would have to do it with another word.
>
> The very length and shape of his limbs and joints, the very formation of his head, and hands and feet were constructed as though for this process alone. Quite unconscious of the stick-insect action, which his frame was undergoing, he followed the creeping dome. For Mr. Swelter was himself -- at all events in his own opinion -- on the tail of his victim. The tail did not happen to be where he supposed it, two floors above, but he was moving with all possible stealth, nevertheless....
>
> If Mr. Flay stalked, Mr. Swelter <u>insinuated</u>. He insinuated himself through space. His body encroached, sleuth-like, from air-volume to air-volume, entering, filling and edging out of each in turn, the slow and vile belly preceding the horribly deliberate and potentially nimble progress of his fallen arches. [<u>TG</u>, pp.420-1]

By employing irony to emphasize artistic construction, Peake situates the action in the words, i.e., he makes us conscious of the imagistic function of representational language. In order for the characters to act effectively in the web-hung Hall of Spiders, "the secret was to <u>ignore</u>." [<u>TG</u>, p.430]. The revelation has two possible metafictional meanings: either Peake means ignore the words to concentrate upon the symbolism of represented actions, or ignore represented action to see aesthetic movement, such as in structure.

The binary polarity between the characters is reflected <u>in</u> the characters. Physically bizarre to the point of

grotesquerie, they nevertheless display a humanistic emotional reality from the start, unlike Dickens' technique of development from caricature to character, which implies a defensive reaction of self-enclosure when confronted by a hostile world (one that is only broken, or transcended, in a moment of dire crisis where humane, altruistic qualities are necessary to relieve the suffering of a personal friend). With Peake, the division between external caricature and interior character remains a fundamental consequence of their unavoidable submission to the social system. His caricature/character split is basic, determined, and untranscendable in the Dickensian sense. Even Flay, as Man of the Woods, doubts unconscious natural pleasure as insurrection.[TG, p.444.] [12] In Peake's world, to be free is a heroic enterprise on quite another level because the sole 'change' life can offer, confined as it is for these characters by the chains of ritual, is death.

Because the social system in Gormenghast is inclusive, even the partly excluded Outer Dwellers caught up in its centripetal dynamic, only mortality can affect personal

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[12] Though Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, isolated from his world, attained a revelation of divine Providence, it was via a material inventory, a re-creation of the absent, capitalistic culture. Flay's introspection [TG, p.442-3] demonstrates his inability not only to consider another way of life differing from Gormenghast, but also to re-create the absent culture because of over-identification, because, outside of the encompassing walls, he doubts the reality of his own existence.

change:

> Drear ritual turned its wheel. The ferment of the heart, within these walls, was mocked by every length of sleeping shadow. The passions, no greater than candle flames, flickered in Time's yawn, for Gormenghast, huge and adumbrate, outcrumbles all. [TG, p.412]

Gormenghast always triumphs over any superficial temporal alterations. Even the whimsical architectural expressions of each Earl's individuality are additions "that characterized the main volume", that "had begun a tradition and had created the precedent for Experiment." [TG. p.202] It is as if ritual were a vacuum around which every element of the universe gravitated, affected by its distance from a dynamic being which colonizes itself.

Peake makes the implicit character division explicit through contrasting Keda's universalized love, more intensely mystic the further away from the Castle (Flay, too, sharing in a 'communion of silence' with nature), with the reduction of this potential when enclosed by the immemorial stones. All the inhabitants of the Castle are externally caricatured, both by physical exaggeration and, by extension, in their private rooms, in order to illustrate that, as eccentric as they appear, they still share a basic human quality, a quality best expressed in 'The Attic':

> As Fuchsia climbed into the winding darkness her body was impregnated and made faint by a qualm as of green April. Her heart beat painfully.
>
> This is a love that equals in its power the love of man for woman and reaches inwards as deeply. 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. [TG, p.77]

The unspoken premise for Peake's elaboration of an autonomous identity is a love of self; the sheer impossibility of that autonomous identity is never a question. Rather, Peake's interest is in revealing the source in the aesthetic imagination of the ontological assumption by differentiating between what is socially imposed and the profound remainder. This is true for all the characters excepting Steerpike who loves nothing, not even, despite his ambitions, himself. Thus, caricatural exaggeration is entirely due to the dominant presence of the Castle and its ritualistic valorization of an absolute past, meaningless in itself.

It is not, then, that the characters lack the common language of humanity, as Manlove suggests when the Countess construes Nannie's knocking as hitting [TG, p.57], nor is it "[b]ecause these individuals choose not to meet with other people, [that] their personalities remain undiluted and their powers of self-expression almost absolute." [13] Rather, because the hierophantic ritual has perverted language monologically in ideological subjectification, their miscommunication inevitably arises from natural human variety and subsequent polyphony. Indeed, Peake gently satirizes the authoritarian exercise of control over

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[13] Modern Fantasy, p.221. My emphasis.

language by exposing the subversive effect of this enforced interiority:

> 'Speaking professionally,' said Doctor Prunesquallor, 'I should say the face was irregular.'
> 'Do you mean it's ugly?' said Lord Groan.
> 'It is unnatural,' said Prunesquallor.
> 'What is the difference, man,' said Lord Groan.
> 'Sir?' questioned the doctor.
> 'I asked if it was ugly, sir, and you answer that it is unnatural. Why must you hedge?'
> 'Sir!' said Prunesquallor, but as he gave no colour to the utterance, very little could be made of it.
> 'When I say "ugly" have the goodness to use the word. Do you understand?' Lord Groan spoke quietly.
> 'I comprehend, sir. I comprehend.' [TG, p.51]

The infiltration of private polyphony occurs consistently in the opening chapters -- between Flay and Rottcodd [TG, p.23], Swelter and his culinary pupils [TG, pp.34-9], Flay and Steerpike [TG, pp.45, 47], Gertrude and Nannie [TG, pp.57-8], Sepulchrave and Sourdust [TG, p.67], etc. -- but never because they choose to remain apart; instead, they are constantly seeking bridges to each other only to tumble into a social abyss. There is no dialectical interplay among these binaries, for no reconcilement, no synthesis, no change is possible outside of death: life among the stones is systematically channelled into the Castle's traditional destiny.

Artistically, Peake utilizes chiaroscuro to concretely express the ethical implications of the structural stasis, especially of the polar binary of interiority/exteriority in

characterization. Shadows and darkness, equated with death, are balanced by the shafts of light, or life, that sporadically pierce the windows and barbicans as if laying siege to Gormenghastian gloom. As Francoise Roussety points out:

> The way in which light penetrates the darkness reflects the way in which life, willy nilly, penetrates death's dominion. Light never floods into Gormenghast; it slips in discreetly, through the cracks in the doors, through closed shutters, or else it seems 'subterranean'. [14]

That Rembrandt was Peake's favourite painter is completely understandable in the light of a prose shaped by an artist's eye, an awareness not only "of the importance of light and shade in the perception of reality" (Steerpike's view of Flay in the intermittently lit Stone Lanes, for example [TG, p.42]), but "especially apparent in his adoption of innumerable dramatic and aesthetic techniques conveyed through the technique of chiaroscuro." [15]

In Gertrude's 'den', "a bird would appear between the bars of a small high window which let in less than no light." [TG, pp.54-5] These visitors from the natural world have as much substance inside the Castle as the animated darkness itself:

> The missel-thrush made no motion, and as a candle guttered, a ghoul of shadow from under a tall

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[14] "Mervyn Peake: An Artist of Life", MPR (Spring, 1976) 2:14.

[15] Rosa Gonzalez, "Peake Among the Masters of Chiaroscuro", MPR (August, 1982) 15:5.

> cupboard dislodged itself and moved across the floorboards, climbed the bed, and crawled half way across the eiderdown before it returned by the same route, to curl up and roost beneath the cupboard again. [TG, p.57]

Thus, one aspect of Peake's aesthetic is to illuminate the microcosmic division implicit in the characters with the structural division in the macrocosm of the Castle:

> An infiltration of the morning's sun gave the various objects a certain vague structure but in no way dispelled the darkness. Here and there a thin beam of light threaded the warm brooding dusk and was filled with slowly moving motes like an attenuate firmament of stars revolving in grave order. [TG, p.78]

Although Peake recognized superficial differences in aesthetic media --

> For the pianist his keyboard: for the writer his vocabulary: for the draughtsman a stick of graphite. A pencil ranges from the frailest of greys to the black of the tomb. Hell in a cedar tunnel. The scope is total.

-- in the ethical purpose attributable to an aesthetic style, they are ultimately indistinguishable: "To draw is to make marks that are the equivalent of a discovery. It is the smashing of another window pane. A letting-in of the light."[16]

Such a purpose illuminates thematics when Peake concretizes his aesthetic techniques in the second book. Whereas Peake constructs theme with chiaroscuro in Titus Groan -- "...they were not so much eyes as narrow tunnels

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[16] "What is Drawing?", rpt. MPR (Autumn, 1982) 15:3. First appeared in Athene, vol. 8 (April, 1957) 3:21.

through which the Night was pouring." [TG, p.319], the subtly horrific effect of Steerpike's declaration of love to Fuchsia is entirely due to this identification of death with darkness: "Try and understand; for I love you as the shadows love the castle." [G, p.356] [17]

Ethical gradations of chiaroscuro, then, depend upon the concentric pull from the empty core of the Castle, as in Barquentine's complete identification with ritual -- "the fanatic for whom the world holds no gradations -- only the blind extremes of black and white." [G, p.267] But this also argues for a metafictional presentation of these limitations to perception that, while creating with one hand, is erasing with the other:

> A pale sun like a ball of pollen was hung aloft an empty and faded sky, and as he sped below it his shadow sped with him, rippling over the cobbles of great squares, or cruising alongside, upright, where at his elbow the lit and attenuate walls threw back the pallid light. For all that within its boundaries, this shadow held nothing but the uniform blankness of its tone, yet it seemed every whit as predatory and meaningful as the body that cast it -- the body, that with so many aids to expressiveness within the moving outline, from the pallor of the young man and the dark red colour of his eyes, to the indefinable expressions of lip and eye, was drawing nearer at every step to a tryst of his own making.
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> The sun was blocked away. For a few minutes the shadow disappeared like the evil dream of some sleeper who on waking finds the substance of his nightmare standing beside his bed -- for Steerpike was there, turning the corners, threading the

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[17] See G. Peter Winnington, "Fuchsia and Steerpike: Mood and Form", MPR (Autumn, 1977) 5:17-23 for a detailed analysis of the Steerpike/Fuchsia relationship in terms of light/dark imagery.

> mazes, gliding down slopes of stone or flights of rotten wood. And yet it was strange that with all the vibrancy that lay packed within the margins of his frame, yet his shadow when it reappeared reaffirmed its self-sufficiency and richness as a scabbard for malignity. Why should this be -- why with certain slender proportions and certain tricks of movement should a sense of darkness be evoked? Shadows more terrible and grotesque than Steerpike's gave no such feeling. They moved across their walls bloated or spidery with a comparative innocence. It was as though a shadow had a heart -- a heart where blood was drawn from the margins of a world of less substance than air. A world of darkness whose very existence depended upon its enemy, the light. [G, p.261]

While Peake employs chiaroscuro to suggest structural morality, the direct correspondence of this for the reader is withheld in the second book, to the extent that unexamined critical acceptance of this technique is, concomitantly, participation in a Romantic delusion, a shadowy pathetic fallacy, if you will. Peake ends this chapter of foreshadowing with deliberate preparation for the appearance of Steerpike's familiar -- the monkey, Satan:

> And then the giant shade began to shrivel, and as it descended it moved a little forward of its caster, until finally it was a thick and stunted thing -- a malformation, intangible, terrible, that led the way towards those rooms where its immediate journey could, for a little while, be ended. [G, p.264]

However, in the very same chapter, Peake warns the reader not to identify too closely with his concretization (in events) of the previous work's stylistic meaning:

> The walls of Gormenghast were like the walls of paradise or the walls of an inferno. The colours were devilish or angelical according to the colour of the mind that watched them. They swam, those walls, with the hues of hell, with the tints of

> Zion. The breasts of the plumaged seraphim; the scales of Satan. [G, p.263]

This implicit warning serves to turn interpretation back upon itself, emphasizing through perceptual relativity the very operations of the mind by which morality is judged. Moreover, that textual morality in Gormenghast takes the overt form of darkness versus light, civilization versus nature, Castle versus Thing, is also relativized. Therefore, it is appropriate to turn from ambiguously represented events to a more precise analysis of the means of representation, the 'depictional' style of Peake's pantechnicon, for "Peake's descriptions do more than describe: they decipher. The message they reveal is, just beyond words, this plexus of intense, sensorial impressions." [18]

The structural stasis in the narrative of Titus Groan, ostensibly adding to the permanence of the Castle, is belied by the fluidity of the description. While much of the imagery animating the Castle conflicts especially with the natural cycle of seasons -- "Summer was on the roofs of Gormenghast. It lay inert, like a sick thing. Its limbs spread. It took the shape of what it smothered. The masonry sweated and was horribly silent." [TG, p.413] -- it provides only an illusory synthesis of the structural polarity:

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[18] Jacques Favier, "Distortions of Space and Time in the Titus Trilogy", MPR, (Spring, 1979) 8:11.

"Autumn returned to Gormenghast like a dark spirit re-entering its stronghold....--Gormenghast had itself become autumn. Even the denizens of this fastness were its shadows." [TG, p.196] Peake employs the pathetic fallacy as a metaphor of all that opposes Gormenghast, and yet, is ineluctably dragged into the influence of its orbit:

> The autumn and winter winds and the lashing rain storms and the very cold of those seasons, for all their barbarism, were of a spleen that voiced the heart. Their passions were allied to human passions -- their cries to human cries. [TG, p.412]

This natural sympathy is ultimately incidental to an inevitable conquest:

> The while, beneath the downpour and the sunbeams, the Castle hollow as a tongueless bell, its corroded shell dripping or gleaming with the ephemeral weather, arose in immemorial defiance of the changing airs, and skies. These were but films of altering light and hue: sunbeam shifting into moonbeam; the wafted leaf into the wafted snow; the musk into a tooth of icicle. These but the transient changes on its skin: each hour a pulse the more -- a shade the less: a lizard basking and a robin frozen.
> ****
> Stone after grey stone; and a sense of the heaving skywards of great blocks, one upon the other in a climbing weight, ponderous and yet alive with the labour of dead days. Yet, at the same time, still....Still, as though paralysed by its own weight, while about it the momentary motions fluttered and died:....
> Was there something about these vertical acres of stone that mouthed of a stillness that was more complete, a silence that lay within, and drummed. Small winds rustled on the castle's outer shell...but within the walls not even the light changed, save when the sun broke through.... [TG, pp.497-8]

As Manlove suggests, "The whole exists in a unity of

living tension." [19] Such tension, however, is not organic in the sense of progressing through structural synthesis, for Peake retains an opposition of destructive and constructive appropriation within his metaphoric pathetic fallacy. It is his aesthetic which displays a Postmodern Fantastic 'hesitancy'. Because Peake sustains a precarious balance in the structural polarity, there is no "reconcilement of opposite or discordant qualities", as Manlove cites from the Biographia Literaria; thus, he mistakenly identifies the object of representation (the Castle) instead of the means of representation as "a replica of what Coleridge defined as the organic imagination and its expression in literature -- a living and growing unity." [20] Even if the Castle is seen as akin to the Gothic metaphor of a developing mind, it assumes the position of the uncontrolled super-ego in a totalitarian relationship with the id of Nature, always diminishing the egos of the characters. The Hegelian synthesis that Manlove implies, that "dialectical interplay of opposites...also to be seen in such personal relationships as exist in the castle", simply does not exist. [21]

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[19] Modern Fantasy, p.220.

[20] Ibid, p.220.

[21] Ibid, p.223.

On the other hand, he quite rightly argues that the binary structure supports a thematic opposition of being/becoming, or enclosure/freedom. But, the structural opposition of description/event -- that "larger dialectic of Titus Groan as a whole...the conflict of stasis with flux" -- which Manlove claims as the organizational polarity for the "fundamental character of the place", is also largely illusory. [22] Each of Peake's narrative time-shifts in the first part of the book (chapters 10, 17, 22 and 29) assuredly "amounts in fact to a loop in the temporal sequence." [23] Yet, to draw the following conclusion, "The second half, containing sequence and flux represents change...and the first, the permanence, the stasis which is the essence of the castle...." is, I think, to misread the purpose of the temporal dislocation, with its resultant emphasis on an active descriptional prose, and to ignore the visual fallacy illustrated by the last, which is a stronger representation of change than events could ever be, as Peake makes abundantly clear at the novel's end: "The Castle was breathing, and far below the Hall of the Bright Carvings all that was Gormenghast revolved." [TG. p.505] [24] Although the

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[22] Ibid, p.225.

[23] Ibid, p.226.

[24] Ibid, p.227. Manlove's traditional critical premises underlie his argument that description equals stasis, event equals flux. In the 'Titus books', the opposite is true.

book may be divided structurally into more static and more active parts, there is no evidence of Gormenghastian ritual failing: indeed, 'god's in his heaven, but all's not right with the world', for "love itself will cry for insurrection." [TG, p.506] Titus is the heroic protagonist for a love (of the other through love of self) that Peake expresses through the medium of his aesthetic prose from the start, one that always-already subverts both static structure and the traditional discourse. Change has been implicit in the very description of this enclosed world, of every character, and of every object in it. Further, it is in this sense that Titus is created in the 'middle of things'.

Because flux is represented in the description, the proportion of description to action focusses interpretive attention upon description as the vehicle for both the Castle's enduring stasis and the brief "wandering" of "the passions in their clay" [TG, p.505], i.e., the ultimately ineffective challenges of the characters. Structural temporal stasis lends weight to the immemorial stones metaphorically, but, concretely, it is an illusion in precisely the same manner as determining Peake's compositional method to be pictorial, for the artist in him could not help but recognize the inherent visual fallacy of linguistic mimesis, and, hence, distinguish between the

visual and the literary imagination. [25] Manlove's assertion that "description meant solely to thicken our sense of Gormenghast....constantly injects stillness into the action, reminding us of the implacable state of being behind every process of becoming in the book" summarily dismisses description's power to shape 'being' through a suggestive 'process of becoming', and, regrettably, taints his entire subsequent interpretation. [26]

Peter McKenzie first recognized significance in the paradox of an author who was also a talented artist, but who could not illustrate in art what he represented in language: "[H]ow can there possibly exist, albeit in imagination, something like Gormenghast and its inhabitants, that cannot be reproduced graphically by an absolute master of drawing?" [27] The paradox is further heightened by the painterly quality

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[25] Credit for this idea is entirely due to Peter McKenzie, upon whose stylistic analysis of Peake's prose in "Pictorial and Descriptional", MPR, (Spring, 1983) 16:3-10, I am relying heavily. Gardiner-Scott's elaboration of perceptual relativity was also influential, though I disagree with her interpretation of the 'Titus books' as an epistemological exploration, seeing, instead, an ontological focus in Peake's social disquisition.

[26] Modern Fantasy, p.229.

[27] "Pictorial and Descriptional", MPR, (Spring, 1983) 16:3.

of Peake's compositional method, which, on the surface, seems to be the visualization of a setting, a 'still life' as it were, and then simply filling in the details.

Within the boundaries of a setting, however, Peake rapidly alters perspectives, not only from angles of physical observation, as a camera might, but internally for an object, shifting from inanimate to animate in description, from animal to human. That the Castle itself is often suggested to have an organic capacity is simply one facet of this deliberately diffuse method, which adds up to an imaginative total infinitely greater than the pictorial sum of its parts:

> It was as though, at any moment some inanimate Thing must surely move; a door open upon its own, or a clock start whirling its hand: the stillness was too vast and charged to be content to remain in this titanic atrophy -- the tension must surely find a vent -- and burst suddenly, violently, like a reservoir of water from a smashed dam -- and the shields fall from their rusty hooks, the mirrors crack, the boards lift and open and the very castle tremble, shake its wall like wings; yawn, split and crumble with a roar.
>
> But nothing happened. Each hall a mouth that gaped and could not close. The stone jaws prised and aching. The doors like eye-teeth missing from the bone! There was no sound and nothing human happened. [TG, p.498]

This 'picture' cannot be painted; it can be visualized, however, imaginatively, exactly as Peake's provisional qualification ('as though') indicates here, because the imagery conveys human emotions, an activity that occurs despite the narrator's final disclaimer.

The accumulating density of such prose provides that exponential explosion of sensory meaning in his novels that seems claustrophobic to some, and indeed he takes great pains in capturing even the most insignificant items. Paradoxically, no scene, or even described object, can be called 'still-life'; rather, the world is imaginatively upon the move:

> A bird swept down across the water, brushing it with her breast-feathers and leaving a trail as of glow-worms across the still lake. A spilth of water fell from the bird as it climbed through the hot air to clear the lakeside trees, and a drop of lake water clung for a moment to the leaf of an ilex. And as it clung its body was titanic. It burgeoned the vast summer. Leaves, lake and sky reflected. The hangar was stretched across it and the heat swayed in the pendant. Each bough, each leaf -- and as the blue quills ran, the motion of minutiae shivered, hanging. Plumply it slid and gathered, and as it lengthened, the distorted reflection of high crumbling acres of masonry beyond them, pocked with nameless windows, and of the ivy that lay across the face of that southern wing like a black hand, trembled in the long pearl as it began to lose its grip on the edge of the ilex leaf.
>
> Yet even as it fell the leaves of the far ivy lay fluttering in the belly of the tear, and, microscopic, from a thorn-prick window a face gazed out into the summer. [TG, pp.455-6]

Accustomed to Peake's style by this point in the narrative, the reader is hardly surprised when twenty-two pages pass before he informs us whose face has been so masterfully introduced.

If the transient miracles of the mundane world are thus delicately inscribed in words, Peake's descriptions of people should be examined with a finer eye, not lumped under

the careless epithet 'grotesque'. The single sentence which might suffice for many an author in Peake's description of the Poet, for example, is merely an introduction:

> It was a long head.
> It was a wedge, a sliver, a grotesque slice in which it seemed the features had been forced to stake their claims, and it appeared they had done so in a great hurry and with no attempt to form any kind of symmetrical pattern for their mutual advantage. The nose had evidently been the first upon the scene and had spread itself down the entire length of the wedge, beginning among the grey stubble of the hair and ending among the grey stubble of the beard, and spreading on both sides with a ruthless disregard for the eyes and mouth which found precarious purchase. The mouth was forced by the lie of the terrain left to it, to slant at an angle which gave to its right-hand side an expression of grim amusement and to its left, which dipped downwards across the chin, a remorseless twist. It was forced by not only the unfriendly monopoly of the nose, but also by the tapering character of the head to be a short mouth; but it was obvious by its very nature, that under normal conditions it would have covered twice the area. The eyes in whose expression might be read the unending grudge they bore against the nose were as small as marbles and peered out between the grey grass of the hair.
> This head, set at a long incline upon a neck as wry as a turtle's cut across the narrow vertical black strip of the window. [TG, p.139]

The Poet is seen from almost every angle except those 'under normal conditions'. Shifts in size (wedge - sliver - slice), shifts from the human to the animal world, verbal animation of individual human features (lending them impossible emotions), the conditional inclusion of past and future, and particularly metaphor, act together to reveal the visual fallacy in mimesis:

> ...an avoidance of the visually definitive that gives maximum suggestiveness to the words. Vision

> has been heavily drawn on for all this; but it has been incorporated into a wonderfully flexible medium -- that of language. [28]

Just as binocular vision gives the illusion of three-dimensional perception, so verbal 'vision' can be associatively manipulated to imaginatively suggest more than is actually in each word alone. The appeal to sensory cognition in Peake's prose succeeds because of the associative memories of his readers, memories channeled by the limitations of perspective, and as physically present in vision, as they are imaginatively present in abstract words. More important, the radically grounded aesthetic can support by this means, and only by this imaginative means, an ontological disquisition.

Steerpike's heroic climb across the Castle roof is an extensive revelation of the interdependence of being and becoming as mediated by perception, for example, where he realizes no tangible presence invisibly haunts the "insatiable omnipresence" of darkness. [TG, pp.131-3] He discovers the 'sky-field' is empty, a vacuum waiting to be filled; thus, his ambition to substitute himself is born. It is this episode that intercedes between a young man desiring only escape to the light, and the increasingly sinister, manipulative little monster Fuchsia discovers in her attic.

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[28] Ibid, p.9. See also Gardiner-Scott, "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic", pp.140-50, for analysis of reader response to perceptual relativity in this passage and others.

Though transmitted by the narrator, the Poet's face is supposedly seen from the limited perspective of Steerpike, who "watched it with one eye around the masonry." [TG, p.139] Because of the self-interested appropriation of sensory cognition by his intellect, Steerpike's perception becomes the kind which horrifies Peake the most -- functional, in thrall to a sheerly intellectual prowess, with a heart unhaunted:

> Who can say how long the eye of the vulture or the lynx requires to grasp the totality of a landscape, or whether in a comprehensive instant the seemingly inexhaustible confusion of detail falls upon their eyes in an ordered and intelligible series of distances and shapes, where the last detail is perceived in relation to the corporate mass?
> * * * *
> Whether the scouring, sexless eye of the bird or beast of prey disperses and sees all or concentrates and evades all saving that for which it searches, it is certain that the less powerful eye of the human cannot grasp, even after a life of training, a scene in its entirety. No eye may see dispassionately. There is no comprehension at a glance. Only the recognition of damsel, horse or fly and the assumption of damsel, horse or fly; and so with dreams and beyond, for what haunts the heart will, when it is found, leap foremost, blinding the eye and leaving the main of Life in darkness. [TG, pp.136-7]

It is what 'haunts the heart' that guides interpretation of these novels, for the primary human sense of perception is logically relative. Further, perceptual relativity must be taken into account in the shaping of mental judgement; Steerpike's "guess" "that something white" swimming in a hollow atop a tower was a horse leads inevitably to his

association that "something swimming by its side...must have been the foal", despite the incongruity, nay impossibility, of the original premise. [TG, p.138] His many errors of judgement are due to his reliance on an unexamined intellect, one which does not take into account the perceptual relativity implicit in its primary source of information Moreover, this fundamental error has aesthetic consequences.

Based on his analysis of Peake's prose, McKenzie claims it can be seen:

> ...how the literary and visual imaginations differ, not in the simple sense of trying to transmit the same message via different media, but in partly determining the very nature and quality of what in Peake become separate though related messages.[29]

McKenzie argues that the notion of 'image' in a 'concept' is itself a metaphor, an imaginative concretization of what is actually a more fluidly unified process:

> ...to think or even to describe does not require us to review images, in our minds, that somehow carry, or represent, our meaning; further, there is nothing behind our words that is the 'true', pure thought that we translate into words; rather, in using language, we think, and language is our thoughts, not a description of thoughts going on elsewhere, on a sort of cinema screen in the mind.[30]

A generalized 'concept' of an object is an amalgamation not only of its related qualities or functions, but of fused

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[29] Ibid, p.3.

[30] Ibid, p.4.

memories of similar objects, as well as other associations, all ghostly present because of basic repression, if not surplus repression. Thus, a word is always highly personalized when activated, while simultaneously held in a communal reservoir.

McKenzie cites J.N. Shorter's observation that "imagining is depictional, or descriptional, not pictorial," and goes on to argue "that the Titus books may be viewed as essentially descriptional", a paradoxical method of narrative composition, structural stasis being implicitly active not so much through the actions of the characters as through the prose style itself:

> For it might be said that the imaginings of Peake, of all people, are precisely like painting a picture: time and again Peake describes a scene to us as though it were a painting. This is undeniable; yet such descriptions are nonetheless deliberate stylizations, occurring within the resources of prose, self-consciously made to simulate a painting; we are deceived if we think that this implies that the prose could, because of that, be translated back into painting again. [31]

It is this visual fallacy upon which theories of literary mimesis are based; words reflect a conceptual reality directly for both are acts of the imagination: "It is, however, of the essence of language to make what is absent, present; to make it present hypothetically, provisionally." [32] Because referentiality is itself metaphorical, Peake's

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[31] Ibid, p.5.

[32] Ibid, p.10.

metafictional strategy reveals the role of the imagination in the subject's intitiation into Imaginary and Symbolic Orders, reinforcing the former, undermining the latter. The heightened descriptional aspect of Peake's aesthetic style actively exposes the mimetic visual fallacy through perceptual relativity, thereby backgrounding epistemological concerns in the novels; foregrounded are the ontological concerns of the characters in conflict with the omnipotent social system of Gormenghast. In this epic of the aesthetic imagination, description is the action: "Because the text is descriptional rather than the precise copy of a pre-existent mental image, it is inconclusive, aimed at the production of a general, and open, class of imaginative effects." [33] Peake's 'pantechnicon', then, subverts the absolute 'stillness' of this enclosed world; his aesthetic, subliminally linking Gormenghast and the estranged world of Titus Alone, is represented by an alienated Titus, metaphorically the epic hero of an aesthetic style.

Akin to the extended simile of the Homeric epic in this regard is Peake's predominant use of metaphor, the very separation of this fantasy from our reality arguing for an interpretation of the entire work as a metaphor of an archetypal human condition, a metaphor whose metonymic parts are contiguously developed in structural analogies via the

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[33] Ibid, p.8.

pantechnicon, especially in the latter's prosaic regulation of perceptual relativity. For Peake, as McKenzie suggests, metaphor is:

> ...a mode of apprehending the world that incorporates layers of simultaneously present meaning: creating complex beauty, irony, profundity and feeling, and linking the great and the small, the past and the present, the remote and the close at hand, magically caught in a few words. It is the autonomy of language from its objects that permits this phenomenon: it may have sense without immediate reference; it may have meaning without actually pointing to something. [34]

With its avoidance of the visually definitive maximizing associative suggestiveness in sensory cognition by intellectually blurring ontological boundaries, and its extended metaphors ensuring that the reading experience is as a 'present' mediating the memory of an absent past and the hypothetical future, Peake's descriptional style is his generative rhetorical dominant, aesthetic lightning bolts powerfully illuminating his epic of the imagination:

> It not only showed to the least minutiae the anatomy of masonry, pillars and towers, trees, grass-blades and pebbles, it conjured these things, it constructed them from nothing. They were not there before -- only the void, the abactinal absences of all things -- and then a creation reigned in a blinding and ghastly glory as a torrent of electric fire coursed across heaven. [TG, p.419]

It is not only concrete objects which receive metaphorical visualization, but completely abstract concepts.

Peake's 'illustrations' of ideas are infused with

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[34] Ibid, p.10.

irony, the creations of logic appearing in the guise of verbal wit so as to carnivalize reified values implicit in the monological assertions of socially codified language: "A pun can act in a similar way to metaphor, pointing to a coalescence of concepts normally distinct." [35] The clearest example is perhaps Deadyawn, that personification of idleness approaching utter negation, who "achieved unwittingly an equipoise between two poles which did not exist." [G, p.58] Peake illustrates 'turning an idea on its head' by literalizing a metaphor in Deadyawn's death, and ascribing what seems a natural acclivity to "Fate": "...the Headmaster...remained upside down, in a horrible state of balance, having stiffened with a form of premature rigor mortis." [G, p.113] Neither extraneous episode, nor gratuitously humorous, Peake prefaces the actual event with an imaginatively potential fantastic capability -- to physically become a prophet -- that is logically impossible: in "the rational world" it is inevitable that "[t]he soft, imponderable, flaccid Deadyawn, that arch-symbol of delegated duties, of negation and apathy, appeared now that he was upside down to have more life in him than he had ever had before." [G, p.113]

Deadyawn, in life and in death, also illustrates the

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[35] Geoffrey N. Leech & Michael H. Short, "Style in Fiction", MPR, (Autumn, 1982) 15:30. An extract from their Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose (Longman, 1981).

teachings of the Old Philosopher, who espouses a life-in-death traceable to the social system of the Castle, i.e., "Death's amazing kingdom" appears with the monological appropriation of language, "when the April lamb is realized to be nothing more nor less than a lamb in April." [G, pp.75-6] Structurally, Deadyawn's death occurs simultaneously with Titus' first attempt to find freedom, a Romantic adventure reflected by his schoolmates' barbaric 'game'. [G, pp.106-9] Thus, the conflations of verbal wit are the intellectual response to the conflict between Peake's promotion of the aesthetic imagination and the elaborate representation of Gormenghast's socio-political religious ritualization of life because they reveal the source of ontology to be other than the merely rational.

Illustrative metaphor, i.e., a metaphor literalized, receives its greatest extension in the epic battle between Flay and Swelter, themselves metaphorical servants to a structural binary, i.e., the fortunes of the battle depend upon the physical metaphors of the combattants, mantis-like Flay stalking the insinuating bulk of Swelter. Accompanying the distancing effect of ironic verbal wit, and the narrator's emphasis on the verbal artifice of this constructed visualization, is a direct attack upon webs of simile in favour of metaphorical verisimilitude:

> As pirates in the hot brine-shallows wading, make, face to face, their comber-hindered lunges, sun-blind, fly-agonied, and browed with pearls, so here the timbers leaned, moonlight misled and the

> rank webs impeded. It was necessary to ignore them -- to ignore them as they tickled the face and fastened themselves about the mouth and eyes. To realize that although between the sword and the hand, the hand and the elbow, the elbow and the body, the silvery threads hung like tropical festoons, and although the naked steel was as though delivered in its caul, that the limbs were free to move, as free as ever before. The speed of the swung cleaver would in no way be retarded. The secret was to ignore.
>
> So Swelter moved forward, growing at each soft, deft pace more and more like something from the deeps where the grey twine-weed coils the sidling sea-cow. Suddenly stepping into a shaft of moonlight he flamed in a network of threads. He peered through a shimmering mesh. He was gossamer. [TG, p.430]

The plethora of hyphenated compounds here and throughout the battle is not incidental; they are the historical stepping-stones between simile and metaphor. More important, I think, is Peake's admonishment 'to ignore' the overt relationships and accept the direct, implicit connectives of represented action.

While the "red island" of blood and galleon imagery of his final demise recall Swelter's not unloyal debauchery on the day of Titus' birth, Peake draws a more complex moral lesson by frustrating "this business of climax." [TG, pp. 434-5, 33] Only slightly less worse than Steerpike's self-limiting functional response to the uncertainty of perceptual relativity is the misappropriation of perception as a means to self-indulgence, the perverted expression of the self under surplus repression:

> Swelter is in his best uniform, a habit of exceptional splendour, the high cap and tunic being of virgin silk. Doubling his body he opens

> the door the merest fraction of an inch and applies his eye to the fissure. As he bends, the shimmering folds of the silk about his belly hiss and whisper like the voice of far and sinister waters or like some vast, earthless ghost-cat sucking its own breath. His eye, moving around the panel of the door, is like something detached, self-sufficient, and having no need of the voluminous head that follows it nor for that matter of the mountainous masses undulating to the crutch, and the soft, trunk-like legs. So alive is it, this eye, quick as an adder, veined like a blood-alley. What need is there for all the cumulus of dull, surrounding clay -- the slow white hinterland that weighs behind it as it swivels among the doughy, circumscribing wodges like a marble of raddled ice? As the eye rounds the corner of the door it devours the long double line of skinny apprentices as a squid might engulf and devour some long-shaped creature of the depths. As it sucks in the line of boys through the pupil, the knowledge of his power over them spreads sensuously across his trunk like a delicious gooseflesh. [TG, p.362]

The question addressed here is the divorced relationship between Swelter's physical body and his mind as informed by the sense of sight, a question displayed by the divisive similes, and transcended by the unifying metaphor of imaginative perception. Thus, it is neither fate nor circumstance that the chef's long awaited, infinitely postponed, murderous orgasm is withheld, for the very voluptuousness of the spider spins a metaphorical thread: "His left eye had become involved with a female spider. She sat upon it squarely, enjoying the rolling movement of the orb she covered." [TG, pp.433-4] In this way, Peake's literal illustrations of abstract concepts opens them to sensory cognition and affectional logic, to aesthetic

apprehension rather than their remaining interpretatively closed by a monopolizing tradition of realism.

Indeed, the first act of the aesthetic imagination closes Titus Groan as much as the reprise of a now concerned Rottcodd. Unlike Titus' "first recorded act of blasphemy" [TG, p.119], an 'innocent fall' from Gormenghastian grace, his actions at the Earling are deliberate, and deliberately fantastic. His refusal of initiation into a Symbolic order implies the rejection of social rationality, i.e., the appropriation of language by monological ideology. In other words, Peake begins to illustrate in concrete events the subversive actions of his aesthetic. Fuchsia contemplates the Outer Dwellers, wondering at her unease in their presence:

> It was as though they held a dark secret of which, one day, they would make use; something which would jeopardize the security of the Castle. But they were powerless. They depended upon the grace of Gormenghast. What could they do? [TG, p.492]

Through the 'taint' of a passionate aesthetic appreciation they might spread the 'disease' of love and end their stunted lives of ritual degradation. Titus, clothed in a smock "miraculously white, as though it gave forth light instead of receiving it", enters into a fantastic empathy with "the bastard babe, and Titus' foster-sister, lambent with ghost light." [TG, pp.490, 497] But it is in the nature of the voice answering his cry, "for all its shrillness... unlike the voice of a child", that Peake indicates the

meaning of this fantastic occurrence: "A tiny voice. In the absolute stillness it filled the universe - a cry like the single note of a bird." [TG, p.496; my emphasis] The link with Keda's bird which symbolizes a universal love is unmistakable. Yet, the most fantastic thing of all in the world of Gormenghast is found in Barquentine's heretical thought, "It was as though the child had a mind of its own." [TG, p.495]

An "alien incursion" from another world (to which Titus, charged with his world's defense, yields) [TG, p.493], Peake's fantastic aesthetic opens a door to the unconscious for the reader, through which the painful memories of childhood experience flow, memories of capitulation to social laws, flowing disjointedly perhaps, but transformed, as represented by the hero of this aesthetic epic:

> 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: and yet within his body something other -- other than this umbrageous legacy. For first and ever foremost he is child.
>
> A ritual, more compelling than ever man devised, is fighting anchored darkness. A ritual of the blood; of the jumping blood. These quicks of sentience owe nothing to his forbears, but to those feckless hosts, a trillion deep, of the globe's childhood.
>
> The gift of the bright blood. Of blood that laughs when the tenets mutter 'Weep'. Of blood that mourns when the sere laws croak 'Rejoice!' O little revolution in great shades! [G, p.7]

As suggested above, it is the knowledge implicit in the realized aesthetic of the first book that Titus must come to understand if he wants to be truly free. Only in this way will he retrieve in his conscious mind his entire past, in particular those pre-verbal means of experience which prepare the mind for cultural intiation into humanity (basic repression), and, thus, by enabling him to differentiate between the last and surplus repression, wholly understand himself. In accord with the stronger Bildungsroman aspect of Gormenghast, Titus' path of development follows a number of stages, by no means easily distinguishable, which apparently culminate at the end of the third volume, though there is no guarantee of finality in that. [36]

Peake first indicates the influence of Titus' childhood experiences so far, giving half of his introductory summary of the characters to the very Castle itself, as one facet of this 'other language': "He has learned an alphabet of arch and aisle: the language of dim stairs and moth-hung rafters." [G, p.7] For aesthetically organic reasons as well, the overshadowing presence of Gormenghast belongs with "[t]he quick and the dead. The shapes, the voices that throng his mind, for there are days when the living have no

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[36] At what stage does human psychological development end? It seems to me that the demands of the procreative impulse, said to define adult normality, are generally sublimated to a diffuse creativity in middle age, and not solely because of cultural pressures either.

substance and the dead are active." [G, p.8] This equivalence between the animate and the inanimate is a necessary consequence of the Peakian aesthetic, for the ghostly gallery which follows is no mere summation of the prefatory volume. Instead, Titus Groan's import is attributed precisely to those pre-verbal means of sensory cognition which have the capacity to not only shape the mind, but, if recovered, to resist the blandishments of the cultural system. [37]

Consequently, the psychological development of Titus needs to be reflected in a slightly altered narrative technique. Compared with Titus Groan's more expository purpose, Gormenghast becomes dramatic, juxtaposing comic and tragic explorations of love, but finally transcending both as literary traditions overly pandering to traditional socio-codification. Peake's strategy, then, is one of ironic subversion of the inherited figures and attitudes of Romance, just as the overt problematization of perception cited earlier, with its relativizing of moral judgement, indicates. Indeed, his use of irony should check the reader's facile identification with the heroism of Titus, or any sense of superiority to the mock-heroism of Bellgrove. To interpret the second book as degenerating into a simple story of Romance is concomitantly to ignore its undermining

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[37] See the passage cited from G, p.11 on page 42 of this thesis.

of those structures, and, hence, misread the work. [38]

The slight alteration in narrative technique, from expository to dramatic style, is accompanied by the sense of change discoverable in narrative parallelism. By suggestive repetition of similar events, Peake shows character development, or creates his privately symbolic themes, or delimits differences in the thematic purport of his aesthetic.

Steerpike's first glimpse through the spy-hole of another world "beyond the oak partition" [TG, p.53] (related also to Titus' adventure among the oaks) becomes his intricate system of mirrors [G, pp.15-7]; his desperate bite into Fuchsia's half-eaten pear [TG, pp.150-1; with curious Edenic undertones] becomes his casual bite of the 'apple' [G, p.15]; his "entirely cerebral" clowning, the "exact imitation" of the artist, [TG, pp.163-4] develops into the "cerebral beast" [G, p.488], whose yielding to a primal urge to dance is truly artistic [G, pp.382-3]; or, lost in the

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[38] Manlove (unfortunately, the classic example) demonstrates such misreadings, relying as he does on the conventions of literary tradition to grasp a work somewhat antithetical to them; it is inevitable that he disagrees with the ending of each book, his stance of a 'realistic' premise, itself inimical to the techniques of Postmodern Fantasy, leading him to reject Peake's rejection of those limitations. Paradoxically, the lack of insight into Fantastic irony -- expressed by Manlove's argument that Titus, who is only a child after all, should accept the role of Earl, stay to rebuild the Castle, and return to Gormenghast at the end of his picaresque adventures -- is proof that Peake deliberately refuted the well-rehearsed responses of literature to the problem of the human condition. See Modern Fantasy.

Stone Lanes, seeking daylight, [TG, pp.43-4] Steerpike is 'lost' in quite another sense when he is observed on his final visit to the Twins, especially in that his bodily control slackens when he is lost in thought. [G, p.377]

Peake also draws episodic parallels to link characters, supporting the sense of their doubling each other. When Fuchsia and Steerpike are caught in a rainstorm, and they retreat to the cave she remembers her mother sheltering in, the eroticized close proximity of the two teenagers, heightened by Steerpike's manipulative comforting when he strips off his shirt, at the very least foreshadows Titus' more openly erotic encounter with the Thing, an elfin vision wrapped in his cast-off shirt. [39] This technique allows both similarities and differences to surface, particularly between Titus and Steerpike, and between Gormenghast and Titus Alone, as we shall see.

While many episodes create thematic or character doubling through structural repetition, the point raised by Peake is precisely how these are re-created by the reader. He implies this at the beginning of "Re-introducing the

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[39] G. Peter Winnington, "Fuchsia and Steerpike: Mood and Form", MPR, (Autumn, 1977) 5:17-23, points out how Fuchsia's repetitive tendency to fall in Steerpike's presence inevitably leads to the manner of her death. Though I am not about to develop a relation with Adam and Eve in Paradise Lost, there is enough textual support for such a theory (see especially Titus' fortunate fall from Gormenghastian grace, TG, pp.116-9). I would strongly suggest that Peake is again literalizing a metaphor with Fuchsia.

Twins" with Irma's ostensibly irrelevant argument concerning the curtains, for Cora's and/or Clarice's ironical commentating role in the work is to reveal the devious intricacies of the imagination:

> 'What happens in the middle, I said; what happens right down the middle?' Her pointed nose warmed, for she sensed victory.
> 'There is a great yearning one for the other. A fissure of impalpable night divides them....there is a lacuna.'
> 'Then kill it,' said Irma... [TG, p.214]

Of course, this is what the unimaginative Irma would desire; yet, Peake, I think, wants to draw attention to the tenuous bridges with which the imagination spans the gap. (Such as I have done with the polarized binary structure of the characters: Peake's aesthetic argument is metafictionally meant to lead to "the voice of someone quite convinced of his own truth -- the truth in his head." [TA, p.86])

I would also suggest that the unreliability of narratorial omniscience consistently occurs in overt commentary on perceptual relativity when the Twins are present:

> She turned her expressionless eyes to Cora, who met them as though she were her sister's reflection. It may be that between them they recognized shades of expression in each other's faces, but it is certain that no one else, however keen his eyesight, could have detected the slightest change in the muscles that presumably governed the lack of expressions of their faces. Evidently this reference to stolen birds was the reason why they came nearer to each other so that their shoulders touched. It was obvious that their sorrow was conjoined. [TG, p.217]

Indeed, the function of the Twins in the novel is partly to unmask narratorial omniscience: "One, taking her cue from the other, decided that she, or the other one, or possibly both, or neither, did not want it." [TG, p.217] The Twins are both the target and the vehicle of irony; the latter in the commentating role they play towards the significance of character polarity and doubles, and narratorial fallibility. Thus, the sense of a diffuse authorial presence actually stems from Peake's exposition of the procedures of the aesthetic imagination, and for this reason: they are, in a metafictional sense, identical.

Thematically, the most important narrative parallel is Peake's development of his epistemological backgrounding to foreground an ontological disquisition. The theme introduced by Rottcodd's querying of 'I see what you mean' [TG, p.23] becomes metaphorically concrete with Peake's use of 'eyes' as a symbolic linking of perception (the primary means of sensory cognition) with the generative power of the imagination. The metaphor is as organic as the Castle is represented to be, for 'eyes' are associated with 'marbles' (sanity) and 'testicles' (physical generation), thus mediating between the intellect and the instinctual drives. The pattern grows via narrative parallels, from Peake's exploration of perceptual apprehension (Swelter in Titus Groan: eye on pupils [p.362]; eyes as 'windows to the soul' in metaphoric imaginative flight [p.364-5]); through a more

assured exposition of aesthetic education (via Titus' 'colour-thoughts' in Gormenghast, which conclude in a metaphoric Joycean pun [pp.84-7, see p.161f of this thesis]); to the self-involved quest for identity that is reflected in Titus' confrontation with a spying 'eye' detached from physical being, but transmitting knowledge all the same. The catalogue of metaphors describing the dart is a particularly interesting commentary on the visually associative imagination, for while one metaphor may be Fancy, many metaphors provoke imaginative construction of their intricate relations:

> This exquisite beast of the air; this wingless swallow; this aerial leopard; this fish of the water-sky; this threader of moonbeams; this dandy of the dawn; this metal play-boy; this wanderer in black spaces; this flash in the night; this drinker of its own speed; this godlike child of a diseased brain -- what did it do?
>
> What did it do but act like any other petty snooper, prying [sic] upon man and child, sucking information as a bat sucks blood; amoral; mindless; sent out on empty missions, acting as its maker would act, its narrow-headed maker -- so that its beauty was a thing on its own, beautiful only because its function shapes it so; and having no heart it becomes fatuous -- a fatuous reflection of a fatuous concept -- so that it is incongruous, or gobbles incongruity to such an outlandish degree that laughter is the only way out. [TA, p.34]

Mechanically functional vision is the product of science's over-privileging of rational thought; contextually, however, a certain queasiness tempers the appropriate laughter, for the passage is prefaced by an allusion to Yeats' "Second Coming", the 'exquisite beast' circling "Titus's head in

narrowing gyres". [TA, p.34] The only other incidence of this phrase occurs in the flight of the imagination describing the violent confrontation between the eyes of Flay and Swelter.

Textual narrative parallelisms are also concretely realized in Peake's doubling of characters, especially the shared disloyalty of Titus, Steerpike and the Thing; though all the characters are traitorous to some extent simply because they are alive, the restless growth of becoming only artificially petrified by social imposition of identity, or being. (On one level, Peake proves that reified 'being' is an impossibility, that 'being' is synonymous with 'becoming', which has ramifications for the status of any text, never mind Peake's 'unset' text). However, allowing textual enthrallment for a moment, the main representatives of change, confronting immemorial ritual outright, are these three.

Steerpike's ambition is to replace the "dirty core of ritual" with an individual dictatorship. [G, pp.163-4] Now, this does not actually displace the hierarchy so much as mould it to personal ends. In this sense, Steerpike's challenge is not destructive of Gormenghast's social system, but an individual concretization of its logically ideal extreme wherein "Equality is the great thing, equality is everything." [TG, p.291] (a personification that Titus, it should be noted, would assume were he to follow the

traditional pattern of Romance, whether comedy or tragedy.) If the system of surplus repression demands submission to a performance principle, then Steerpike is, logically, the most suitable successor to the throne. His unemotional intellect is capable of perfectly managing the intricacies of everyday ritual even when he is physically helpless [G, p.297]; his eventual psychosis merely extends the bizarre neuroses of Peake's divided caricature/character implications to their logical limit. There is no middle ground for Steerpike, no 'heart'. Intellect dominates the physical in him to the degree that he can exercise amazing feats of bodily control, but such internalized surplus repression, self-regulating only in the sense of demanding his own body submit to a performance principle, has dire consequences indeed. Lacking any affectional ties, Steerpike's repressed drives ultimately explode in his body, the very degree of surplus repression provoking the strength of the instinctual reaction. As a personification of the Castle's system, Steerpike seeks complete identification, not real change.

The Thing, in contrast, represents the anarchic state of an inhuman lack of basic repression. Unlike Steerpike's fluid manipulation of language, perfectly mimicking real communication, the Thing is never intitiated into language, her mimicry the unthinking parrotting of an animal, so that she remains an external force incapable of mounting any

effective threat to the social system beyond that of a rogue animal. The complex notion of freedom she communicates to Titus is entirely his own imaginative response. Her sudden death reflects the vagaries of natural chance, not the moral judgement of the Universe. She is perhaps a symbol of mankind's elimination of the animal in her or himself, but seems closer to the human elimination of the natural world under surplus repression, foreshadowing the scientific destruction of Muzzlehatch's zoo.

Between these two extremes -- the cerebral beast and beastly cerebration, stands Titus, the rebellious 'heart' of the Castle, who mounts the only effective challenge to its empty heart of valorized tradition. He assumes an awkward position for any novelistic character, attracted physically to the Thing's natural alternative, which is also enthrallment to idealistic adolescent Romance, and repelled by Steerpike's intellectual authority, which is submission to the restrictions of ritual. His heart oscillates between love and hate; love because of affectional ties to the only world he has ever known, hate because of "the ambiguity of it all....He resented a world in which he was neither one thing nor another." [G, p.306] Personal frustration prods Titus toward greater self-knowledge, hence, comprehension of external restraint in the social system:

> His hatred, not for Gormenghast, for its very dust was in his bloodstream, and he knew no other place, but for the ill fate that had chosen him to be the one upon whose restless shoulders there

> would rest, in the future, the heavy onus of an ancient trust.
>
> He hated the lack of choice: the assumption on the part of those around him that there were no two ways of thinking: that his desire for a future of his own making was due to ignorance or to a wilful betrayal of his birthright.
>
> But more than all this he hated the confusion in his own heart. For he was proud. He was irrationally proud. [G, p.341]

Though Titus shares with Steerpike the sin of unwarranted pride, it is all the more dangerous for him because of Romance's identification of the ruler with the land, their state of health synonymous, a delusion to which he might easily succumb.

In killing Steerpike, Titus does not act to rid the Castle of an evil threat, nor even to satisfy a personal grudge, so much as avenging "his sister", and revenging himself for the loss of "his weapon." [G, p.468] Admittedly, Peake has a difficult time expressing rationally the kind of arational truth he has in mind. Moreover, he has to suggest the latter in spite of the continuing self-delusions of adolescent confusion, and by re-appropriating aesthetically the very language of conveyance. Titus is not a man, except as he has passed the external tests of society, no matter what claims the narrator makes. It is a problem dealt with overtly: "On the face of it, it might seem that the rage that was eating him was absurd. And the rational part of Titus might have admitted that this was so." [G, p.467]

Certainly, the 'reason' Peake gives for Titus' anger seems absurd, particularly as it is eminently suited to a psychological interpretation. Yet, he carefully differentiates between psychological truths and his final 'reason of no symbolism':

> What he did not guess was that the canoe was neither more nor less than the Thing. Deep in the chaos of his heart and his imagination -- at the core of his dreamworld it was so -- 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 herself.
>
> But more than this. For another reason also. A reason of no symbolism: no darkened origin: a reason clear-cut and real as the dagger in his belt.
>
> He saw in the canoe, now lost to the murderer, the perfect vehicle for sudden and silent attack -- in other words for the avenging of his sister. He had lost his weapon. [G. pp.467-8]

Though this passage practically screams of abstract castration, the attribution of any strictly psychological sense elides other inferences here. Which is not to say that a loose psychological analogy is inapplicable, but that it should be understood in terms of the aesthetic ontology Peake is promoting. If the Thing (canoe) and Steerpike represent extremes of instinctual phsyical prowess and intellectual craft, as suggested above, then the Thing/canoe is the 'perfect vehicle' for vengeance on the personification of the Castle's tyranny. In other words, Titus' weapon is not literally phallic, but metaphorically raw animal power. Symbolically, Titus is avenging intuition

(Fuchsia) and imagination (Thing) by attacking the intellect (Steerpike). The claim for manhood is, however, a Romantic self-delusion on the part of the fallible narrator at this point.

Another part of Peake's alteration of narrative strategy is the creation of a new structural polarity, borrowed from Romance, to further clarify his metaphorical shadings. While the primary purpose of the second book is to reflect the development of Titus through the phases of his adolescence, the Bildungsroman aspect serves as the mediating core for implied facets of the World War and literary history. This can be seen in the very titles of the books. At first, I was at a loss to explain why the first, prefatory novel should be entitled Titus Groan, and the second, which concentrates more exclusively on Titus, Gormenghast. Part of the reason for this anomaly has been explained previously ('Titus is meaningless' without his background). Though the original spelling -- 'Goremenghast' -- has usually been taken to convey the author's horror at the atrocities of war, Eric Drake points out that it would have had a secondary meaning for Peake, who spoke Chinese as a child, and he may have consciously, or unconsciously, recalled it when choosing a name for his visionary realm; etymologically, "[t]he first two syllables of Gormenghast are Chinese":

> They mean 'every door', and 'door' can stand for 'house'....There are two more characters in this

> common Chinese phrase; the third is a repetition of the first....The fourth...means 'family', so the whole phrase means 'every house, every family', usually rendered 'every household'. [40]

Thus, accompanying the sense of wartime atrocity, there is a 'ghastly', or ghostly, 'every home' in the title. The adolescent Titus is an archetype for family rebellion, involved in an almost Oedipal fight with Steerpike (who, because of his position as master of ritual, and a kind of rivalry over Fuchsia, is a bizarre father substitute) in order to prove his manhood to himself and, at least partly, his distant mother.

Peake expresses this archetype of adolescent angst through the carnivalized structures and attitudes of Romance, paying special attention, implicitly and explicitly, to the problems of Romantic self-delusion in order to expose its limitations vis-a-vis his aesthetic grounding of ontology.

Implicitly, Romance is indicated by a 'heroic music' infused into his prose via sublimated pentameter, the very density of isolated passages often close to a poetic distillation of language, in both use of imagery and rhythm:

> No other movement?
>
> Only the deathly padding of the cats. Only the soundlessness of the dazed cats -- the line of them -- the undulating line as blanched as linen, and lorn as the long gesture of a hand.
>
> * * * *
>
> They flowed. Noiselessly and deliberately they flowed. Through doors ajar they flowed on

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[40] Eric Drake, "Lost Archives", MPR (Spring, 1977) 4:9.

> little feet. The stream of them. The cats. [TG, p.498]

In a radio interview, Peake corroborated his use of prosaic rhythm when responding to Kay Fuller's description of Titus Groan as "pure poetry":

> I found that I was actually writing in five-feet lines over a large part of the book...in other words, the higher the tension, the more I found myself writing in poem rhythm rather than prose rhythm. [41]

Paradoxically, Peake allows free rein to his imagination via his 'pantechnicon', yet his "style is highly artificial" in the sense that he is rigidly and consistently creating his own form for self-expression; as analyzed by Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short in "Style in Fiction", Peake's prose displays many poetic effects: "It is full of syntactic parallelism and other kinds of schematic patterning...." [42] Their structural analysis reveals "relations of meaning foregrounded" by narrative parallelisms in which the reader must:

> ...work out the connections of similarity and contrast...which thereby become representative of something more general, which could not be expressed by simply adding together the literal sense of the words." [43]

Thus, in stylistically expressing the complex relationships confronting young Titus, Peake simultaneously reprises the

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[41] "The Reader Takes Over", MPR (Spring, 1980) 10:11.

[42] MPR (Autumn, 1982) 15:31.

[43] Ibid, p.32.

same quandary for the reader, but on an ontological level.

Leech and Short demonstrate vertical and horizontal linguistic relations, especially noting the greater complexity of the latter whose verbal mediations "have to be understood metaphorically" because they equate "the animate with the inanimate, the natural with the man-made", and conclude:

> This direct juxtaposition of incompatibles suggests that in Titus' world such basic categories of experience are not distinct....[F]or Titus, not only place but also time fails to recognize the customary separation of the living from the lifeless. [44]

Besides blurring conceptual boundaries, or mental categories, the parallelisms activate "links" that "are not logical, but associative....another instance of the author's refusal to acknowledge familiar distinctions taken for granted in the literal use of language.' [45] Moreover, as stated earlier, the chronotope of both represented worlds occupies a similar metaphorical relationship to our own, again ensuring that Peake's aesthetic will become the main focus of interpretation: "...his fictional world defies common sense, and frustrates any attempt to separate linguistic means from fictional ends." [46]

Such structural analysis, more readily applicable to

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[44] Ibid, p.33.

[45] Ibid, p.34.

[46] Ibid, p.30.

poetry, is easily applied to Peake's prose style because "the degree of foregrounding in this passage and the interpretive process it elicits are of a kind more readily associated with poetry than prose." [47] They note alliteration, assonance, and "[m]ore to the point,...a rhythmic regularity which" can be "scanned ...in a quasi-blank-verse metre." [48] Peake's use of a rough pentameter is sometimes trochaic, as in Leech and Short's example, sometimes iambic. [49] More important, what was largely unconscious in the first volume, Peake's awareness of his compositional procedure being somewhat of an afterthought, is deliberately employed in the second, a practice discoverable, for example, when prose passages are scanned in an appropriate manner:

> About the rough margins of the castle life -
> Margins as irregular as the coastline
> Of a squall-rent island,
> There were characters that stood or moved
> Gradually to the central hub.
> They were wading out of the tides of
> Limitless negation - the timeless opaque waters.
> Yet what are these that set foot on the cold

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[47] Ibid, p.34. Their example is taken from Gormenghast, Chapter 1, part II, pp.7-8, from "Who are the characters?", to "...and the dead are active."

[48] Ibid, p.35.

[49] I will not draw strong connections to the traditional use of these metres, even though both play an informative role in Shakespearean drama -- the supernatural expressed with trochaic pentameter, the heroic with iambic -for two reasons. First, I am obviously not going to attempt such interpretation over some twelve hundred pages of narrative; second, because Peake's use is not consistent enough to be determined a poetic form, though its use in prose is in itself suggestive.

> beach?
> Surely so portentuous an expanse
> Should unburden itself of gods at least;
> Scaled kings, or creatures whose outstretched
> Wings might darken two horizons.
> Or dappled Satan with his brow of brass.
> But no. There were no scales or wings at all. [G, p.14-5]

The irregularity of the first eight lines settles into a steady rhythm when Peake's metaphor reaches a dramatic limit. The metaphoric play on the ambiguity of even simple connectives like 'or' (o'er, ore) exemplifies a level of narrative poetry quite unexpected in the usually mundane prose of novelists, to say nothing of its metre. Primarily trochaic at the beginning, shifting into iambics at the end, the pentametric rhythm perhaps implies a consciously causative relationship to tradition. While the rocking-horse rhythm of the trochee suggests that Titus does "appear to us through his own childish language", counter to the claim of Leech and Short, the geater complexity of parallelism also supports their alternative, Titus appearing "through a 'web of ritual'". [50] This poetic 'web' opposes the content of its lines to the implications of their invisible form, i.e., while rhythmic allusions reinforce reader identification with traditional Romance heroism, the other more unstable poetic elements favour the aesthetic epic stance I have described, and the deliberate exaggeration of prose rhythm should break the spell of textual enthrallment, much as

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[50] "Style in Fiction", MPR (Autumn, 1982) 15:35.

Romantic self-delusions of the characters are elsewhere undermined with metafictional irony.

Odd hints of an epic significance occur even in comically deflated situations:

> The Professors rose at once to their feet. A moment of traditional observance had arrived. Turning the long tables upside down - and there were twelve of them -they seated themselves one behind another, within the upturned table tops as though they were boats and were about to oar their way into some fabulous ocean. [G, p.129]

This ritualized memory of some previous odyssey foreshadows the later flood. Certainly, the comic Homeric 'reversal' receives an epic treatment at Irma's party, the "wine-red horde" of the professorial 'suitors' defeated by the "god-like quality" Peake's paragon of prudish imprudence (Irma) perceives in Bellgrove, who realizes as he approaches her, "This...is one of those moments in a man's life when valour is tested." [G, pp.214, 222, 223]

Before the flood of comic passion is undammed, while the professors intone "an obscure chant of former days when, presumably, it held some kind of significance", events in Titus' life are taking a 'literally' related course:

> The margin of the forest under whose high branches Titus was standing was an interwoven screen of foliage, more like a green wall constructed for some histrionic purpose than a natural growth. Was it to hide away some drama that it arose there, so sheer and so thick? Or was it the backcloth of some immortal mime? Which was the stage and which the audience? There was not a sound. [G, pp.129, 130]

Coupled with passages like this, the rhythmic prose argues

for a conscious adoption of Shakespearean Romantic structure at least; not, however, without an ironic deflation of its idealistic implications, nor merely as the effect of novelistic relativity on drama.

Explicitly, then, Romantic self-delusion is explored through comedy in the wooing of Irma by Bellgrove, their miscommunication with each other, and their misperceptions of themselves, providing scenes of unparalleled hilarity. Peake explores Romantic self-delusion more seriously through the relationships between Steerpike-Fuchsia-Titus and Fuchsia-Titus-Thing. These relationships are guided in intensity by their proximity to the vacuum of meaningless ritual, but not exactly in the same manner as in Titus Groan, for Peake modifies the original interior/exterior structure, and all its attendant ethical implications, to a more prototypically Shakespearean Romance structure of city/green world. As regards the relation of this structure to self-delusion, characters in Gormenghast have problems with epistemology because they borrow their identity from the social system. Peake's development of Titus is consequently the shedding of self-delusion, i.e., the growing awareness of a self-regulated identity via the aesthetic of imagination.

By overtly presenting epistemological concern on the part of the characters in the opening pages of the first book, Peake is prefacing his epic of aesthetic ontology with

a problem that can then be backgrounded. Flay's quite ordinary remark, "I see what you mean", elicits an extraordinary thought: "Mr. Flay had said that he saw what Rottcodd had meant. Had he really? Very interesting. What, by the way, had he meant? What precisely was it that Mr. Flay had seen?" [TG, p. 23] The last question is "uncomfortably pertinent", particularly as it calls into question the metaphoric status of Peake's entire enterprise for the reader ("To what may I attribute your presence"), and recalls the quandary encapsulated by his epigraph from Bunyan. [TG, pp.22-3] As I suggested earlier, this subliminal theme is pursued explicitly through the characters and implicitly through the aesthetic medium, especially in such episodes as the artificial division between the chef's appropriating eye and sensory cognition.

In Gormenghast, Peake shows Titus' mental growth through an evocative 'colouring' of the imagination. Structurally, this scholastic adventure is situated between the ironically staged death of a pernicious philosophy of Stoicism, and the ironically comic explosion of Irma's romantic passion, further emphasized in their polarity by their being the only two incidences of an episode being subtitled in this volume. There is more than happenstance in Peake's enfranchizing of 'Spiregrain, Throd and Splint' into "the golden landscape" [G, pp.77-81], and his attitude of 'let the linguistic games begin', initiated by 'Irma Wants a

Party' [G, pp.88-95], for the episodes are separated by an arational, associational, metaphorically literalized, 'train of thought' completely at odds with such examples of pure logic as meaningless mathematics; for Peake, the mind is neither 'tabula rasa', nor logically retentive:

> The inky fingers scrubble through the forelock -- the blackboard is a grey smear. The last three lessons can be seen faintly one behind the other - - like aerial perspective. A fog of forgotten figures -- forgotten maps -- forgotten languages. [G, p.83]

To this blurring of intellectual categories (not ontological boundaries) Peake opposes "the richness, the variety" of an intrinsically aesthetic learning experience, an associational, affectional logic radically grounded in sensory cognition, a 'train of thoughts' aboard which "Titus became dreamily interested, not in their sequence but in the fact that thoughts and pictures could follow one upon the other so effortlessly." [G, p.83]

The reader is therefore engaged to elaborate any sequential significance. Peake's paean to red, "a colour-thought", touches first upon a 'house of red' (womb memory?); then a very ancient reaction to "having spilled this red liquid -- this stream of legendary yet so real crimson"; followed quickly by awareness of his own heart's "double-thud, and the drumming [that] rushed in from another region of his memory", which indicates how even natural environment is adventure to a child, geographic association

shaping "the firmament of his imagination"; and finally, demonstrates how the powerful configurations of the imagination are capable of "dilating as they neared until they pressed out and broke the frame of fancy...." [G, pp.84-5] Further, if we recognize the 'frame of fancy' for what it is -- a social artifact, i.e., an artificial cultural limitation on the imagination, part of Peake's purpose in presenting this extraordinary psychological development is clarified:

> And as the head enlarged, an eye became visible in the darkness of its sockets, and in a moment nothing else but this wild and sinister organ could be seen. For a short while it stayed there, motionless. There was nothing else in the great world but this -- globe. It was the world, and suddenly like the world it rolled. And as it rolled it grew yet again, until there was nothing but the pupil, filling the consciousness; and in that midnight pupil Titus saw the reflection of himself peering forward. And someone approached him out of the darkness of the pirate's pupil, and a rust-red pinpoint of light above the figure's brow became the coiled locks of his mother's wealth of hair. But before she could reach him her face and body had faded and in the place of the hair was Fuchsia's ruby; and the ruby danced about in the darkness, as though it were being jerked on the end of a string. [G, pp.85-6]

The suggestion is of an empathic, premonitory comprehension of past and future as they impinge upon the imaginatively present, intellectually absented self.

'Yellow-thought' is about to follow when it is curiously interrupted by Bellgrove, abruptly awakening to confront the idle Dogseye after having "gathered his gown about him like God gathering a whirlwind." [G, p.86] Now,

there is more than an echo of Stephen Deadalus' relation with Cyril Sargent in Ulysses here, for Peake's juxtaposition of deific image and belittling moniker neatly sums up Joyce's later anagrammatical pun equating God/Dog, while creating space for the exposition of his own view on abstract duality:

> 'Finish the 'G' and leave it at that. And leave the 'EYE' for other things...' -- an inane smirk began to flit across the lower part of his face -- 'such as your grammar-book,' he said brightly, his voice horribly out of character. [G, p.87][51]

Bellgrove 'in character' notably takes the child's place "and worked away at the 'G' of 'DOG' until" the boys are freed by the bell, "transformed...as though they expected to find upon the other side the embodiment of their separate dreams -- the talons of adventure, the antlers of romance." [G, p.87] While Peake's technique of allusion is unusually subtle, it proves his comic exaggeration is seldom to be taken at face value, utilized instead, as here, to develop some complication of his aesthetic plot.

The entire episode in the Lichen fort, for instance, proves that Bellgrove, because of his retention of childlike qualities irrelevant from an adult perspective, has not entirely lost his 'marbles'. Of children, Peake makes clear that "there was a reality, a world apart, a secet place to which they alone had access" that is in direct contrast to

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[51] See James Joyce, Ulysses, for the relevant passages in the 'Nestor'and 'Circe' chapters.

socially derived, monological ideology:

> But when he [Bellgrove] spoke, he had, of course, to frame his sentences in that threadbare, empty way to which he was now a slave. Whatever is felt in the heart or the pit of the stomach, the old habits remain rooted. Words and gestures obey their own dictatorial, unimaginative laws; the ghastly ritual, that denies the spirit. [G, p.150]

The problem rests in suggesting a more precise definition of this 'spirit' from inside language's 'frame of fancy', for, out of all the Castle's youth, only Titus grows to recognize "this love like a sub-soil." [G, p.152] Fittingly, it is Dr. Prunesquallor -- to whom carnivalization of language is an everyday repast, and who remains a slightly subversive presence in contrast to all that is Gormenghast -- who transcends Bellgrove's ritually 'framed' attempts at self-expression: "But I see what you mean. By all that smacks of insight, I most probably do.' [G, p.157] Empathic communication is not achieved through language's external forms, but through internal equation of human experience, a 'self-knowledge-as-other', fully aware of its provisional status and, hence, incorporating relativity. Thus, Peake communicates to the reader via sensory simile or metaphor: Barquentine's 'marble' has become externalized, scatologically ossified, and incorporated into ritual, unlike Steerpike, who "had no habits in that sort of way....He did what furthered his plans." [G, pp.161-3]

The 'way' of Steerpike's 'habits' is structured, however, in the same way as Titus'. For Peake utilizes the

external habits, or traditions, of literary history, equating the psychology of adolescence with the structures of Romance, and qualifying their social implications of an inevitably polarized choice between comedy or tragedy with the ironies of Romantic self-delusion.

Immediately after Irma's loss of control, defiantly screaming out her womanhood like one of her painted parrots, follows Titus' opportunity to "show them." [G, pp.94-5, 100] Chapter 15 is indeed overdetermined with images of rebirth, an aesthetic 'passage' with Titus crossing "the curtain of darkness which divided him from his citylike home" to explore "Forests as wet and as green as romance itself." [G, pp.96-7] The stage is set for a revelation of the imagination, but we should remember that it is a stage.

The challenge of Gormenghast Mountain -- "Do you dare?", causing "a rare confusion of voices and images", seems a specific reference to the significance of Mont Blanc for the Romantics of the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries:

> His back was towards Gormenghast.
>
> The mountain's head shone in a great vacancy of light. It held within its ugly contour either everything or nothing at all. It awakened the imagination by its peculiar emptiness.
>
> And from it came the voice again.
>
> 'Do you dare? Do you dare?
>
> And a host of voices joined. Voices from the sun-blotched glades. [G, p.97]

Although this opposition appears to be the traditional one for Romance of a morally positive natural world versus a

negative civilization, the preservation of ambiguity concerning the mountain's vacancy allows Peake to shape the traditon to his own purpose. The narrator clarifies Titus' limitations, again stressing the function of perceptual relativity in judgement, and implying the artificiality of this seeming division:

> To pretend, as he galloped, that he was free.
>
> Free...!
>
> What could such a conception mean to Titus, who hardly knew what it was to move from one part of his home to another without being watched, guided or followed and who had never known the matchless privacy of the obscure? To be without a famous name? To have no lineage? To be something of no interest to the veiled eye of the grown-up world?....
>
> Because of the wild vista that surrounded Gormenghast and spread to every horizon as though the castle were an island of maroons set in desolate water beyond all trade-routes: because of this sense of space, how could Titus know that the vague unfocused dissatisfaction which he had begun to feel from time to time was the fretting of something caged?
>
> He knew of no other world. Here all about him the raw material burned: the properties and settings of romance. Romance that is passionate; obscure and sexless: that is dangerous and arrogant.
>
> The future lay before him with its endless ritual and pedantry, but something beat in his throat and he rebelled.
>
> To be a truant! A Truant! It was like being a Conqueror -- or a Demon. [G, pp.98-9]

The final choices are consistent with the black/white moral propaganda that Peake undermines elsewhere. Further, that this freedom is a Romantic self-delusion, i.e., not yet fully realized freedom, is indicated by the problems encountered in Titus Alone.

Titus' spoken defiance, in contrast to Irma's, is tied to "so huge a sense of himself...as to make the figures in the castle like puppets in his own imagination." [G, p.100] This is the inherent danger of self-delusion in Romantic idealism. But what might resolve into childishness, actually reveals a cultural barrier: "He was not only the 77th Earl of Gormenghast, he was Titus Groan in his own right." [G, p.100] Foreshadowing the separation of his later life -- "Titus realized in full what it was to be alone. The solitude was of a kind he had never experienced before." -- and even the penultimate stage of his journey in Titus Alone -- "The silence of a motionless altitude with a world of fantastic vapour spread below." [G, p.101], still, he is not 'fully alone' here. It is part of the pretense, in the same manner as the freedom of the Romantic adventure is a pretense.

Childhood games, especially role-playing, have long been understood as a safe way of testing reality, of preparing the participants for taking their place in adult society. The adventure is interrupted by a long description of his schoolmates' "hazardous, barbaric, yet ceremonial game -- a ritual as unquestioned and sacrosanct as anything could be in the soul of a boy", as well as with Deadyawn's death, ironically parodying the adult version of the children's game, an indication that social restrictions of logic necessarily lead to more disastrous consequences. [G,

p.109] (Indeed, Bellgrove's august head is literally ennobled with the role of 'the Head', and the professors as a group are about to be invited to their own perilous adventure, the immemorial adult game of man and woman.)

The consequences of Titus' Romantic adventure, however, lead to a society quite different from that of Gormenghast. Peake juxtaposes two facets of Titus' choice, expressing them through his alternative perceptions of the castle's stirring -- "but there was no vitality in these movements, no purpose, any more than the long hair of some corpse, tossing this way and that in a wind, can deny the death of the body it flatters." -- and the relative animation of natural movement: "To Titus they seemed curiously alive, these copses. For each copse appeared singularly unlike any other one...." [G, pp.101-2] This insight into natural uniqueness and variety is comparable to Titus' sense of an undifferentiated self, especially in contrast to Gormenghastian similitude: "The landscape was alive, but so was Titus", while Gormenghast blurs into "that grey line of towers." [G, p.103]

Titus' struggle through the green wall, assuredly a 'staged rebirth', is curiously reminiscent of Steerpike's climb up, and later battle through, the ivy. What is "the chimera of a daydream" under the heroic auspices of a Romantic setting, however, soon turns to horrific nightmare:

> And now, what he had loved he loathed. He loathed this deathly, terrible silence. He loathed

> the gold light among the trees, the endless vista of the moss --even the gliding flight from footmark to footmark. For it was as though he were being drawn towards some dangerous place or person, and that he had no power to hold himself back. The mid-air thrill was now the thrill of Fear. [G, pp.131-2]

More specifically, it is the sameness which, unlike natural variety but exactly like the Castle, "seemed never to change" that provokes his repulsion, as well as a symbolic situation similar to Titus' problem with his maternal home:

> He had been afraid of leaving the dark margin on his right, for it was his only hold upon his location; but now he felt it as part of some devilish plan, and that to cling to its tangled skirt would be to deliver himself to some ambushed horror. [G, pp.131-2]

Like many another Romantic fantasy, he catches his first glimpse of the Thing, its very appearance impossibly unreal, as he bounds through the oak woods "into its gold heart":

> Like himself, it was in mid-air, but there was no other resemblance. Titus was heavily if sparsely built. This creature was exquisitely slender. It floated through the golden air like a feather, the slender arms along the sides of the gracile body, the head turned slightly away and inclined a little as though on a pillow of air.
>
> Titus was by now convinced that he was asleep: that he was running through the deep of a dream: that his fear was nightmare: that what he had just seen was no more than an apparition, and that though it haunted him he knew the hopeless absurdity of following so fleeting a wisp of the night.
>
> Had he thought himself awake he must surely have pursued, however faint his hope of overtaking the slender creature. For the conscious mind can be set aside and subdued by the emotions, but in a dream world all is logic. [G, p.132]

A curious textual inversion of normality, then, allows Titus to find an aesthetic value in nightmarish surroundings:

> On the long glissade of the wasp-gold flight, like a figment from a rarer and more curious climate than Titus had ever breathed, it had expressed as it rose across the glade the quintessence of detachment: the sense of something intrinsically tameless, and of a distilled and thin-air beauty. [G, p.134]

Because he sees this quality in terms of his own dilemma, however, he idealizes the Thing's disrespect for ritual. It is not so much "Something that would no more think of bowing to the seventy-seventh Earl than would a bird, or the branch of a tree", as it is something which, like bird or tree, barely thinks at all. [G, p.134] The Thing is no Ariel, no Puck; it is not even Caliban.

While Titus' projection of meaning onto the Thing is actually self-delusion, there is no denying the effect this has on him:

> The glimpse of a world, of an unformulated world, where human life could be lived by other rules than those of Gormenghast, had shaken him....
> * * * *
> There was no way for Titus to know which way to turn. He only knew that he could not return in the direction from which he had come.
> * * * *
> [W]hen, most refreshing of all to Titus' eyes, the oaks no longer cast their ancestral spell across the vistas, but were challenged by a variety of trees and shrubs, until the last of those gnarled monarchs had withdrawn and Titus found himself in a fresher atmosphere, then, at last he was clear of the nightmare and, with his hunger for redundant proof, was once again in the clear, sharp, actual world that he knew. [G, pp.134-5]

That world is neither Gormenghast's artificial, nor

Romance's idealized, version of nature. Indeed, the nightmare of natural similitude is comparable only to his adventure in the forgotten labyrinths of the Castle:

> But here, unlike the child lost in the forest, Titus was surrounded by a fastness without sentience. There was no growth, and no movement. There was no sense that a sluggish sap was sleeping somewhere; was waiting in the stony tracts for an adamantine April. There was no presence here that shared the moment with him, the exquisitely frightening long-drawn, terror-edged moment of his apprehension. Would nothing stir? Was there no pulse in all these mocking tracts? [G, p.179]

That 'no/thing' moves makes all the difference. Inside the 'mocking tracts' of Gormenghast, even "a clue for freedom" is lacking, so that Titus loses not only his "sense of direction, of where he had come from,...wiped away by what seemed an age of vacillation", but the sense of his own reality; even pain only momentarily assures presence in a place where:

> There was no ray of light to indicate that there was any outer world. What luminosity there was was uniform, a kind of dusk that had nothing to do with daylight. A self-contained thing, bred in the halls and corridors, something that seeped forth from the walls and floors and ceilings. [G, p.180]

The lack of a capital for this 'self-contained thing' is not irrelevant, for the implicit threat of the Castle -- "It seemed that he had begun to be absorbed into the stone." -- is a generalization of the specific threat implicit in Titus' attraction to the Thing. [G, p.181] If "the hollow halls were a nightmare of the past", their dreams of evil

will soon return, echoing to the murderous Steerpike's tread, but it is the idealized natural world that will be the nightmare of his future. [G, p.183] The raven that leads him to safety foreshadows the revelatory reactions of the Thing to Titus' presence in Flay's cave, indicated as well by the carved raven she steals.

Such an interpretation is promoted by the aesthetic's ironic implications for his borrowed Romance structure, especially in Titus' discovery of the Thing's true nature -- it, not she (part of his self-delusion involving his adolescent response to the Thing's sex [G, pp.187-8]):

> It was she! But how different!
> What had his memory done to her that he should now be seeing a creature so radically at variance with the image that had filled his mind?....[W]as this what had floated through his imagination in arrogant rhythms that spanned the universe?....[T]he rarefaction had become clay.... This was something new and earthy....this dark reality of slaughtered birds, of scattered feathers, of an animal's posture and above all of an ignorant originality that was redolent in her every gesture. [G, p.416; my emphasis]

Peake exposes the false idealism in Romantic attitudes toward Nature, such as the idealistic vision of the Shakespearean green world, by ripping away the mask of convention to reveal a Nature 'red in tooth and claw'. Still, this is not so much total rejection of Romanticism as it is redefinition. Instead of heroic self-delusion, Peake's exposition of the powers found in the natural world demonstrates that they can be essentially human only if

qualified with the civilizing necessity of basic repression. Though Titus wants her, more than anything else, to 'speak to him':

> ...this is what she could not do, for the first sound which Titus heard her utter bore no relation to human speech. Nor did the tone of it convey that he was being answered even in a language of her own. It was a sound, quite solitary and detached. It had no concern with communication. It was inward and curiously pitched. [G, p.421; my emphasis]

'She' has literally reverted to 'it'. The chaotic energy of instinctual drives is sublimated not in a natural, but in a naturally human way through basic repression; the resulting capacity for self-regulation grounds a diffuse eroticism, a loving linkage of self with other, through the medium of language. The point is that genital fixation does not definitively limit adult normality, but is a phase of psychological growth whose successful sublimation is not a regression to childhood polymorphous eroticism, but a progression to a fully realized ontological reality. Further, as Titus' faulty memory suggests, here and later, remembrance plays a part in the influence of perceptual relativity on conscious cognition.

As Peake piles episode upon episode, drawing parallels between them, the sense of reality, so emphatically present in many passages, also begins to seem the crystalline clarity of dream or nightmare, much like Prunesquallor's dream [G, pp.196-7], rather than any faithful linear

rendering of events. What the author suggests of the misapprehensive self-delusions of Irma and Bellgrove holds true for the reader's position in relation to the narrative: "There are times when the emotions are so clamorous and the rational working of the mind so perfunctory that there is no telling where the actual leaves off and the images of fantasy begin." [G, p.226] Thus, even while Peake's tongue is firmly in his cheek, and his 'cheek' firmly in hand, as he riotously dissects love's "voices at play" (a carefully set up metaphor for perceptual relativity and "the truants of the brain") [G, p.227], the spice of his aesthetic leaves an aftertaste of seriousness upon the palate.

These, then, are the facets of Peake's aesthetic pantechnicon, the technical means for the revelations of the imagination. Before I continue with analysis of its testing in Titus Alone, I would like to show how it effectively alters the main themes of Gormenghast, in particular, clarifying the otherwise murky motivations of the conclusion.

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The Significance of the Pantechnicon

Like his choice of 'colour-thoughts' from the palette of his pantechnicon, Peake implies an aesthetically concrete

ontology almost in spite of the self-delusions of his characters, as Bellgrove attests:

> -- by the Lord, if I don't show 'em how it's done. Two arms, two legs, two eyes, one mouth, ears, trunk and buttocks, belly and skeleton, lungs, tripes and backbone, feet and hands, brains, eyes and testicles. I've got 'em all -- so help me, rightside up. [G, p.232]

In a reversal of his predecessor's position, Bellgrove is prepared to act. But it is the generative power hinted at in the last pairing of this catalogue that lends purpose to Peake's descriptional style; it is, perhaps, the key to many of the characters' desire to 'show them' in this novel, whoever 'they' are? [52]

It is especially important to Titus to 'show' his mother what he's made of; she becomes the specific focus for his earlier vague feelings of dissatisfaction, and a particularly apt spokesperson for the anonymous ritual when she challenges her son to explain his treason in a "cold, inhuman voice": like Steerpike, "He had not planned to come out into the open"; unlike him, "he could never have voiced his thoughts had he planned to do so." [G, p.459] The proof of real physical presence is always tied to observable deeds, then, but whereas Bellgrove's shortsightedness is comic, Titus' self-delusion is tragic:

Was he the seventy-seventh? No....He was the First

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[52] The question is pertinent because potential audiences range from the anonymity of the social system to Peake's own reaction to poor sales of the first volume. (Crabcalf and his failed epic are, perhaps, a self-portrait.)

> -- a man upon a crag with the torchlight of the world upon him! He was all here -- there was nothing missing, brains, heart and sentience -- an individual in his own right -- a thing of legs and arms, of loins, head, eyes and teeth.
>
> He walked sightlessly to the window. He made no sign to his mother. He was her traitor. Let her watch him, then! [G, p.488]

Peake's substitution of 'teeth' for 'testicles' in this similar catalogue distinguishes between destructive and generative powers implicit in sensory cognition, invoked again by a 'test of valor'. The repetition of the catalogue, and alteration of the final pairing, are not incidental: Titus, frustrated in his first sexual encounter, has turned that unspent energy outwards in a confusedly motivated anger at Steerpike, perfectly reflected by his imperfect, 'sightless', self-knowledge. Destruction of Steerpike, the "symbol of all things tyrannical", will not, as he thinks, fulfill him, for the tyranny does not lie with individuals but with the social system; Steerpike, despite embracing evil, is a victim, a scapegoat for Gormenghast. [G, p.488]

Throughout the dramatic conclusion, Peake fuses implicit Oedipal suggestions in the imagery with a more explicit sense of Titus as archetype for the author's aesthetic and social metaphors. The stagelit climax is coloured, then, with Titus' 'illness', a sense of unreality that is continued in Titus Alone:

> His fever mounted. As he grew weaker he grew fiercer. Perhaps he was in a dream. Perhaps it was all a delusion -- the heads at a thousand windows -- the boats tossing like gold beetles at the foot of midnight heights; the flooded window that

> yawned for blood and drama, the upper window where his mother loomed, her red hair smouldering, her face like marble. [G, p.486]

The metaphorical Gothic substitution of house for body regulates the suggestively Oedipal staging of the episode, yet Peake continually withholds the finality of psychological or allegorical interpretation, pushing the reader toward aesthetic ontology instead:

> And he was no one's figurehead. He was only himself.... He was Titus, perhaps, if words were needed -- but he was no more than that -- oh no, not Gormenghast, not the seventy-seventh, not the House of Groan, but a heart in a body that swam through space and time. [G, p.487]

That Peake has deliberately omitted 'mind' from this description heightens Titus' conflict with the mentally unbalanced Steerpike; Titus' individual "determination to prove himself a man" interestingly reflects "the radiant purpose of the single mind" rather than the divided mind of his foe:

> He had no room in his system for fear. He knew that it was only for him to fall upon this symbol of all things tyrannical -- Steerpike the cold and cerebral beast -- for him to be fulfilled. His medium was a short and slippery knife. [G, p.488]

In a battle metaphorically between individual freedom and a subject of monological ideology, it seems appropriate that Peake employ metaphors of 'phallogocentrism' to subvert authoritarian repression with sensorial and associational logic, in much the same way as the earlier linking of the Thing-canoe-weapon is here concretely realized as a

linguistically visual 'phallacy'. [53] It is these various analogical undertones of metaphor that support otherwise untenable statements:

> The sense of scale, which he had inherited from his mother -- that effect of being larger than he really was, of being over-size, was now peculiarly in evidence. It was as though it were not just that Titus Groan had entered, but that his abstract, a prototype had come through the door, and that the floodwater that dripped from his clothes was somehow spilled in heroic measure. [G, p.487-8]

Because of the subliminal consequences of Peake's metafictional aesthetic for our own social reality and being, it is as if, deludedly identifying with the hero, it were our eyes racing over the page "with a lust of revenge." [G, p.488] Such emotional reactions necessarily precede any revelation of the imagination, heightening its mediating power:

> And out of his guess, out of his weakness, 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 the imagination's pride. He, Titus, the traitor, was about to prove his existence, spurred by his anger, spurred by the romanticism of his nature which cried not now for paper boats, or marbles, or the monsters on their stilts, or the mountain cave, or the Thing afloat among the golden oaks, or anything but vengeance and sudden death and the knowledge that he was not watching anymore, but living at the core of drama. [G, p.493]

While acts 'prove' existence, it is the 'core of drama'

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[53] 'Phallogocentrism' is Jacques Derrida's term for Lacan's theory of the subject's initiation into an Imaginary Order, during which the 'letter' substitutes for the penis in a primal Oedipus complex.

that represents Titus' continuing delusion now. The Castle recognizes the victorious Titus' feat as the very stuff of legend, but the hero himself remains unaffected by the outcome, dissatisfied not only with the chafing bonds of ritual, but with the remembered fear of this new position of authority going to his head:

> 'Then <u>be</u> silent,' said Titus, and in spite of his anger, the heady wine of autocracy tasted sweet upon his tongue -- sweet and dangerous -- for he was only now learning that he had power over others, not only through the influence of his birthright but through a native authority that was being wielded for the first time -- and all this he knew to be dangerous, for as it grew, this bullying would taste ever sweeter and fiercer and the naked cry of freedom would become faint and the Thing who had taught him freedom would become no more than a memory. [<u>G</u>, p.469]

Titus' insight into the seductive, enthralling nature of social and personal power reveals a knowledge of the perils of subjectification, of any submission to the rituals of his home (surplus repression), as well as to misled Romantic idealism (basic repression); thematically, it reveals that evil cannot be isolated, externalized and overcome, for the 'monster' is within. His battle with Steerpike is thus an outgrowth of Romantic idealism if understood on a simple level of black/white morality, a level Peake has promoted as tenuous at best because of the inherent ambiguity of perceptual relativity. Instead, the 'battle' concerns the proper balance of mind, heart and body.

Peake elaborates just such an inference with the drowning of Steerpike's brain in a black wave of arrogant display:

> He had swung full circle. He had given himself up to the crowding forces. He, the rationalist, the self-contained!
>
> And so, in a paroxysm of self-indulgence -- or perhaps in the grip of some elemental agency over which he had no power, he had denied his brain, and he had lost the one and only moment of time in which to strike before his enemy [G, p.498]

The imbalance caused by surplus repression pushes Steerpike over the edge; Titus, by contrast, though his brain is initially also veiled by "a cloud of crimson", clings to a rational emotion of fear:

> - as in a hot sky of continuous cloud, an area, no bigger than one's thumbnail will clear and show the sky. And with this momentary clearance of his brain from the fumes of fever and fatigue, came the fear of Steerpike and darkness and death.... directly he fell, the fear left him again. He said to himself, 'I am falling. I am moving very fast. I will soon be on top of him. Then I will kill him if I can.' [G, p.497]

Peake's equation of Steerpike with darkness and death indicates that the 'stage' itself is of paramount importance for this struggle. Steerpike has fought his way into the ivy in a vain attempt to reach the wall; it is a direct attack on nature:

> With what remained of his strength he fought it. He fought the ivy. He tore at the scales of its throat. He pulled himself into it. He tore at its ligaments, he broke its small water-logged bones; he forced its ribs apart and as they strained to return to their ancient curves he fought his way through them. And as he grappled and pulled his way inwards, something inside him

> and very far away was saying, 'You have not reached the wall.... [G, p.491]

Titus is forced to follow "into the heart of the foliage where the branches shone like a network of white and twisted bones at the inrush of the moonbeams", but he reaches further inward than Steerpike, "curled up like an emaciated child in a cot of twigs", cradled in the ivy like some enwombed monstrosity awaiting birth from the Castle's enshrouding darkness. [G, pp.495-6] Gormenghast's wall of immemorial stones retains here all its previous significance, particularly as the boundary between the worlds of light and shadow:

> There was but one course for him [Titus]. To burrow in as deeply as he could, and then to descend in the gloom until he found his foe. The moonlight was now so strong that a kind of deep twilight had taken the place of the rayless midnight among the leaves. Only at the deeply-hidden face of the wall itself was the darkness complete. [495]

It is as if, by penetrating further into the darkness of Gormenghast, in a kind of epic conquest of death, Titus heroically outshines his foe. As stated earlier, death is the single effective agent for change. Fuchsia experiences a revelation of the imagination similar to Titus -- "All she knew was that she felt weak, that she was not reading about all this in a tragic book but that it was true." -- but dies because she is defenceless against the power of her metafictional idea. [G, p.453] Titus, his experience with the Thing providing a greater margin of balance, penetrates

to the heart of darkness, and metaphorically dies by killing his double, for Steerpike, in personifying the logical extreme of the Castle's social system, is relatedly a part of Titus.

Vision metaphorically conveys the insight:

> He could see nothing of the body into which his small knife plunged. Only the head, with its distended mouth and its grizzly blood-lit eyes, was visible....
> * * * *
> But at the rip of the knife in his [Steerpike's] chest all vision left him....The sharp pain of it [Steerpike's return blow] cleared the boy's mind for a fraction of time and he thrust again into the darkness below his face. The world began to spin and he was spinning with it and he heard again, very far away the sound of crowing, and then opening his eyes he saw his fist at his enemy's breast, for the lozenge of moonlight had spread across them both, and he knew that he had no strength to withdraw the knife from between the ribs of a body arched like a bow, in the thick leaves. Then Titus stared at the face, as a child who cannot tell the time will stare at the face of a clock in wonder and perplexity, for it was nothing any more -- it was just a thing, narrow and pale, with an open mouth and small, lacklustre eyes. They were turned up.
> Steerpike was dead. [G, p.499]

Titus rises, "as it seemed, from the dead." [G, p.500] Mortality, that perplexing allotment, so easily erased, of a little span of time, motivates Titus' decision to finally break with his ancestral home.

The Castle is aptly filled with grey slime after the flood abates, a metaphorically moral judgement on the immemorial stones, as if the stark ethics of chiaroscuro were muddled by perceptual relativity. Startlingly, if

Romance's preconceived frames of fancy are imposed upon the conclusion, Titus takes no part in the work of regeneration. "[A] living symbol of revenge", whose scar is "his own secret glory", Titus, finding no peace, wonders: "Why was he walking every day to the monotony of the eternal encampment; the eternal castle and the eternal ritual?" [G, pp.502, 505] The "difference" he longs for [G, p.411], now also reveals the underpinnings of society, 'the eternal encampment':

> And he would be free. Free of his loyalties. Free of his home. Free of the maddening forms and ceremonies. Free to become something more than the last of the great Line. His longing to escape had been fanned by his passion for the 'Thing'. Without her he would have never dared to do more than dream of insurrection. She had shown him by her independence how it was only fear that held people together. The fear of being alone and the fear of being different. Her unearthly arrogance and self-sufficiency had exploded at the very centre of his conventions. From the moment when he knew for certain that she was no figment of his fancy, but a creature of Gormenghast Forest, he had been haunted. He was still haunted. Haunted by the thought of this other kind of world which was able to exist without Gormenghast. [G, p.507]

An insight into what supports surplus repression despite consciousness of it -- the fear of being alone and being different -- sets Titus apart. Iconoclastically, in regard to literary tradition, his "face was not that of any romantic youth. It was, in a way, very ordinary." [G, p.507] Indeed, Peake almost seems aware of being too obvious here, though the unidealized novelistic description of the hero also subtly implies a perfect imperfection, preserving variety: "H[illegible]d no perfect feature. Everything seemed a

little too big and subtly uneven." [G, p.507]

Certainly, what 'haunts the heart' must be put into action if it is to have any value. That is an apt description of Titus' semi-conscious decision, one made more by his body than his mind, one that, for all its vagueness from a rational standpoint, leads to the realization that one must act to live:

> It was when he saw the great walls looming above him that he began to run.
>
> He ran as though to obey an order. And this was so, though he knew nothing of it. He ran in the acknowledgement of a law as old as the laws of his home. The law of flesh and blood. The law of longing. The law of change. The law of youth. The law that separates the generations, that draws the child from his mother, the boy from his father, the youth from both.
>
> And it was the law of quest. The law that few obey for lack of valour. The craving of the young for the unknown and all that lies beyond the tenuous skyline.
>
> He ran in the simple faith that in his disobedience was his inmost proof. He was no callow novice; no flighty child of some romance of sugar. He had no sweet tooth. He had killed and had felt the wide world rustle open from the ribs and the touch of death had set his hair on end.
>
> He ran because his decision had been made. It had been made for him by the convergence of half-forgotten motives, of desires and reasons, of varied yet congruous impulses. And the convergence of all these to a focus point of <u>action</u>. [G, p.508-9]

Such action is not to be equated with the earlier claim for Titus as "that rarer thing, a man in motion", for then the narrator espoused the Romantic self-delusions of the characters. [G, p.460] Rather, the sense of the word for Peake seems closer to one underlying the confused 'reasons'

Titus bursts out with to his mother:

> What do I care for the symbolism of it all? What do I care if the castle's heart is sound or not? I don't want to be sound anyway! Anybody can be sound if they're always doing what they're told. I want to live! Can't you see? Oh, can't you see? I want to be myself, and become what I make myself, a person, a real live person and not a symbol any more. That is my reason! [G, p.459]

Beneath the petulance of the character, a strange desire, a 'reason of no symbolism', is buried. This 'sounds' like nothing so much as a complaint against his 'Authorjehovah'; indeed, it should be the metafictional quest for the hero of an aesthetic epic. The final phrase of the book, "Titus rode out of his world", complies with such a desire. [G, p.511] It is, again, a metaphor literalized, the extratextual departure of a character seeking, perhaps half realizing, an aesthetic ontology; one, moreover, that evokes some painful memory as of childhood. For Titus' 'act' recalls the pride of the Carvers, the bogey man of their children, the almost supernaturally ominous statue of the horse and rider.[TG, p.234]

By having Titus leave in such a manner, Peake presents the second act of the imagination, i.e., the refusal of social conclusions implicit in his borrowed Romance structures, comic and tragic. The 'rebirth' of Titus after defeating Steerpike gives indications of a new ex-centric sense of himself, one that fits neither the morality of tragedy's social re-integration (dystopian), nor comedy's

social restoration (utopian) [54] His mother, by contrast, expresses the concentric viewpoint: "There is nowhere else....You will only tread a circle, Titus Groan. There's not a road, not a track, but it will lead you home. For everything comes to Gormenghast." [G, p.510] Though Titus departs one fictional world only to wander another, his quest for identity surely involves creating his own world.

As the hero of the new epic, Titus' undertaking will indeed be formidable. In the third volume, he is repeatedly encircled: by beggars at the dock, by high society at the Cusp-Canine's party, by the 'criminals' of the Under River, and by the hostile crowd of nonentities at Cheeta's Black Masque. When his mother's prophecy is about to be fulfilled, however, he discovers a new revelatory act of the imagination.

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The Truth of the Pantechnicon

Much has been made of Peake's debilitating illness

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[54] Tragedy is roughly equivalent to the position of the intellectual Steerpike in the sense of the death of an excluded scapegoat hero reaffirming extant social values. Comedy, closer to the Thing as Romance ideal in this regard, is more physical in the sense of youth's regenerative powers rebuilding a perfect society. Both traditional conclusions are rejected by Titus and, hence, Peake, because of their complicity in social subjectification.

during the writing of the third 'Titus book', but excuses for the poorer quality are not as necessary as might seem apparent in a first reading. Posthumous editorial deletions by the publisher were haphazard, inconsistent to a deletorious degree, especially in regard to their effect on the dramatic construction and thematic implications of the Black Masque, and the characterization of the Scientist and Titus. Tanya Gardiner Scott described their effect on the work, after studying the manuscripts closely:

> Thus an examination of the prepublication material...reveals much about Peake's initial conceptions of Titus Alone, clarifying otherwise cryptic wording, showing his deliberate manipulation of plot, tense and image patterns, his widely diffused eroticism and his close attention to characterization. It shows that, despite the extended time taken in writing the novel...and its unevenness as his illness gained hold on him, he crafted it more carefully than he is given credit for in the printed texts, particularly as it represents a new stage of his artistic development.[55]

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[55] "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic", pp.289-90. She notes that deletions from description of the Factory -- 'Until smallness became synonymous with might... so that in the end the pin-head waits to burgeon like an evil flower....' -- equate atomic power with the personal 'fleur du mal' at the Black House [pp.284-5]. Further, Titus' sanity is much more strongly questioned [p.269], which increases the importance of his final resolution: 'He has almost come full-circle to stand on the rim of the world and to be once again shades of the immemorial Castle -- These two ideas no longer oppose one another but agree and marry, for the seed of the one appears in the other and the seed of the other appears in the one.' [p.288] Here, Peake indicates the precise equivalence of immanent totality with the imagination's aesthetic ontology.

Moreover, the new world he creates demands another stylistic departure, as does the continuing development of his main character, in the same manner as his representation of the Bright Carvers and Keda's universalized love demanded a style distinct from that used to represent Gormenghast. For Peake, if for anyone, the medium indubitably contains the message.

Underwater imagery, intermittently used in the first two novels, completely floods the third. Although the imagery apparently alludes to the kind of descent that follows Northrop Frye's pattern of Romance in The Secular Scripture, Peake's adaptation of the Gothic tradition means this work is closer to the Modern variant of the pattern, where the hero's descent is usually into the sub-conscious. However, both the epistemological backgrounding and Titus' third act of the imagination upon 'surfacing' argue that Peake broke with this tradition.

While a fleeting episodic structure adds to the feel of the work as picaresque, Peake meant it to reflect a post-apocalyptic setting in the near future. In contrast to the expository and dramatic styles of Titus Groan and Gormenghast respectively, the erratic tone of intensity, and a consequently hallucinatory sense of disconnectedness between episodes, casts a dreamlike quality over everything. Hell for Titus is Modernism's picaresque quest for identity turned nightmare, as if he never recovered from the fever

attendant on his battle with Steerpike.

Titus' quest for identity thematically shapes Peake's questioning of the possibility of coeval worlds, explicitly bringing exploration of ontological doubt or instability to the fore. Not only is the reality of the past uncertain, but, because a feverish Titus infects the narrator at times, the ontological status of the world he wanders is also suspect. To the inhabitants of the city, Titus' enigmatic presence threatens the relative, though artificial, stability of their society, undermining the unquestioned assumptions of its exclusionary base. To Cheeta, Juno, Black Rose (to a limited extent), and even to the self-sufficient Muzzlehatch, he represents 'mystery', an enigma they find lacking in their own lives. Though he seems, for his own part, to be dreaming, he shakes them out of a lethargic state, in particular, provoking a problematic memory of their past in his interactions with each character.

The irony of Titus Alone in this regard is not solely in the work's more overt social satire, but also in the fact that Titus is never truly alone. The figures from his past haunt him every second, much as the physical freedom from the parental environment only exacerbates lingering psychological influences; again, Titus' metaphorically alienated situation is archetypal, any young adult's problematic identity only gradually realized as they resolve the claims of their past.

Peake continues to turn internal textual problems outward, for the reader is confronted with the ontological question not only thematically, but is placed in the same position as Titus because of the different chronotope:

> Had Titus come across a world of dragons he could hardly have been more amazed than by these fantasies of glass and metal; and he turned himself about more than once as though it were possible to catch a last glimpse of the tortuous, poverty-stricken town he had left behind him, but the district of Muzzlehatch was hidden away by a fold in the hills and the ruins of Gormenghast were afloat in a haze of time and space. [TA, p.32]

Here, Peake links perceptual relativity with the visions of memory, knowledge's storehouse, as the basis for discovery of self. Despite the episodic structure then, there is no true sense of picaresque adventure, the tone throughout actually closer to a dark night of the soul, culminating in the flowering of evil in the Black Masque, and finally achieving some new synthesis found by "the act of living". [TA, p.263]

If Day's theory of the Gothic's parodying of Realism by undermining the inherited social attitudes of Romance is applied here, then the Postmodern novel occupies a position of being twice removed in regard to the Modern novel, Postmodernism's parodying of Modern Realism necessarily entailing a parody of Gothic parody:

> There was something incurably obvious about it all. Something puerile. 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. And rich! As

> rich as her father's factory can make her. And he? He is heir to a kingdom. But where is it? Where is it? [TA, p.170]

Not only has Titus' disillusionment with the Thing punctured the balloon of idealized Romanticism, but Peake's deliberate emphasis on the parody, its 'incurable obviousness', shifts the dominant from Modern epistemology to Postmodern ontology. Words themselves are relative, as Muzzlehatch points out:

> I use them as a kind of lattice-work....They hide me away from me...let alone you. Words can be tiresome as a swarm of insects. They can prick and buzz! Words can be no more than a series of farts; or on the other hand they can be adamantine, obdurate, inviolable, stone upon stone. Rather like your "so-called Gormenghast".... [TA, p.145]

Titus Alone follows this pattern of parodic parodying through its hero's sense of nightmarish memory, all the characters he encounters potentially linked by inversion with previous ones. Thus, Titus' encirclement is repeated in more than imagery, for the self is also constrained by memory.

Muzzlehatch is an obvious father figure for Titus, a mentor whose effective rescues, guidance, even his sheer interest and involvement, contrast favourably with Sepulchrave's abstracted attitude toward his son, never mind that both go mad. Yet their insanity also provides evidence of inversion, Sepulchrave's melancholic self-absorption the opposite of Muzzlehatch's aggressive defense of other's interest, including his obsessive vengeance for the

destruction of his zoo, which represents natural variety.

Juno's classically statuesque beauty is not only the antithesis of Cheeta's slender modernity, but the maternal smothering that affects her erotic relationship with Titus signals the similar, earlier complication of Titus' upbringing. Though Gertrude is his genetic mother, he is suckled by Keda, and supposedly spends some years under the doting, ineffectual care of Mrs. Slagg. Juno combines these qualities: her physical stature is the opposite of Nannie's diminutive, wrinkled appearance; her sexuality is more particularized and earthy than Keda's universal love; and her communicative, sympathetic attitude with others, the antithesis of the Countess' threatening silences and domineering authority.

The Black Rose is potentially a blasted Fuchsia, her deep resources of passion, symbolized by the burning ruby she seldom wore, now prostituted and corrupted by Veil, who, at least as regards their relationship, plays a perverse version of Steerpike as seducer: Fuchsia's 'man of the dusk', a manipulative Romantic dandy, becomes the sadistic pimp of full blown nightmare. Physically closer to Flay, Veil is also an inversion of the loyal servant's protective attitude toward the misled daughter of the Groans.

The "shadow of a leaf" [TA, p.192] seen in Cheeta's face recalls Peake's alternative name for the Thing in

manuscript -- Leaf. [56] The opposite of natural grace, Cheeta's artificial beauty is "a mixture of the sophisticated, the bizarre, and the exquisite." [TA, p.165] Her frigidity links her with the Thing, while her reliance on intellect (even her vengeance takes the form of Titus' mental destruction) distinguishes her from the Thing's instinctual, physical animosity.

Cheeta's father, the Scientist, is a perverted version of Alfred Prunesquallor, his bland anonymity contrasting effectively with the good doctor's prominent personal characteristics. His selfless pursuit of scientific experiment, and disavowal of responsibility, however, are a form of evil more to be contrasted with the ambitious Steerpike's manipulative machinations, as well as the latter's desire to openly glory in his talent for destruction. Evil in Titus Alone is definitively insidious.

The helmeteers, those enigmatically similar robotic beings, parody the 'self-involvement' of the Twins, whose self-interest was the basis of their outward desire for power. The trackers of Titus express a more disinterested, if single-minded, pursuit of public duty. Controlled externally, forced against their will to commit heinous acts, they not only compare with the duped Twins, but are also an inversion of the featureless benignity of the Grey

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[56] See Batchelor, Mervyn Peake, p.95.

Scrubbers.

Places are involved in this parodic process: the architectural unity of the Castle is opposed to the disparate regionalization of the City -- industrial sector (Factory), slums, private wealthy suburb, and underworld community all distinctly separated. Even the 'fantasies of steel and glass' are quite different from the allowed precedents in immemorial stone. Gormenghast Mountain, with its naturally subversive Romantic appeal, is opposed to the creation by social exclusion of 'subversives' in the Under River; the well-run, mechanized Factory implies the opposite of the disorganized, haphazard education provided by the School; the Honeycomb of prison cells so beloved by Old Crime contrasts with solitary confinement in the Lichen Fort; and perhaps the ruinous Black House, the haunt of animals, is meant to invertedly reflect Flay's Cave, skull-like in appearance. Thus, even in regard to its hero's quest for ontological surety, Titus Alone in its entirety is "something of a holocaust." [TA, p.254]

Obviously these connections may be seen as incidental, filterings of Titus', or the narrator's, or the author's, troubled consciousness. The inverted parallels I have suggested between characters from these isolated worlds are far from systematic. Other links are more tenuous, arguably an imposition of significance. Is Old Crime a parody of Flay's loyalty to the Stone Lanes, for example, or a brutal

inversion of Bellgrove's sympathy for the imprisoned Titus? Is the dutiful Inspector Acreblade meant to contrast with Rottcodd's desire for solitude?; the removedness of the self-effacing Magistrate related to the overt fanaticism of Barquentine's zealotry? Is Crabcalf's failed epic and public disapprobation the opposite of the introspective Poet's limited success in becoming Master of Ceremonies?; or are the three disciples attaching themselves to a dubious Titus reflections of the submission of Throd, Spiregrain and Flint to their master? Does ridiculously repressed Irma finally climb the social ladder to become the successful Lady Cusp-Canine? Do Irma and Bellgrove become the loving Old Couple? Or is Bellgrove's 'invisible revolution' parodied by the surreal mathematician, Mr. Zed, and his suffering wife? Finally, two figures seem to have neither pairing, nor any internal relation -- Swelter and Anchor. [57]

While these suggestive connections may be my own invention, it seems to me that Peake provides enough substance for such an interpretation; together they create a submerged rock which any easy assumption of Titus'

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[57] Manuscript deletions studied by Gardiner-Scott suggest a possible link between the chef and the white-smocked Scientist: 'On restless nights, tossing and turning like a sea-cow he was sometimes heard to cry out as though in horror. But on waking he was himself again and worked according to a logic of the daylight, for after all he was only an instrument of the government -- and thus of the public itself. That the public knew nothing of this was of course inevitable.' See "Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic", p.282.

fundamental sanity must confront. By supporting the question of Titus' sanity with such inverted parodies, Peake stresses the problem of ontological status. Indirectly, i.e., imaginatively through metaphorical literature, and retrospectively, i.e., through memory, these links affect interpretation of the first two books, for the more obvious social satire and references to wartime atrocities reflect upon this supposedly simple Fantasy so as to reveal its purpose of social disquisition, an examination of the roots of responsibility for the fleur-du-mal of fascism. [58]

For the reader, the strong discontinuity between realized worlds is a test of enthrallment. What, after all, is the status of Gormenghast? When, and where, is it? Is it merely a fantasy?:

> Were they coeval; were they simultaneous? These worlds; these realms -- could they <u>both</u> be true? Were there no bridges? Was there no common land? Did the same sun shine upon them? Had they the constellations of the night in common?
> * * * *
> What of the rivers? Were they separate? Was there no tributary, even, to feel its way into another world?
> Where lay the long horizons? Where throbbed the frontiers? O terrible division! The near and the far. The night and the day. The yes and the no. [<u>TA</u>, p.33]

The only 'tributary' is Titus' stream of consciousness, reflecting here our memory and perceptive imagination.

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[58] See Tanya Gardiner-Scott, "War Images and Influences in Mervyn Peake's <u>Titus Alone</u>", <u>MPR</u> (1986) 20:38-48, for an in-depth analysis of references to contemporary history.

Peake's allusions -- to the chapter 'Near and Far' in Titus Groan (emphasizing perceptual relativity and the metaphorical chronotopos), to literary tradition's metaphor of black/white morality based on ancient experience in Gormenghast (recalling his relativization of chiaroscuro's ethical implications), and to the ontological question of Titus Alone -- summarize the qualities of the mediating power of the aesthetic imagination in the 'Titus books'.

Moreover, Titus' power in the third book is neither physically heroic nor intellectually idealistic. He passively appeals, instead, to the imagination of the people of this brave new world; Titus is both an attractive mystery and repelling threat, for they are ineluctably drawn to someone not only outside their social system, but unwilling to accept any imposed identity, incapable of compliance because of his insistence on another, self-sufficient reality. Confronted with his mysterious evocation of their imaginations, they desire the freedom to be themselves; they fear the loss of their own socially imposed identity. Titus' self-involved quest unwittingly deflates the modern myth of the integrity of the autonomous individual, exposing the homogeneity within each circle of artificial stratification as the effect of surplus repression and submission to a performance principle in an exclusionary hierarchical system.

In Gormenghast, the operative principle of society is

inclusive. Despite the walls which divide Inner from Outer Dwellers, the lives of both are regulated by the religio-political rituals of an abstract and valorized tradition; meaningless though that tradition is in itself, it gives a sense of purpose to their lives. In the City, the operative principle is exclusionary, primarily because the purely intellectual, ahumanistic concerns of science have replaced religious ritual. But this is not to say Peake prefers one over the other, for, in both, social institutions are undermined.

The poverty stricken eke out a miserable existence in the great slums, some tiredly fishing for sustenance, while those more idle sell seats to watch the sunset. Across the natural boundary of the river (seemingly utilized for this very purpose), those embracing social values lead trivial, empty lives of disproportionate wealth and privilege. But both rich and poor share complicity in sustaining "a kingdom of the outcasts; the fugitives; the failures; the mendicants; the plotters":

> To those ignorant of extreme poverty and of its degradations; of pursuit and the attendant horrors; of the crazed extremes of love and hate; for those ignorant of such, there was no cause to suffer such a place. It was enough for the great city to know and to have heard of it by echo or by rumour and to maintain a tacit silence as dreadful as it was accepted. Whether it was through shame or fear or a determination to ignore, or even to disbelieve what they knew to be true, it was, for whatever reason, an unheard of thing for the outrageous place to be mentioned by those who, being less desperate, were able to live out their lives in either of the two geat cities that faced

one another across the river. [TA, pp.111-2]

The inhabitants of the Under River are mostly exiles from this elite social sphere, banished for victimless 'crimes', and spending their time remembering the past when they were fully privileged members of the hierarchy:

> ...a sodden and pathetic salvage, telling of other days in other lands. Days when hope's bubble, bobbing in their breasts, forgot, or had not heard of dissolution. Days of bravado. Gold days and green days. Days half forgotten. Days with a dew upon them. [TA, p.110]

This dependence despite exclusion is not really comparable to that of the Carvers, who hold their own traditions and retain a sense of dignity. Instead, the denizens of the Under River are the logical extension of the "custom-shackled hierophants" above. [TA, p.36] In the City, ritual has lost whatever peculiar aesthetic beauty it might possess, reduced, as the Pavlovian immobility at the sound of a gun booming suggests, to the cold precision of a machine. The inhabitants are little more than automatons, the "princes of maintenance". [TA, p.35] Even the wit of voices at play is ironically empty, the inane sound of the play of voices dominating the Cusp-Canine's party.

The sole purpose science can offer is an empty consumerism, the ever increasing, increasingly unnecessary, perfection of machines, in particular, the spy globe of a police state, which Titus, in destroying, "blasphemed against the spirit of an age." [TA, p.106] The danger

science holds is represented in general by the horrors of the factory -- the identical faces and the subtle torture. While the relationship between the Black Rose and Veil blatantly evokes the human tragedy of concentration camps, Peake does not let us forget that the complicity and conditions which allowed the latter still exist. The process of dehumanization Cheeta accidentally discovers finds its epitome in the helmeted guards, a metaphor of similitude under surplus repression:

> They wore a kind of armour, yet were free to move with absolute ease. When one of them took a step forward, the other followed suit....Around their column-like necks were tiny boxes, suspended from metal threads....Could it be that they were receiving messages from some remote headquarters? But no! Surely not. They were not the sort of mortals to obey. Their silence in itself was hostile and proud. [TA, pp.178-9]
> * * * *
> Titus (whose heart was thudding, for he recognized the enigmatic pair) was able for the first time to hear yet another noise. It was a low and horrible hissing. 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 signs 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. [TA, pp.191-2]

The realization that they are not machines, but controlled by scientific means, comes as a great shock:

> Yet the more they squeezed and pinioned them the stronger the sinister couple grew, and it was only when their helmets fell to the ground that a supernatural strength deserted them, and they were at once overpowered and slain by their own weapons. [TA, p.254]

With this extreme of submission to a performance principle, Peake lays responsibility for the execution of Muzzlehatch squarely at the door of science, not, however, because of an all-too-human Faustian ambition, but because of the surplus repression implicit in pure reason, cut off from its natural source, in ignorance, if not outright denial, of the mediating, self-regulatory role of the aesthetic imagination, which holds the abuses of both extremes in check.

As for Titus, the trial afforded by his adventure in another world is primarily one of memory as it affects the quest for identity, of his guilt over past acts and their consequential problematization of the self. The descent into a metaphoric underworld where the hero's identity is questioned can be considered as a trial of the values implicit in the Peakian aesthetic whether that metaphor is equated with the entire realm or the Under River itself. While Titus' return more overtly fuses past and present selves synergistically, even his failure to assume responsibility for his action after rescuing the Black Rose arises from his guilt over abdication. A lack of self-love is the basis for Titus' self-castigation throughout the final volume, but especially in his relationships with the three women and Muzzlehatch. Paradoxically, it is the resolution of selfishness and selflessness that Titus must achieve. Though he has "learned...the art of making enemies

(and this is indeed good for the soul)", he is "blind, deaf and dumb when it comes to another language." [TA, p.145] That language is love. Not love of others, but the love of self without which love of the other is impossible. Thus, that Titus' "thoughts were fastidious. Only his body was indiscriminate" serves to indicate his continual absorption with his past: "His love was always elsewhere." [TA, p.189]

When he finally rediscovers Gormenghast, Peake again breaks with traditional conclusions, this time those of the Modern novel and its epistemological uncertatinty:

> From time to time, as they sped through the upper atmosphere, and while the world unveiled itself, valley by valley, range by range, ocean by ocean, city by city, it seemed that the earth wandered through his skull...a cosmos in the bone; a universe lit by a hundred lights and thronged by shapes and shadows; alive with endless threads of circumstance...action and event. All futility: disordered; with no end and no beginning. [TA, p.258]

It is precisely at this Modernistic climax of total alienation, hating himself and the "unnatural from whose platter he had supped too often", that Titus sees a man in a cloud and hears him speak. [TA, p.258] What Titus hears we can only surmise, i.e, what Muzzlehatch symbolizes for Peake is ambiguous: the preservation of variety, self-sacrifice for a cause, simple human friendship, or heroic magnanimity. Or all of these, "sprawled as though to take the curve of the world." [TA, p.255-6]

Though Titus suffers acutely from nostalgia, from "a flood of memories" and all the social 'sins' associated with them, the concrete proof of his identity, so desperately sought, is curiously given and withheld. [TA, p.261] I do not mean to dispute the evidence of tne rock and cave directly, but the questioning of Titus' sanity throughout the book, as well as his lack of visual proof of the Castle (if you see what I mean) create a further disquieting undertone in an ending already disquieting enough. "A gun boomed....seven times": is this the final meaning of 'seven'? [TA, p.262] What limits to the proof of existence are acceptable to the imagination? If we accept Gormenghast's reality, it should be noted that the Castle has absorbed his abdication into its ritual. Gormenghast does not need lineal succession to survive. If we do not accept, Titus' revelation of 'some new synthesis' is a ludicrous chimera.

In either case, what matters aesthetically is Peake's promotion of the active re-integration of the individual identity through the erasure of the subject/object division:

> His heart beat out more rapidly, for something was growing...some kind of knowledge. A thrill of the brain. A synthesis. For Titus was recognizing in a flash of retrospect that a new phase of which he was only half aware, had been reached. It was a sense of maturity, almost of fulfillment. He had no longer any need for home, for he carried his Gormenghast within him. All that he sought was jostling within himself. He had grown up. What a boy had set out to seek a man had found, found by the act of living.
>
> There he stood: Titus Groan, and he turned

> upon his heel so that the great boulder was never seen by him ever again. Nor was the cave: nor was the castle that lay beyond, for Titus, as though shaking off his past from his shoulders like a heavy cape began to run down the far side of the mountain, not by the track by which he had ascended, but by another that he had never known before.
>
> With every pace he drew away from Gormenghast Mountain, and from everything that belonged to his home. [TA, pp.262-3]

Nor can Peake, I imagine, express more than this suggestive, dubious conclusion. For the reader, a hero of the aesthetic imagination is either believed in, or not. There are two ways of thinking.

Titus, through no fault of his own, has become an enduring enigma. Peake's manuscripts contain notes for a projected fourth book (in the form of a page hidden in a box given to Titus by the dying Muzzlehatch). Even the first few pages of this book exist; Titus wakes up alone in a hut on a wintry mountaintop, the first location of an extraordinary list:

> TITUS among the --
>
> | | | |
> |---|---|---|
> | Snows | Fires | Affluence |
> | Mountains | Floods | Debt |
> | Islands | Typhoons | Sosciety (sic) |
> | Rivers | Doldrums | |
> | Archipelagos | Famines | |
> | Forests | Pestilences | |
> | Lagoons | Poverty | |
> | | | |
> | Soldiers | Monsters | Pirates |
> | Thieves | Hypocrites | Mermaids |
> | Actors | Madmen | Dreamers |
> | Painters | Bankers | Decadents |
> | Psychiatrists | Angels | Athletes |
> | Labourers | Devils | Invalides (sic) |
> | Lepers | Mendicants | Blood-Sportsmen |
> | Lotus-eaters | Vagrants | |

Shapes	**Sounds**	**Colours**
Echoes	**Tones**	**Scents**
Textures [59]		

Does the quest for identity continue? The conclusion of Titus Alone suggests not, though Titus will indisputably continue to grow through aesthetic experience. This list does appear to indicate a picaresque novel on a greater scale than the third. However, that too is ambiguous, the very disparity and variety also arguing for the inclusion of everything and everyone, a kind of 'Here Comes Everybody'.

Most interesting is the third grouping. Is it a list of techniques, or a theme? Does Titus continue as Modern picaro, doomed to an endless quest? Or, is he a Postmodern epic redeemer? Indeed, we might wonder which world he will journey through: perhaps, a third as distanced from our own as the first two; perhaps, he will descend from the mountain top, a man unclouded, and speak to us.

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[59] See Gilmore & Johnson, Mervyn Peake: Writings and Drawings, p.122. Also, Watney, Mervyn Peake, pp.224-5, who argues that the list indicates Titus' continuance as picaro.

CONCLUSION

Peake's secret god, then, can only be the individual -- the locus of the aesthetic imagination, the interpretor of the pantechnicon -- and his Postmodern epic 'myth' concerns the integrity of an autonomous identity. The locus of an 'immanent totality' stays with the self-regulating powers of the individual, as in the Classical epic's value of magnanimity, but its concrete reality is redefined as an imaginative reality because of surplus repression. Thus, the Postmodern epic novel does not regress to an historically inappropriate state of being, but synergistically fuses that state of being with a process of becoming which incorporates relativity.

However, it is difficult to see how this might be represented in a communal setting without regressing to the literary epic's promotion of immanent totality as reified in social institutions. While Peake certainly believes such totality is provisionally possible for the individual, it seems diametrically opposed to the notion of an historical culture. The single possibility of transcending what is apparently an inherent limitation of the novelistic mode is, of course, the utopian vision. Thus, the direction of Peake's planned continuance is simultaneously of paramount importance and undecidable.

If the 'story' of Titus merely continues in a series of

picaresque adventures, then Peake's refusal of nostalgia is consequentially ineffective as a force for social regeneration, i.e., assuming a society based on aesthetic principles is possible. If Titus, redeemed, is to venture onward as Redeemer, then Peake's refusal of nostalgia would project a vision of community based on that aesthetic pantechnicon that is the source of the generative, regulative imagination. The actual form such a vision would take can only be surmised from his notes as informed by the implications of the first three volumes.

Still, the work, as is, expresses the feelings of a generation. Beginning with the memory of a glorious past's dissolution, believers in inherited tradition were further traumatized by the atrocities of Fascism. The hope arising from what many saw as a moral purgation, the defeat of evil, was a direct result of the scale and extent of the forces of destruction. Consequently, post-war desires for reconstruction recognized the need to re-examine that past. When science, too, became a source of disillusionment, particularly with the awareness that 'evil' was within, and not susceptible to externalization, a generation of 'angry young men' came to the forefront, eventually leading to the social upheavals of the Sixties.

Peake, though he foreshadows them, was not among them. Despite the increasingly satiric tone of the 'Titus books', there is little sense of his being judgemental where human

figures are concerned. Rather, the whole force of the satiric thrust is aimed at the belittling effect of an abstract social system -- "a vast shambles of the heart. Filth, squalor, and a world of little men." [TA, p.250] -- never the victims, privileged or not, of its surplus repression.

The author himself said, "The advance from virtual blindness to that state of perception -- half rumination, half scrutiny -- is all that matters. The end is hypothetical. It is the journey that counts." To the 'Titus books' choice, first asked in the epigraph -- 'Dost thou love picking meat? or would'st thou see a man i' the clouds, and have him speak to thee?', Peake's own epitaph serves as his unequivocal answer --'To live at all is miracle enough.'

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