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Gothic elements in the fantasy worlds of Mervyn Peake and Sylvia Townsend Warner: an analysis and comparison

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<u>Introduction</u>

The twentieth century has provided us with a great number of intriguing fantasy novels. It is only natural that our initial interest is drawn by the original elements in these novels. It is, however, important to consider the sources and traditions of influence on these seemingly original literary creations. When one reads novels such as *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950) and *Titus Alone* (1959), by Mervyn Peake, their originality is indeed without question, but, at the same time, we notice elements borrowed from traditional genres, of which the Gothic is the most important. At the same time, however, we must not overlook the evident differences with the original tradition, and the inclusion of these traditional elements into a new whole. Traditional Gothic settings and characters appear, but it is, at first glance, unclear how they contribute to the complete interpretation of this trilogy.

This paper will explore these three novels and Peake's short story collection *Boy in Darkness and other stories* (1956) to establish the exact quality of the influence of the Gothic and to determine if we can categorise Peake's trilogy, or any of the individual novels, as Gothic fiction. Additionally, we will try to determine, from a text-based point of view, the exact attitude towards these traditional elements, in order to find out if these Gothic themes and images are indeed present, and if they are, whether they are simply adhered to or made fun of through postmodern mechanisms of satire and exaggeration instead.

We will also examine the fiction of Sylvia Townsend Warner, another novelist of the twentieth century who is known for the inclusion of fantasy in seemingly realist stories. By an analysis of one of her novels, *Lolly Willowes* (1926), and of a collection of short stories originally published in *The New Yorker*, *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977), we will establish her attitude towards fantasy and towards the value of generic and other traditions. Additionally, we will examine instances of Gothic in her novels. The main focus of this research will, however, lie on the fundamental differences or similarities between Townsend Warner's and Peake's attitude towards literary tradition in general and the Gothic in particular.

In order to resolve these research questions, this paper will start with a short introduction to both writers, before turning to the Gothic as a genre. It is of the highest importance that we determine the important features, themes, images and motifs of the Gothic, in order to determine if and how these are adopted in the texts under investigation. Equally important is the analysis of previous research on both writers, as this will offer crucial information as well as suggest gaps in the research which may be filled by this thesis.

Alice Mills' study *Stuckness in the fiction of Mervyn Peake* and Tanya Gardiner-Scott's *The Evolution of a Dark Romantic* are the most important secondary material on Mervyn Peake's trilogy, and both offer useful insights on particular characters and scenes in the novels. The secondary material on Townsend Warner is more diffuse, as critical work on her fantasy oeuvre is sparse. Therefore, several academic articles focusing on different aspects in *Lolly Willowes* and *Kingdoms of Elfin* will be referred to in this overview. After these introductory chapters we start our own investigation on the usage of the Gothic in Townsend Warner and Peake, which will be addressed in individual chapters, before combining our results to establish the similarities and differences between their individual approaches.

Methodology

In this research on the Gothic elements in Mervyn Peake and Sylvia Townsend Warner, a technique will be applied which is based on the ideas and concepts of practical criticism, developed by I.A. Richards in 1929. The most important feature of this theory is the use of a close reading-method to filter out significant information from within the text. In an attempt to exclude contextual information as much as possible, practical criticism is text-centred. [1]

These techniques will be adopted in our research in order to determine the link between the studied texts and the Gothic genre. We will establish if our texts deviate from tradition in order to determine their value within the genre and as isolated texts. In opposition to strict practical criticism, however, we will take insights from other approaches into account, including some reader-oriented, context-oriented, feminist and psychoanalytical issues, insofar as they play an important part in the Gothic genre. (Freud[2], Kristeva[3])

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[1] Berensmeyer, Ingo. <u>Literary Theory An Introduction to Approaches, Methods and Terms.</u> Stuttgart: Klett, 2009, p. 20-24.

[2] Berensmeyer, 2009, p. 61-64.

[3] Berensmeyer, 2009, p. 119.

<u>Sylvia Townsend Warner: a biographical introduction[4]</u>

Sylvia Townsend Warner was born on the sixth of December 1893, as a daughter of George Townsend, an assistant-schoolmaster, and his wife Nora. Sylvia would develop into an highly intelligent young lady, but would remain a huge disappointment to her mother, resulting in a problematic relationship between them.

During the first world war, she transgressed class boundaries by joining the War Help Committee. As a result, she started working in a munition-making factory. In 1916, her father died of stomach ulcer and Sylvia was pushed away from the family house by her mother, who blamed her for this death. Thus Sylvia Townsend Warner moved to London in order to work with Percy Buck on the Church Music project. She also started to write poetry. Her first of 5 poetry collections, *the Espalier*, was published in 1925.[5]

Alongside these poems, in 1923 she also started writing her first of in total seven novels, *Lolly Willowes*, about a unmarried woman escaping the restrictive role of the bourgeois family environment through witchcraft and the indifferent ownership of the devil.[6] Apart from the clear influence of her own family situation, the novel also shows signs of her interest in music , poetry and the lives of ordinary people.[7] The novel was published in 1926 and was immediately successful. In the aftermath of this success, Townsend Warner was invited to write articles for several magazines.

Her second novel, *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, can clearly be situated in a similar narrative style, soon to become considered typical of Townsend Warner. The result is a novel in fable-form situated in a realistic social and political geography, which is disrupted by cleverness and oddity.[8] She is one of the few, at that time, capable of combining fantasy and realism into a successful whole. Over the following years, Sylvia's fame would spread, resulting in a journey to the United States. Also, she published *The True Heart*, a modern retelling of the myth of Amor and Psyche.

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[4] based on Harman, Claire. <u>Sylvia Townsend Warner: a Biography</u>. London: Chatto & Windus, 1989.

[5] Mulford, Wendy. <u>This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics, 1930-1951</u>. London: Pandora Press, 1988, p3.

[6] Mulford, 1988, p105.

[7] Mulford, 1988, p49.

[8] Mulford, 1988, p105.

When she met Valentine Ackland in 1930, however, her literary production was brought to a stop as the relationship with Valentine became the most important aspect of her life.[9] Strangely enough it is to this non-literary period in Sylvia's life that most of the critics turn their attention, casting aside her literary produce to focus on Sylvia as the loving lesbian. Nevertheless, the relationship does produce a particular joint collection of poems by Valentine and Sylvia, entitled *Whether a Dove or Seagull* (1933).

Another aspect of interest to the critics, is the fact that Sylvia and Valentine both became prominent members of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1934.[10] Logically, the novels Townsend Warner wrote during this period are political in tone. Both *Summer will show* (1936), a story set in Paris at the time of the French revolution, and *After the Death of Don Juan* (1938) are highly political, the latter even explicitly anti-fascist and supportive of communism.[11]

Sylvia did not, however, limit herself to writing. She also more actively participated, both by her appearance at important international communist congresses and by assisting the wounded communist rebels in Spain during the Civil War in 1936. During this same period, Townsend Warner started writing short stories for *The New Yorker*, providing her with financial security and a renewed appreciation by the public.[12]

1954 was another important literary year for Townsend Warner, with the publication of *the Flint Anchor*. Additionally, she was working on a translation of Proust's *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, which was published in 1958. After these two publications Sylvia's literary work limited itself to her short stories, still published in *the New Yorker*, and a biography of T.H. White, published in 1967 with great success.

The relationship with Valentine, however, was not so successful. Valentine engaged in a mentally troublesome affair with Elisabeth Wade White from 1939 onwards, casting doubts upon the relationship between Valentine and Sylvia, who saw herself develop into a third party looking in from the outside. Townsend Warner's narrative style too, was damaged by the affair and the fatigue of the war, becoming even more dry and unemotional.[13] In 1949, the affair ended and a reconciliation took place. When Valentine died in 1969, Sylvia was devastated and no longer found satisfaction in her

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[9] Mulford, 1988, p35.

[10] Mulford, 1988, p55.

[11] Mulford, 1988, p124.

[12] Mulford, 1988, p4.

[13] Mulford, 1988, p146.

writing. Two years later, through the composition of the Elfin stories, she started to feel pleasure in writing once more, even if the style adopted was radically different from before. Instead of letting her characters break social conventions, this time it was Townsend Warner herself who broke her conventional narrative style.

The first of the Elfin stories, *Something Entirely Different*, a fairy tale and thus still a form of fable literature[14], combines Sylvia's interest for medieval fantasy and legends with a more detached and heartless narrative voice, enabling her to describe her fantastic world from a historian's impersonal and rational perspective. The realms, described in the collection *Kingdoms of Elfin* (1977) as ritualistic, amoral and anarchic[15], are in tune with her pessimistic mood, serving as a satirical mirror for human society[16], even if the elves show no interest in humanity at all. This seems to case for Townsend Warner herself too, who is tired of humanity and the struggle with life and feels ready to leave this world behind her.

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[14] Mulford, 1988, p124.

[15] Harman, Claire. Sylvia Townsend Warner: a Biography. London: Chatto & Windus, 1989, p.312.

[16] Harman, Claire. Sylvia Townsend Warner: a Biography. London: Chatto & Windus, 1989, p.308.

Mervyn Peake: a biographical introduction

Mervyn Peake, born in Kuling (China) in 1911 as the son of a doctor of the London Missionary Society, can be considered as one of those rare multitalented artists. Apart from being a novelist, nonsense poet (*Rhymes Without Reason* - 1944) and dramatist, he was also a first-class illustrator and outstanding painter. He was a charming, optimistic man[17], with a huge romantic imagination. His novels display, apart from eloquence and wit, an unmatched technical narrative skill. He can be considered as a precursor of Magical Realism, as he was the first to be aware of the advantages of writing about a character in an unfamiliar but realistic world.[18]

His time in China was highly influential for his later life. It was here, at an early age, that Peake started drawing, but it was the Chinese rituals and architecture especially which were influential for the Gormenghast novels. The forbidden city in Beijing, as a square enclosed by massive battlements and walls, served as the most important inspiration for Gormenghast, as a desolated court cut off from the world.[19]

Peake returned to England in 1923[20], where he established a fascination for pirates, influenced by his reading of *Treasure Island*[21], and resulting in the pirate story *Captain Slaughterboard drops Anchor*. He attended the *Craydon school of Art*, but was soon accepted in the *Royal Academy School* (1929), where he won several awards with his grotesque paintings on the borderline between beauty and ugliness.[22] After his move to an artist's colony on Sark, Peake ended his studentship in 1933.[23]

Three years later, he was offered a job as art master at the *Westminster Art School*, where he taught his future wife, Maeve Gilmore. The couple married in 1937 and Peake wrote and illustrated a fantasy version of their romance in *Captain Slaughterboard drops Anchor*, published in 1939.[24] At this time, he had also started writing poems for the *London Mercury*.[25]

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[17] Winnington, Peter. <u>Mervyn Peake: the man and his art</u>. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2006. p. 16.

[18] Winnington, 2006. p. 19.

[19] Winnington, 2006. p.27.

[20] Winnington, 2006. p. 31.

[21] Winnington, 2006. p. 25.

[22] Winnington, 2006. p. 161.

[23] Winnington, 2006. p.39.

[24] Winnington, 2006. p. 51.

During the second world war, Peake worked as a war photographer, and was send to the concentration camp of Belsen in 1945[26] in order to show its horrors to the Western public. This experience changed him completely, and might have had an influence on *Titus Alone*, clearly set in an apocalyptic world which serves as a pessimistic and grotesque mirror of reality.[27]

In the Forties, Peake also established himself as an illustrator for British classics, such as *Treasure Island* (1949), *Alice's adventures in Wonderland* (1946), *Bleak House*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1948) and *Swiss Family Robinson* (1949). His illustrations were considered to be particularly suitable for stories with a dark, gothic atmosphere. It is therefore not strange that his own novels were so easily associated with the Gothic genre too.

Titus Groan, the first novel of the Gormenghast trilogy, written during the war, was published in 1946, when the couple lived on Sark. The visual descriptive style and ornate language adopted by Peake in it, criticised at the time of publication, became a major influence on other writers and was eventually seen as that typical feature which made Peake's characters come so very much alive: Peake was a fascinated explorer of human personality, capable of seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary.[28]

It is this feature in particular, which renders the novel so timeless and original.[29] The amount of detail provided by this aggressive three-dimensional style enabled Peake to take full control over his world, moulding it according to his wishes, as if part of a closed imagination.[30]

The narrative itself is complex too, with a large number of grotesque characters. The plot, marching to an unpredictable outcome, is based on the desire for power of one of these characters, Steerpike, who struggles with the ritualistic setting as a representative of the angry mob. The novel follows the rise and fall of this cold and reckless villain.[31] Peake addresses a lot of themes through this character, such as the opposition between the cruel injustice of the dusty ritual and the immorality and hypocrisy of Steerpike himself.[32]

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[25] Winnington, 2006. p. 41.

[26] Winnington, 2006. p. 75.

[27] Winnington, 2006. p. 15.

[28] Winnington, 2006. p. 15.

[29] Winnington, 2006, p. 7-8.

[30] Winnington, 2006. p. 13.

[31] Winnington, 2006. p. 82.

[32] Winnington, 2006. p. 81.

The novel was not received well by the critics, who dismissed the arcane vocabulary, conceits and wordplay[33] as overcharged and simply bad writing. They also criticised the excessive use of lengthy descriptions and the overpowering position of the setting on the plot.[34] One reviewer even described it as "a large haphazard Gothic mess."[35]

In *Gormenghast* (1950) and *Titus Alone* (1959), the focus of the narrative shifts to Titus Groan, another character struggling for individual freedom with the shackles of ancient ritual.[36] *Gormenghast* continues where *Titus Groan* ended, and narrates the increasing antagonism between Titus and Steerpike, ending in the escape from Gormenghast castle of Titus, after the final confrontation with Steerpike.

In *Titus Alone* Titus is portrayed as a wandering innocent, who has lost his ancestral home and faces the horrors of war in an unfamiliar world. This confrontation leads to an moral examination about the natural goodness or depravity of human kind.

Apart from the play Peake wrote in 1957, *The wit to woo*, which was a complete failure, he wrote one last novel after the Gormenghast trilogy, *Mr. Pye*, published in 1953, which ironically describes an evangelist attempt to convert the isle of Sark and its inhabitants. The detailed realist description of the isle of Sark anchors the story, which is, in itself, clearly fantastic in nature, into the known world.[37]

When Peake developed Parkinson's disease, his writing has already gone out of fashion. Now, due to his 'madness', Peake's public reputation vanished too. He was more and more linked to cheap horror-story writers and even described by Kingsley Amis as 'a bad fantasy writer'.[38] It was believed that Peake has lost his mind through the writing of his dark books, as if the fictional madness had caught up with him. Especially in the structural weakness of Titus Alone, critics saw a sign of growing madness. These weaknesses were, however, due to the editor, rather than Peake's own fault.[39] Only

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[33] Yorke, Malcolm. <u>Mervyn Peake, My Eyes Mint Gold: a Life</u>. London: John Murray, 2000, p. 165.

[34] Yorke, 2000, p. 172.

[35] Yorke, 2000, p. 168.

[36] Winnington, 2006. p. 84.

[37] Winnington, 2006. p. 155.

[38] Winnington, 2006. p. 15.

[39] Winnington, 2006. p. 17.

after his death in 1968[40], when his books were republished by Pinguin, did the public show any appreciation for the great writer Peake truly was.[41]

The Gothic as a Genre

The biographical information given in the previous chapters might turn out useful to understand the importance of some of the recurring themes in the novels of Mervyn Peake and Sylvia Townsend Warner. However, if we want to determine the importance of the Gothic in the oeuvre of these writers, it is necessary to add a introduction to those themes and aspects traditionally connected to this genre.

Right from its origin, with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the Gothic was a highly popular genre with a large middle-class audience, expressing the tensions and issues of the contemporary enlightened world in a pseudo-medieval and supernatural imaginary world. Influenced by the Romantic movement, emotions play a vital part in the Gothic too, especially emotions of anguish and dread.[42]

Due to its focus on the entertainment value, the Gothic developed into "the major fictional form in English in the 1790's"[43], but, nevertheless, this did not provoke the critics into taking a positive stance towards the genre. According to them, the popularity of these macabre novels was not a sign of quality, but a proof of its vulgarity and immorality -especially in its eroticism[44]- and thus also as a sign of bad writing. The initial critical response to *Titus Groan* might remind us of this initial negative attitude towards the Gothic.

The problem was, of course, created exactly by this widespread diffusion of the Gothic, making it difficult for the critics to discriminate between different types of Gothic and to filter out those works endowed with literary qualities. They tended to look at the Gothic as a monolithic genre, dismissing it

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[40] Winnington, 2006. p. 210.

[41] Winnington, 2006. p. 18.

[42] Davison, Carol Margaret. Gothic Literature, 1764-1824. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009, p.2.

[43] Davison, 2009, p.2.

[44] Punter, David. The Literature of Terror: a history of Gothic fictions from 1765 to the present day. Harlow: Pearson Education, 1996, p.191.

as "a bizarre by-product of the Romantic movement"[45] and part of a "cult of emotion"[46] on the basis of some of its worst realisations.

Soon, however, they realised the limitations of this monolithic view, first distinguishing between the terror-Gothic of Lewis (1796) and the Sentimental Gothic of Radcliffe (1794)[47], but eventually resulting in a recognition of the diversity within the genre and a serious investigation into its sources and influences. This investigation did not just limit itself to German folk tales, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Dante's *Inferno* and Spenser's *The Fairy Queen*, but took into account elements from diverse literary traditions.

It is at this time that the critics become aware of the Gothic's quality to cross over between different genres, just as the characters in it cross over from one identity to another or from one world to another.[48] To oppose Realism, Gothic takes the powerful emotions from tragedy and combines it with supernatural imagery and violence found in legends and folk tales.[49]

The Gothic is often wrongly identified with its dominant 'medieval' tropes, such as "imperilled heroines, dastardly villains, ineffectual heroes, supernatural events, dilapidated buildings and atmospheric weather."[50] The most important stereotypical aspect of the Gothic, is, however, the setting. Most frequently used are the ancestral home[51] with buried family secrets and "the gloomy, labyrinthine castle"[52] with its secret passageways, dungeons and dark alleys. Under these tropes, however, are hidden more complex concepts. The castle environments and impressive mountain sceneries are not just a meaningless setting; They serve as examples of an idea of particular interest to a lot of Gothic novelists: the sublime.

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[45] Davison, 2009, p.6-7.

[46] Baker, Ernest. The History of the English Novel: the Novel of Sentiment and the Gothic Romance. London: H.F and G. Witherby, 1934. p.175.

[47] Summers, Montague. The Gothic Quest. London: The Fortune Press, 1968. p.29.

[48] Davison, 2009, p.16.

[49] Punter, 1996, p.182.

[50] Spooner, Catherine and McEvoy, Emma. "Introduction." The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p. 1.

[51] Spooner, Catherine and McEvoy, Emma. "Gothic Locations." The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p.51.

[52] Davison, 2009, p.25.

This concept is related to beauty, but, is, at the same time, completely opposite to it. The Sublime inspires both awe and terror and is connected to excessive emotions which cannot be contained.[53] Often it is used as proof of the overwhelming and violent power of nature or tyrannical rule, marginalising the powers of the individual. It is also the element which provides that sense of gloom so typical of the Gothic.[54]

It was Edgar Allan Poe, together with Nathaniel Hawthorne, as writers in a country without castles and dark history[55], who made clear that the Gothic did not require an actual castle-setting. Their fascination with the domestic made clear that any location, even a contemporary house, can symbolically turn into a sublime Gothic setting, as long as one adapts the type of Gothic to the surroundings.[56] This change of the Gothic setting is thus only made possible by the creation of the psychological Gothic.

It is the increasing Romantic interest in the individual[57], added to the Gothic's natural tendency to explore limits and look into excess[58], which leads to a Gothic exploration of the human psyche in order to uncover the secrets hidden in the subconscious, as a parallel to the secrets hidden in the dark castle. [59] The Gothic not only likes to cross genre boundaries, it also uses dreams and other states of unconsciousness to break down and transcend the boundaries of personal identity, or, more generally, of the human mind.[60] The ultimate result is self-consciousness, which leads to the loss of innocence, self-division, paranoia and a struggle with the evil in oneself.[61] This struggle either ends in death or a coming to terms with the malevolent human nature.[62] In other words, it is a journey towards self-knowledge.

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[53] Davison, 2009, p.28.

[54] Hennessy, Brendan. The Gothic Novel. London: Longman Group, 1978, p.8

[55] Lloyd-Smith, Alan. American Gothic Fiction: an Introduction. London: Continuum, 2004. p. 26.

[56] Bloom, Clive. Gothic Horror: a guide for students and readers. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998. p.3.

[57] Davison, 2009, p.35.

[58] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 5.

[59] Davison, 2009, p.21.

[60] Davison, 2009, p.31.

[61] Davison, 2009, p.31.

[62] Bloom, 1998. p.11.

As we have seen, the physical place of the castle starts to get connected to the psychological place of the mind. Gothic architecture has the tendency to transform from mere setting into a sublime character, often as malicious as the residing villain or ghost. These landscapes are often used to articulate and explore some of the repressed fears, taboos and desires in society, indicating that the Gothic is not escapist literature[63] and only uses the Medieval to address contemporary issues and real horrors.

This is especially the case in the American branch, where a large quantity of social, political, religious, racial, class and gender issues[64] are implicitly addressed by projecting them unto the Gothic Other, thought to be foreign to the self. However, this conflict with the Other, as an external evil, quickly turns out to be an externalisation of the internal struggle with the repressed and socially unacceptable self.[65]

This tendency to repress and reject the unacceptable part of the self can be connected with Julia Kristeva's concept of the *Abject*. Kristeva sees the abject as something that disturbs identity and crosses borders, as the liminal element that makes use aware of the fragility of our own ego.[66] It is also connected to the grotesque and the earthiness and materiality of the human body. Often the abject can be identified with corpses and bodily waste, such as blood and saliva, as these are rejected from the human body too.[67]

Thus a connection is established with the horror-component of the Gothic. Horror, as the gruesome and inescapable truth of the actual Gothic event, is a necessary element of the Gothic novel, working together and in opposition to terror, as the unreasonable fear for what might happen.[68]

The abject can lie in objects and beings too, especially if these beings have a mixed nature, part human and part animal or machine (Golem, Frankenstein's monster, etc.).[69] A similar identification of the uncanny feminine with the abject takes place in the Gothic too, as the result of an existing gender anxiety.[70]

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[63] Punter, 1996, p.181.

[64] Davison, 2009, p.33.

[65] Davison, 2009, p.32.

[66] Hurley, Kelly. "Abject and Grotesque". The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p.138.

[67] Hurley, 2007. p.138.

[68] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 8.

[69] Hurley, 2007, p. 139.

[70] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 58.

These instances of the abject all fulfil the protagonist with hatred, as they represent that part of the self which is not in accordance to cultural rules. This hatred is meant to lead to the protection of identity boundaries, but, ultimately, the Gothic leads the protagonist to recognition of the self in these abjected others. However, the protagonist does not only feel hatred towards the abject. He is fascinated by it too, and even derives pleasure from the gruesome nature of the abject, coming to a sentiment of *jouissance*, a combination of pain with pleasure.[71]

The Gothic, as a genre supportive of the cult of sentimentality and opposing the rationalism of the Enlightenment, used a layer of shocking and mysterious supernaturalism to attack both the dry realism of the Enlightenment, and, at the same time, the optimistic quest of Rationalism for unlimited freedom of an emotionless human mind by showing the negative consequences of acting upon repressed, previously forbidden desires.[72]

Additionally, by bringing the supernatural into its generally realist descriptive style, Gothic also questions the power of science to understand the world rationally.[73] The rational might be able to describe things as they are on the surface, but underneath there might just be something entirely different.[74] Thus, Gothic's distorted vision might just give access to truth too, although of a different, fragmented[75] and more psychological kind.

It is for this reason that we encounter so many Gothic stories where the supernatural is eventually explained away[76], as being the result of disillusions created by the protagonist's mind. Even if the supernatural is shown to be non-existent, it has still questioned the rational capacities of those characters who believed in it and acted in accordance with it. And thus, the rationality of the human race in general is questioned too. The supernatural has a similar function as the mad scientist: they both indicate the possible dangers of science, rationality and enlightenment.[77]

Often the supernatural is suggested by a magical object, which is not only an object of fascination for the main character, but for the reader too, as this Gothic object is not easily interpreted and carries a

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[71] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 97.

[72] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 5.

[73] Punter, , 1996, p.183.

[74] Punter, , 1996, p.186.

[75] Punter, , 1996, p.189.

[76] Baker, Ernest. The History of the English Novel: the Novel of Sentiment and the Gothic Romance. London: H.F and G. Witherby, 1934. p.200.

[77] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 6.

wide range of possible meanings. Hawthorne, in his highly manipulated Gothic stories set in a Puritan framework, was the first to use Gothic objects consistently to establish a mood of Gothic strangeness. These over-determined objects serve as an obsessive focus for the narrative, often used to prove the existence of hidden truths and desires in a world not to be understood by rationality.[78]

Another concept that can be related to taboo, repressed desires and domestic Gothic, is the *Uncanny*, popular in Gothic from the late nineteenth century onwards[79] and first used by Freud in his essay bearing the same name. Freud defined it as "everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden, but has come to light"[80] and as "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression."[81]

It suggests the existence of supernatural and magical elements that threaten the 'real' world, but, at the same time, it is also connected to something which is, through repression, no longer familiar. This unfamiliar element nevertheless brings forth some sense of recognition. It is a return of the past, but without full remembrance. Full remembrance of it, however, is avoided and feared.[82] Thus, in its continual threat to rise to the surface, it Gothically haunts the narrative.[83]

To express a feeling of the Uncanny, Gothic typically uses such tropes as repetition; déjà vu and coincidence; animism, automatism and metamorphosis; death and the double. These tropes all question the protagonist's own identity by suggesting the presence of another realm just out of reach.[84]

The Gothic, as a retrospective genre, just like Romanticism[85], tries to show that the sense of the uncanny one might feel in modern society, can be connected to the traumatic experience of the breach with the past and the repressed sense of nostalgia regarding this paradisal era. In American Gothic novels, however, the past is not paradisal, but barbaric and linked to the traumatic event of abandoning one's past in another country in order to create a new future. Even if the past is repressed, it will return and haunts the present, laying bare this particular scar in American society until it is fully healed.

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[78] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 33 and 73.

[79] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 6.

[80] Freud, Sigmund. The Uncanny. 1919. p.3.

[81] Freud, Sigmund. The Uncanny. 1919. p.4.

[82] Punter, David. "The Uncanny." The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p. 130.

[83] Punter, 2007. p. 129.

[84] Punter, 2007. p. 131-132.

[85] Summers, Montague. The Gothic Quest. London: The Fortune Press, 1968. p.23.

Even if American Gothic shares a lot of features with the continental tradition, it also adds new themes and social issues to the Gothic mixture, such as the frontier experience of isolation and violence, slavery issues[86] and Puritan religion and its idea of the perversity of the human soul. [87] The real horrors underlying the Gothic narrative are no longer related simply to middle class anxieties and the conflict between sensation and ratio, but also address the oppression of women (*The Yellow Wallpaper* 1891) or the guilt of slavery and colonisation, often in domestic settings.[88]

Gothic also is a literature of alienation, whether alienated from his own creations (*Frankenstein* 1817, *Island of Dr. Moreau* 1896), from nature and his humanity or simply living in isolation and thus alienated from society and even from reality (*Turn of the Screw* 1898).[89] Even the fact that most Gothic protagonists struggle to gain self-knowledge, can be read in this light as a sign of them being alienated from themselves under the threat of modern life.

One fundamental thing all Gothic stories share is the habit of raising questions about morals and traditions within society without providing any definite answers to them. As the Gothic is both escapist and conformist[90], it does not try to resolve issues or burden us with a moral message. Rather, it gives us the possibility to find out the consequences of breaking the moral codes only to make us realise their importance, thus reinforcing the "culturally prescribed doctrines of morality"[91]. The Gothic reveals the repressed and buried issues to warn and remind us of them, without really helping us deal with them.[92]

Postmodernism has been found to have rehabilitated the Gothic, as it is a way of reading the world that invites more popular genres into the equation, and is also fascinated with Gothic themes, such as indeterminacy, paranoia, nostalgia and excess.[93] Additionally, for postmodernists, the location of the

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[86] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 4.

[87] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 47-48.

[88] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 8.

[89] Punter, 1996, p.197.

[90] Bloom, 1998. p. 2.

[91] Lloyd-Smith, 2004. p. 5.

[92] Punter, 1996, p.208.

[93] Spooner, Catherine. "Gothic in the Twentieth Century." The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p.38 and 43.

action regains significance, as the place of destabilisation and derealisation, a feeling clearly shared by Mervyn Peake.[94]

In Postmodernism, "Gothic becomes, rather than the determining feature of the texts, one tool among many employed in the service of conjuring up interior terrors."[95] The Gothic thus shows its capacity to change[96], no longer in complete control of the narrative, but rather haunting it.[97]

Simply by looking at these Gothic themes and stereotypes, it becomes clear that Mervyn Peake's trilogy does seem, at first glance, to share a lot of imagery and themes with the Gothic. Townsend Warner seems to have a lot less in common with this genre. A closer study in nevertheless required, in order to determine if textual evidence can be found to support or criticize this initial view. Let us first have a look at the critical research already done by other critics, before initiating our own investigation.

The Gothic in Mervyn Peake: Alice Mills and Tanya Gardiner-Scott

As soon as he started writing, Mervyn Peake has attracted the attention of literary critics. The initial reception of his oeuvre was, however, mixed. Peake's writing was discarded as a feeble attempt to create a trilogy of fantasy novels in the Gothic mode. This initial perception, build upon a misunderstanding of his unique illustrative writing technique, was adapted over time into a more positive understanding. This was mostly due to the inclusion of the Gormenghast trilogy into the Penguin Classics Series in 1968, resulting in renewed interest from a largely fascinated and enthusiastic audience. From this point onwards, academics too started to consider Peake as a classic writer of fantasy, and more and more articles started to be devoted to his person, his art and his writing.

In this chapter, I summarise the academic publications most useful for my own research on Mervyn Peake, focusing on those readings where Gothic elements, techniques and imagery are used in the

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[94] Spooner, Catherine. "Gothic in the Twentieth Century." The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p.45.

[95] McEvoy, Emma. "Gothic Traditions." The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p. 8.

[96] Spooner, Catherine. "Gothic in the Twentieth Century." The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p.42.

[97] Spooner, Catherine. "Gothic in the Twentieth Century." The Routledge Companion to Gothic. ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy. London: Routledge, 2007. p.40.

analysis of the three Gormenghast novels. These studies provide a background for my own study of the Gothic in Peake, but, additionally, lay bare gaps in the study of the Gormenghast trilogy as a Gothic whole, questioning this now conventional perception of the novels.

Alice Mills' *Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake* uses the concepts of stuckness, defined by Mills as that rebellious attitude towards rules and limitations destined to end badly, and adherence, loyal and unquestioned acceptance and application of the rules, to analyse the struggle between freedom and traditions in particular scenes and characters in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*. *Titus Alone* receives considerably less attention by Mills, who addresses the concept of stuckness in this novel only in the relatively short eighth chapter on the link between stuckness and love.

This unbalanced attention is not due to the fragmented nature of *Titus Alone*, an assessment not shared by Alice Mills, who devotes her ninth chapter to the coherence of this final novel, but rather, to the different setting of the third novel, and the absence of the typically 'stuck' characters, as Mills has identified them in the first two novels. As Mills points out, the stuckness of *Titus Alone* is different from that found in the other two novels. Here, Titus' identity and freedom is threatened by intimacy, love and joy with a overpowering maternal figure.[98] Just as he ran away from the dominating castle of Gormenghast, here too, he rejects female intimacy and thus remains a stuck man.

This is particularly evident in those scenes of "vertical penetration"[99], as Mills calls them, where a boundary needs to be crossed into a new life or setting at the risk of death.[100] Mills uses several examples, both from *Gormenghast* and *Titus Alone*, to support this theory. These crossing moments, connected with the idea of the start of a new life, bring with them the threat of death. When Titus encounters a male in such a crossing moment, he cannot resolve the death-treat on his own, gets stuck and is ultimately saved by another character, as is the case when Titus is almost killed by the spider-like Veil in the city of Under-River, before ultimately being saved by Muzzlehatch. When the vertical penetration occurs upon a woman however, for example, when Titus falls thought the ceiling of the glass palace in the arms of his future lover Juno, the 'threat' consists of imprisonment and identity-loss through sexual intimacy.[101] Thus we find here an example of Kristeva's concept of the abject, and its connection between terror and joy when one encounters one's psychological mother.[102] Mills shows us, however, that Juno can move out of this fatal mother role, and is ultimately offered a life of her own

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[98] Mills, Alice. Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005, p. 153.

[99] Mills, 2005, p. 156.

[100] Mills, 2005, p. 159.

[101] Mills, 2005, p. 161-162.

[102] Mills, 2005, p. 163.

outside this Peakian female cliché, as a tender and sexually fulfilling female in her relationship with Anchor.[103]

In her introduction, Alice Mills discusses some of the previous research done on Mervyn Peake, rightly asserting that only Tanya Gardiner-Scott and herself have devoted a full-length critical study on Peake as an author so far.[104] Other publications on Peake were limited to biographical studies, linking Mervyn Peake's personal life to his writing. In this light, Mills mentions the connections between the China childhood and his writings, described by Laurence Bristow-Smith[105], and the study of Gardiner-Scott on the influence of Peake's wartime experiences in *Titus Alone*.[106]

Other studies have focussed on the specific style of writing adopted by Mervyn Peake and his usage of colour, shadow and light[107], clearly influenced by his painterly background. Mills herself, however, does not focus on these two traditional objects of studies on Peake, but concentrates on "the point of stuckness for many of his male characters beyond which they are unable to develop psychologically or move physically".[108] She links and opposes this male stuckness to the castle's "collective adherence"[109] to tradition and ritual. According to Mills, this adherence can also be found in Peake's usage of formulaic language and generic clichés.

It is this investigation of the conflict between individual freedom and society, which renders Mills so useful in our own research of the Gothic in Mervyn Peake. As we have seen that the conflict of the individual with a society that threatens its freedom is particularly important in the Gothic mode, the presence of this particular feature in the Gormenghast trilogy strengthens the traditional view of these novels as Gothic. Mills herself, however, feels that Peake's oeuvre is not easily classified within a genre, but rather that it breaks with traditional genre conventions.

Mills' methodology is a psychoanalytic one: stuckness is a term of her own invention enabling her to use various psychoanalytical theories. She sees it as a particular attitude of male characters in Peake's works, often described in "imagery of flood and shipwreck"[110], when they enter a confrontation with

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[103] Mills, 2005, p. 166.

[104] Mills, 2005, p. 2.

[105] Bristow-Smith, Laurence,"The Chinese Puzzle of Mervyn Peake", Peake Studies III, 3 (1993), 25-44.

[106] Mills, 2005, p. 2.

[107] Roussety, Francois, "Mervyn Peake: an Artist of Life", Mervyn Peake Society Newsletter II (1976), 11-16.

[108] Mills, 2005, p. 3.

[109] Mills, 2005, p. 3.

[110] Mills, 2005, p. 4.

an overpowering mother figure. This mother figure denies the advance of the male and forces him into stuckness, where the male loses his power of speech and movement. Only retreat is an option. [111] Mills connects this stuckness to the abject of Julia Kristeva, as the fear for the other, in this case the powerful female, with its tendency to fascinate and repel at the same time. The connection with this familiar feature in Gothic literature is addressed in the fourth chapter with regards to the figure of Swelter.[112]

Mills discusses this character from a Freudian point of view as a homosexual sadist, ruling over his apprentices by fear. Additionally, he is the "incarnation of gross appetites"[113] and, when his description as patriarchal sadist changes to the image of the maternal, he becomes the location of the abject for Mr Flay, as an object of Flay's feelings of horror and revulsion. Flay thus becomes the stuck man, fascinated and repelled by a monstrous mother figure.[114] He is the only character in the book revolted by Swelter, and Mills considers this a sign of the abjection of the maternal in himself onto Swelter. Flay defines himself in opposition to Swelter, as the unacceptable 'other'. Furthermore, Swelter is connected to other typical features of the abject: the connection with leaking fluids and his body as food both strengthen the image of Swelter as the abject.[115]

In the end, however, Flay is not killed after the confrontation with the maternal. Rather, Flay survives due to the fact that he is already experiencing the symbolic death of exile from the castle[116], and it is Swelter who dies instead. In death, Swelter becomes the stuck man, rather than the maternal abject.[117]

Sometimes, the maternal leading to stuckness should be seen as symbolic: the castle of Gormenghast itself gradually starts to embody these overpowering, maternal qualities, preventing its residents from breaking free from it: most of the residents of the castle never leave it, and, those who do, like Keda, Mr Flay and Titus, all experience "a compulsion to return"[118] to the Castle.

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[111] Mills, 2005, p. 4.

[112] Mills, 2005, p. 83-93.

[113] Mills, 2005, p. 85.

[114] Mills, 2005, p. 86.

[115] Mills, 2005, p. 90.

[116] Mills, 2005, p. 95.

[117] Mills, 2005, p. 93.

[118] Mills, 2005, p. 6.

Mill's third chapter looks more deeply into the different types of stuckness to be found in the Gormenghast novels. Mills starts with a type of stuckness related to a "precedent-bound life"[119] , explained by Mills as adherence: "a willing compliance with the rules"[120]. Whereas stuckness is individual, adherence is collective, experienced by all inhabitants of the castle obeying the rules of ritual. It is the attitude of accepting the social construct around oneself, which not only denies freedom, but, at the same time, provides the inhabitants of the castle with direction and guidance. [121] They accept their unchanging physical and moral state as normality.[122]

This attitude is then opposed to the individual stuckness found in characters who act on desires (for freedom, for power, for murder). Only these characters consider adherence as something that limits their sense of self. Their quest is, however, unsuccessful, the negative attitude of fear towards mother figures is maintained and the only escape from stuckness is found in literal and symbolic death, often in water sequences. [123] This outcome is surprisingly un-gothic, since the individual struggle in the traditional Gothic novel ultimately leads to success and happiness.

Whereas water is connected with stuckness, the symbol of adherence is fire. It is no accident that Sourdust, Barquentine and Sepulchrave, as icons of adherence, all die as the consequence of a fire of some sort.[124] For Mills the figure of Sepulchrave offers one of the best examples of a character that finds tranquillity in adherence, and his death is the consequence of the awakening of a mad desire. Thus he becomes stuck and loses the capacity for human speech.[125] Steerpike, the villain of the first two novels, is initially master of both water and fire, but, in *Gormenghast*, he burns himself and dies surrounded by water. He too has got stuck in his conflict for power over the Castle society. Other male characters suffering from stuckness are addressed in the fifth chapter.[126]

This precedent-bound life controlling the characters and setting of the narrative also endangers variation within the narrative. Nevertheless, Mills does identity variety, stating that humour and

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[119] Mills, 2005, p. 53.

[120] Mills, 2005, p. 53.

[121] Mills, 2005, p. 54.

[122] Mills, 2005, p. 67.

[123] Mills, 2005, p. 6-7.

[124] Mills, 2005, p. 54-55.

[125] Mills, 2005, p. 6.

[126] Mills, 2005, p. 95-107.

variety are mainly provided by the "slippage among genres"[127] in the novels. This is done by abundant imagery, obsessive iteration, the usage of cliché and weird nonsensical details that undermine any inclusion within a genre.[128]

Nevertheless, when conventions are followed, the narrative becomes predictable. For Mills, this is the case in the melodramatic love story of Keda and when Steerpike starts to develop into the Gothic villain. Predictability is here just around the corner, and only to be avoided by this slippage of genres.[129]

if part of any genre, the trilogy should be seen as part of a satiric tradition.[130] The names of the characters, which seem ridiculous at first, are nevertheless meaningful and highly symbolic and serve as another method of characterisation. Mills explains several of the in this chapter. But this is not all: the satiric seems to be present in the entire novel, especially in the rituals, which seem to be a reworking of our own culturally prescribed traditions.[131] Mills is particularly interested in the nonsense poems used within the novels and investigates them as a possible key for a satirical reading of the text.[132]

Mills provides us with several sources that have studied *Titus Groan* within a particular genre, but she herself considers *Titus Groan* as a combination of elements from various genres. Exclusivity is thus, according to her, out of the question.[133] This statement is followed by a short analysis of the allegorical genre within *Titus Groan*, which is indeed present in the development of themes like age, rebellion and the conflict between change and tradition, but is undermined by parody, complex characters and elusive imagery, showing that the novel cannot be limited to this interpretation.[134]

Another limited interpretation is that of the Gothic nature of the castle. Mills sees this castle as one of the finest achievements of Peake: both human - as a skull, the world of ideas - and non-human metaphors are used to describe the castle. Gothic stereotypes are, however, consistently undermined:

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[127] Mills, 2005, p. 56.

[128] Mills, 2005, p. 59.

[129] Mills, 2005, p. 56-57.

[130] Mills, 2005, p. 9.

[131] Mills, 2005, p. 73-74.

[132] Mills, 2005, p. 78-85.

[133] Mills, 2005, p. 57-58.

[134] Mills, 2005, p. 60-64.

the castle is not full of dread or paranoia. If a gothic atmosphere is present, this is due to the horrifying nature of the actions of the characters.

The castle is indeed mutable, ever-expanding and immeasurable, forming the exact opposite of the unchanging ritualistic society within.[135] This is, however, only a defensive strategy, a reaction to Steerpike's attempt to map the castle. [136] Nevertheless, as Steerpike gradually turns into a Gothic villain, the castle too transforms more into a Gothic castle, as the place where dark secrets, such as the fate of Swelter and Sepulchrave, are kept and where murder and madness roam.[137]

In conclusion, it is clear that Alice Mills addresses several useful aspects for the research of the Gothic in Mervyn Peake. She considers the failure of the struggle for freedom in a ritualistic and maternal castle-society to be a major theme in the Gormenghast novels, and, in doing so, establishes a connection with the Gothic. We have seen that in this genre, especially in the American Gothic, the struggle between individual and society is omnipresent and very often responsible for some of the underlying tensions and issues returning to the surface. Additionally, Mills' reference to the abject serves as another link with the Gothic we will explore further in this investigation.

Although Alice Mills takes a psychoanalytic point of view, it is straightforward to adopt her findings to another methodological background, and, therefore, her book should be seen as one of two basic sources for any academic investigation of the novels of Mervyn Peake.

Another interesting reading of the Titus novels is offered by Tanya Gardiner-Scott in an article she wrote for the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*. In it, she focuses on the importance on perception and its relativity in the Gormenghast novels. According to Gardiner-Scott, Peake tries to describe his own world in a vocabulary understandable for a reader fixed in the real world, but, at the same time, plays with time sequence, characters and painterly techniques (such as chiaroscuro) to undermine this perception.[138]

In particular, the technique of connecting the human with the animal and the inanimate by conceits, is used by Peake to widen the reader's perception of characters and setting. It is, however, not only the

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[135] Mills, 2005, p. 67-68.

[136] Mills, 2005, p. 68-70.

[137] Mills, 2005, p. 71.

[138] Gardiner-Scott, Tanya. "Mervyn Peake: the relativity of perception". Journal of the fantastic in the arts 1.2 (1988), 14 and 19.

painterly descriptive style that defines perception in the novels. The frequent shift between omniscient narrative and insights into the mind of a particular character is highly important too.[139]

Thus, the reader can add Peake's highly significant naming device and his vivid symbolic description to his personal conception of the characters. Peake's ultimate goal is, according to Gardiner-Scott, to guide the reader's imagination, but, at the same time, to make him aware of the relativity of any perception.[140] This relativity is divided into three areas: that of the self, of others and of the world. The individual perspective of the characters serves as a reference point to contemplate the world and the other, but often leads to satirical objectification, undermining a clear view. Additionally, it also results in self-delusion.[141]

When Gardiner-Scott addresses the opposing characters of Titus and Steerpike as linked by a shared rebellion against the weight of tradition, she quickly turns to the Gothic. She refers to Patrick Day, who says that "the male protagonists of the Gothic fantasy transform the heroic romance archetype and the Faustian tragic hero into [...] a monstrous parody [of themselves]"[142], thus linking perception and self-delusion to the Gothic tradition. Both Titus and Steerpike are searching for self-knowledge, a typically Gothic quest, but, instead of discovering their identity, their self-delusion leads to identity-loss.[143]

Titus, as a self-deluded romantic, attempt to find self-knowledge in freedom from Gormenghast, but, once he enters the post-apocalyptic outer world, it becomes clear that "his whole perception of himself is bound up in the Castle."[144] Titus does, however, come to a more correct and healthy perception of himself in the end of *Titus Alone*, when he internalises the castle as an important part of his life, enabling him to move on.[145]

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[139] Gardiner-Scott, Tanya. "Mervyn Peake: the relativity of perception". Journal of the fantastic in the arts 1.2 (1988), 15.

[140] Gardiner-Scott, Tanya. "Mervyn Peake: the relativity of perception". Journal of the fantastic in the arts 1.2 (1988), 15.

[141] Gardiner-Scott, Tanya. "Mervyn Peake: the relativity of perception". Journal of the fantastic in the arts 1.2 (1988), 16-17.

[142] Day, William Patrick. In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy. University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1985. p. 102

[143] Gardiner-Scott, Tanya. "Mervyn Peake: the relativity of perception". Journal of the fantastic in the arts 1.2 (1988), 21.

[144] Gardiner-Scott, Tanya. "Mervyn Peake: the relativity of perception". Journal of the fantastic in the arts 1.2 (1988), 22.

[145] Gardiner-Scott, Tanya. "Mervyn Peake: the relativity of perception". Journal of the fantastic in the arts 1.2 (1988), 23.

More importantly, however, Gardiner-Scott has also written a comprehensive study of the setting and characters in the Gormenghast trilogy. Her *The Evolution of a Dark Romantic* needs to be taken into account, as it can offer interesting insights into the issue at hand. Gardiner-Scott emphasises character and setting because she realises they are so fundamental to the narrative. It is the interplay between castle and inhabitants that leads the narrative into a certain direction. Gardiner-Scott is thus able to look beyond a limited critical view of the painterly narrative style of Peake and delve into the results of this style in the depiction of characters and environment.

She considers these elements from a Romantic Gothic perspective, a logical choice, since, in these genres, setting and characterisation are fundamental contributing factors to narrative strength. Much of the information we get from Gardiner-Scott about both characters and setting, might therefore be of great use in the present investigation.

Gardiner-Scott addresses the three novels in chronological order. In the first chapter, on *Titus Groan*, she examines the function of the setting. In the first two books, no other setting seems to exist apart from the castle, the outer dwellings and the woods and mountain close by. Gardiner-Scott identifies the nature surrounding the castle as "a blasted fairytale landscape"[146], changing its mood in accordance with the seasons and other natural forces around it, just like it would in medieval romances.[147]

One could easily link the landscape to the typically Gothic wilderness, where, once one turns one's back to the castle and society, danger lurks around the corner and identity is questioned: in the journey Keda makes, she feels oppressed by her surroundings and threatened by a personified and grotesque nature.[148]

However, every setting is overshadowed by the castle of Gormenghast. It is, for Gardiner-Scott, not just a setting, but is almost transformed into a separate character. The castle not only serves to establish the mood of the narrative, a typical function of the setting, but, additionally, has a symbolic function[149], personifying and giving voice to the crumbling traditions of the society within.

The extreme usage of description -often with similes to human beings and the human body[150]- connects Mervyn Peake to the Radcliffean narrative tradition, and enables him to distort time and

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[146] Gardiner-Scott, Tanja, Mervyn Peake, the evolution of a Dark Romantic, Peter Lang: New York, 1989, p.21.

[147] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.22 and 24.

[148] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.21-22.

[149] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.19.

[150] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.21-22.

place even further. Time and place seem continually "subject to change"[151]. Thus, the castle is transformed into an organism of its own, independent from its inhabitants.

Gardiner-Scott refers here to Manlove and Winnington, who develop a castle-mind parallel. According to them, the description of the castle points towards an image of the castle as a developing brain with forbidden knowledge. By the use of metaphors and similes, "the barriers between the physical and the mental are transcended"[152]. Furthermore, the castle obtains human characteristics in the minds of its inhabitants.[153]

Another, more simple usage of setting identified by Gardiner-Scott in *Titus Groan*, is their function as backdrop for some of the characters. Swelter's identification with his kitchen, Gertrude's connection with her cat-room, Fuchsia's secret attic and Sepulchrave's library are just some of them.[154] Almost every character has a particular room connected to them, with the possible exception of Steerpike, who can adapt to any surrounding. Steerpike invades these personified rooms and, when he leaves, the setting no longer offers a safe haven for their original residents. The atmosphere of these rooms is invaded by a sense of the uncanny, as if Steerpike's villainous possession of the rooms truly transforms them into Gothic locations.

Apart from the setting, Gardiner-Scott is also particularly interested in the characters of the Gormenghast trilogy, and, in the next chapter of her book, she analyses all male and female characters of *Titus Groan*, with a particular attention for the role of the female in Gothic fantasy. Her analysis of all these characters is detailed and highly useful in our research, especially her emphasis on the "careful dehumanisation"[155] of the characters through Peake's grotesque descriptions. This dehumanisation and identification with a particular animal or machine can ultimately lead to a real metamorphosis, as is the case with Sepulchrave.[156]

Just like Alice Mills, Gardiner too shows a particular interest in the names of the characters, often suggestive of some hidden meaning and always at odds with their grotesque physique. All character receive a particular "verbal signature"[157] to facilitate recognition by the reader.

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[151] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.19.

[152] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.23.

[153] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.23.

[154] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.25.

[155] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.31.

[156] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.33.

[157] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.31.

In her analysis of the different characters, Gardiner-Scott emphasises the symbolic function they fulfil: Rottcodd is the framing character offering a more distant point of view[158], Flay is the personification of the castle's traditions, the first character to utter the Castle's creed (No Change!)[159] and Sourdust and Barquentine represent the importance of ritual and order.[160]

Gardiner-Scott also shows a particular fascination with the unstable link between the highly individual characters and the ritualistic ceremonies transforming them into a community. The community in Gormenghast is, however, additionally undermined by the lack of real communication and intimacy between the characters.[161] Most characters only meet on these formal occasions and if communication is present there, it is quickly transformed into a combination of self-absorbed monologues about individual preoccupations, similar to the internal monologues of the chapter of 'The Reveries'.

This theme of isolation, another theme shared by Peake with the Gothic genre, is particularly evident in the female characters. Gardiner-Scott criticises Peake's limited usage of the female. They are subordinate characters who all fail to acquire the object of their desire, whether it is love or power. Often they are only used to introduce the comical into his narrative. This is the case with Nannie Slagg, the twins and Irma Prunesquallor.[162] Only maternal figures, like Gertrude and Keda, receive a more interesting part and abandon their traditional nurturing roles for a more complex attitude of detachment towards the world and the humans around them.[163]

The most important character to be analysed is Steerpike, as the Faustian anti-hero.[164] Gardiner-Scott claims that, when he expresses the desire to bring change to the ancient rituals and traditions of the decrepit castle, we feel sympathetic to him, but this feeling soon disappears. He turns out to be a gothic villain with a strong willpower, attempting to realize his selfish desire for control and power by all means necessary[165]. Gardiner-Scott also points to that typically Gothic capacity to change his

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[158] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.35.

[159] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.37.

[160] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.44.

[161] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.32.

[162] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.74-75.

[163] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.73 and 81.

[164] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.61.

[165] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.65.

appearance and character to manipulate others, putting on different masks according to the circumstances.[166]

Gradually, he transforms into a Gothic demon, who "laughs at human suffering"[167], an evolution ultimately leading to his own destruction in *Gormenghast*.[168] Gardiner-Scott considers his eyes to be his main demonic attribute, as the personification of dispassionate evil.[169] Although Steerpike is sexually inactive, he still manipulates the sexual fantasies of others and, gradually, starts to threaten Fuchsia sexually. [170] Here, Fuchsia is similar to other naive female victims of a Gothic villain, as she is both excited and repelled by his company and brought from her romantic reveries to a sexual and emotional awakening ultimately leading to her death.[171]

This clearly gothic reading of the character of Steerpike is followed by a short and limited analysis of the Gothic in the trilogy, and especially the effect of the pictorial narrative style and its similes and metaphors on the reader's imagination.[172] In particular Peake's tendency to play with different perspectives within a scene create a sense of intriguing mystery, inviting the reader to investigate for clues, an effect aimed at by Poe and other Gothic writers too.

Another typical Gothic element Gardiner-Scott claims to be present in the trilogy are scenes of pleasurable horror. She gives several examples: the fake haunting of the aunts by Steerpike, Swelter's conversation with his cleaver and Mr. Flay witnessing the *avant première* of his own murder, however, not only create this feeling of horror by transgressing behavioural taboos, but also give the reader a sense of complicity and voyeurism.[173]

The examples Gardiner-Scott offers us here, seem to me more than instances of pleasurable horror. Instead, they should be considered as ironically mocking and mirroring traditional Gothic scenes, and might be indicative of Peake's original stance towards the Gothic, something we will look into in our own analysis.

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[166] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.61-62.

[167] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.65.

[168] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.71.

[169] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.66.

[170] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.66-67.

[171] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.84-85.

[172] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.93.

[173] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.94-95.

The second novel, *Gormenghast,* hardly offers any new characters and the majority of the existing characters and settings do not evolve or change in the second book. Therefore, Gardiner-Scott centres her reading of *Gormenghast* around some of the themes Peake elaborates on, such as loyalty, freedom and the force of evil. There is one character who does change, and plays an important role in all these themes: Titus Groan himself.

To bring forth these themes, the balance between description and action changes, and action becomes more prominent. The action is almost always sequential, but, as he did in *Titus Groan*, Peake highlights specific blocks of time through his typical descriptive narrative style. [174] The main plot device is the conflict between Steerpike and Titus. This conflict touches every inhabitant of the castle and ends with Steerpike's death. The role of the other characters is limited to that of a victim of Steerpike, who murders or abuses them.[175] Apart from Steerpike and Titus, only the castle itself plays an important role in the narrative, becoming more and more an independent character opposing the forces of change.[176] It not only opposes Steerpike, but also Titus, who, after his meeting with the Thing, feels even more strongly the weight of tradition upon himself.

Gardiner-Scott changes her method here, using a thematic approach to discuss the two main characters of Titus and Steerpike as "Gothic fatal pairs"[177], suggesting two sides of the same character. They show the importance and danger of personal freedom and power, and address issues of identity in a typically Gothic fashion.

For Gardiner-Scott, Titus should be inscribed in a tradition of Romantic rebels, as the character of a *bildungsroman*, who gradually becomes aware of his elite status. Titus is not comfortable with this and delights in solitude. He is an explorer who is, just like other Romantic heroes before him, deeply impressed by architecture and nature.[178] Nature also serves as a intensifier of mood, hinting at discoveries Titus will make.[179]

This fascination with exploration is symbolically linked to the mysterious character of the Thing, an elusive being almost like a nymph, destined to be humanised by love or to die young.[180] She

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[174] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.99.

[175] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.100.

[176] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.99.

[177] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.101.

[178] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.102.

[179] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.105.

[180] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.102-103.

symbolises the freedom from tradition that Titus desires and fears.[181] After the vision he has of her, Titus' rebellion against the traditions of the castle and those who uphold them (Barquentine and Steerpike) increases, but remains private until the death of Fuchsia, as if the intimacy with her is the only thing that linked him to the castle and his rightful position.[182]

After her death, he does not act according to his role, but turns it into a personal vendetta against Steerpike, his arch-enemy.[183] The ambivalent attitude towards the Thing changes too, when he attempts to abuse her sexually, as if to drain the freedom out of her. Her death frees him from the inner conflict, as he realises "that there were other ways of life"[184] than that of Gormenghast.

Another character strengthening the desire for freedom is the exiled traditionalist Flay, who counsels Titus to obey the rituals, but, by living the life Titus desires, only increases the rebellion in Titus' heart.[185] This is especially the case when Titus realises Flay shares his hatred of Steerpike, even though it is not for the same reason as Titus hates him: as the absolute symbol of authority.[186]

Even though the narrator constantly talks about Titus, Titus is not often focalised, and, thus, he seems to us a confusing and confused character, overloaded with information and struggling with an internal conflict.[187] Escape from this conflict is only possible after a final act in the defence of the castle. The battle with Steerpike thus becomes a rite of passage and a proof of manhood enabling Titus to make the choice between being a ritualistic symbol or finding freedom as a traitor to the castle and his mother.[188] When Titus leaves the castle, however, he is still a confused character, without a clear goal and still unconsciously connected to his maternal home.[189] Instead of resolving his issues with the Castle, he flees before them, locking them away in his subconscious.

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[181] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.104 and 113.

[182] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.107.

[183] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.121.

[184] Peake, Mervyn, The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p 737.

[185] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.109.

[186] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.114-115.

[187] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.116-117.

[188] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.131-132.

[189] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.133.

Steerpike is another complex character, struggling with his identity. He is presented as a demonic parasite, almost as if he was created by the castle itself as a necessary counterforce against the ritualistic tradition. In his description, Peake tends to focus on his shadow as "a thing with a life of its own"[190] forming the mirror-image of his evil soul. Added to this is the idea that Steerpike is the negative double of Titus, his dark shadow. Steerpike is a fake, trying by imitation to gain a "genuine identity and true independence and power".[191] One of his methods of obtaining this is the pseudo-romantic connection he establishes with Fuchsia. She is, however, not his lover, but simply a victim of his power games and of no real value to him. When she sees through his mask, he takes on the role of the gothic villain when he decides to rape her.[192]

His relationship with the twins also becomes more and more sadomasochistic: they are connected and obedient to Steerpike through fear, but Steerpike himself is frightened of them too, as they represent a double treat of femininity to his dispassionate male psyche.[193] Thus, in his Gothic world of violence and cruelty, human pleasure is absent and only demonic pleasure is to be reached through sadomasochism.[194]

Killing too is increasingly connected to this demonic pleasure and is even sexualised. The result is that Steerpike starts to lose his discipline and makes mistakes, leading to his disfigurement when Barquentine, loyal to ritual till his death, fights him. [195]

Only after this rite of passage resulting in a phobia for fire[196], Steerpike starts to evolve differently from the way he did in *Titus Groan*. Now he is no longer a rebel against the castle's hierarchy and laws, but rather, the protector of ritual, slightly altering traditions along the road to fit his own purposes.[197] Gradually, we see a split in Steerpike's mental world, between his brain, which guides Steerpike and keeps him functional and his mind, succumbed to the previously controlled evil in his

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[190] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.135.

[191] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.136.

[192] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.147.

[193] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.138.

[194] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.139.

[195] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.143.

[196] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.147.

[197] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.137.

soul.[198] This is, of course, another Gothic motive of a character struggling with a repressed and demonic archetype within his own subconscious.

Thus, we see Steerpike's gradual development in a Gothic villain. Gardiner-Scott considers that the initial conflict between romantic hero and demon, shadows to one another, has forced them both into an extreme caricature of these Jungian archetypes.[199] This opposition can only end in the death of the demon, and its "disintegration into Gothic nothingness"[200] , as the proof that pursuit of power can only lead to failure and death. Through this death, the victorious archetype can find peace and equilibrium again.

Gardiner-Scott shows us, however, that at the beginning of *Titus Alone*, Titus has not found this equilibrium. He is lost and cannot break free from Gormenghast, which haunts him in his dreams, subconscious sign of the remaining existence of a link with the castle.[201] The third novel seems to show us Titus' quest to find himself, and to come to term with his everlasting connection to the castle without getting stuck.

In this third novel, Titus becomes a passive-aggressive anti-hero[202], who still cannot cope with authority, intimacy and rules, making him scorn the company of his friends (Muzzlehatch and Juno) to wander in solitude. He leaves the castle world for another world, where Gormenghast is not known and where decisions are not made by tradition, but rather governed by the limitless power of science. If this world is Gothic, it plays with the horror of progress, war and science. Science seems to replace magic as the element of the supernatural, and, for Titus, the boundary between the two is vague.[203]

Here too, it are females who threaten to limit Titus' freedom, whether by a maternal nurturing affection (Juno), or the vengeful evilness of Cheeta, who, by creating a parody of Gormenghast in order to drive Titus into madness, unsettles Titus' self-delusion and makes him aware of the subconscious link with the castle he thought to have left behind.[204] He realises that "nothing in this new world can replace

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[198] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.152-153.

[199] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.154.

[200] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.157.

[201] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.205.

[202] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.211.

[203] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.212.

[204] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.206-207.

Gormenghast".[205] In the end he returns to the outskirts of the castle, comes to terms with his origins, inserting it in his self-image, before wandering into a new direction.

Gardiner-Scott seems to consider this third novel to be vastly different from the other two. Though she pays some attention to the setting of *Titus Alone* in her last chapter, this chapter is so limited, that it offers no particular insights, apart from the opposition between the ancient ruins of Gormenghast and the futuristic ruins of the factories in the new world.[206]

Furthermore, in her analysis of *Titus Alone*, she hardly finds any Gothic elements, and seems to consider the novel more of a Science-Fiction adventure novel, a search for enlightenment of Titus, rather than the completion of the pessimistic world picture already created in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*. She seems to forget that even in a Gothic classic, like Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, different less-gothic settings are used to bring variety in the narrative and to come to a more complete picture of the narrated world.

She does, however, realise the intrinsic Gothic qualities of the labyrinth-like Under River[207] and of the Black House, ironic double of Gormenghast castle, where Cheeta has organised a ritual for Titus. Gardiner-Scott, however, does not seem to realise that this comically staged Gothic scene and setting might undermine any gothic reading of the previous novels and of the castle of Gormenghast. It seems to suggest that our initial understanding of the castle is as much a distortion of reality as the misunderstanding of Gormenghast by Cheeta. Instead, Gardiner-Scott focuses mostly on the link between Cheeta's character and setting, examining the Black House as the "architectural expression of Cheeta's evil intent towards Titus".[208]

Gardiner-Scott has provided us, in both publications, with a lot of valuable information about Gothic sequences and themes in the Titus novels, especially concerning the characters of Titus and Steerpike. Nevertheless, even if Gardiner-Scott offers some highly useful information about the setting, characters and their development in the three novels of Mervyn Peake, we should still be aware of her weaknesses. Some critical questions need to be raised: Why does Gardiner-Scott only discusses some Gothic features, and why doesn't she combine all the Gothic elements of a novel in one chapter? Her classification of the trilogy as Gothic novels would only be strengthened by this approach.

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[205] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.209.

[206] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.219.

[207] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.221-222.

[208] Gardiner-Scott, 1989, p.225.

Additionally, one should take into account that Gardiner-Scott does not look for features undermining the Gothic reading of this text. Instead, she overlooks the deeper underlying meaning of these gothic sequences. This paper will try to fill this gap in Gardiner-Scott's reading in order to come to a more objective view of the Gothic in the Gormenghast novels.

There is one more publication that needs to be discussed, because it really places the Gormenghast trilogy in the Gothic tradition. In a chapter in his *The Literature of Terror: a history of Gothic fictions from 1765 to the present day* David Punter discusses modern Gothic story writers, such as Thomas Pynchon, Angela Carter and Mervyn Peake in an attempt to show that Gothic is not an outmoded genre, but rather, due to its boundary crossing, capable of adapting to a wide range of contexts.[209]

According to Punter, what unites these writers is a shared awareness of the importance of analysing social fears and taboos, as is done in traditional Gothic stories too. Punter states that all these writers use the Gothic in a highly innovative way, moulding it to fit into their narrative frame, which is often more fantastical than that of their predecessors.

For Punter, Peake's novels deal with the traumatic WW II experience, and, more specifically, with the social order connected to it.[210] However, even if he makes a statement about all three novels, he only explicitly refers to Titus Groan. Punter refers to Peake's focus on the claustrophobic environment and its influence on the characters living in it to prove his point.

David Punter sees Gormenghast as "the final Gothic castle"[211], limitless symbol of decay and ritual, which does not fit into the post-war world outside. It is a Gothic object with a multitude of different meanings, depending on the character who is defining it. It can be both hierarchic prison and retreat of the mind, but above all, it is the location of fear. A double fear, both for what the future and progress might lead to - total war - and for the suffocating past.[212]

It is the castle which forces the characters into conditioned ritual acts. Even unprecedented acts are, however, described in that same slow-motion style, as if the characters need to move "through a sea of tradition"[213] to act independently. Thus, according to Punter, the Castle should be seen as the

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[209] Punter, David. <u>The Literature of Terror: a history of Gothic fictions from 1765 to the present day</u>. Harlow: Pearson Education, 1996, p.119.

[210] Punter, 1996, p.121.

[211] Punter, 1996, p.122.

[212] Punter, 1996, p.122.

[213] Punter, 1996, p.121.

personification of traditionalism, of a force threatening life with its predictability, but prohibiting change nevertheless.

One thing should be clear from Punter's reading: it is very short-sighted and subjective, and it overlooks much of the complexity of the Gormenghast novels. Even if a number of its features can indeed be considered Gothic, it still remains a question if one can label it as a Gothic trilogy, and if this label would not prevent the novels from affecting them as much as they do know. Even if Punter's assessment is sufficient when part of a global study on the Gothic, it is clear that a deeper study on Peake's Gothic is in order to come to a non-biased and neutral conclusion.

Sylvia Townsend Warner: Gothic as the void in the research

on *Lolly Willowes* and *Kingdoms of Elfin*

In opposition to Mervyn Peake, who only became well-known to the public and critics after his death, Sylvia Townsend Warner was already a well-known poet before she started writing novels and became an established writer after the publication of her first novel, *Lolly Willowes* (1926). This has, however, not resulted in a large amount of academic publications on her writing. Academic articles have appeared on her writing, but, most substantial research generally focuses on her public life as a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain and her private love affair with Valentine Ackland.

Several critics have worked on *Lolly Willowes*, but none of them have addressed the Gothic in this novel. Instead of discussing the Townsend Warner's motives, such as witchcraft and the struggle of the female with patriarchy from a Gothic perspective, they devoted their attention to the link between art, narrative witchcraft and the conflict with patriarchy (Jacqueline Shin's 'Lolly Willowes and the Arts of Dispossession' [214]), to the spatial symbolism resulting in a feminist geography (Jennifer Nesbitt's 'Footsteps of Red Ink' [215]), to the issue of tradition (Rosemary Sykes' 'The Willowes Pattern' [216]), to the conflict between aggression and passivity and Townsend Warner's unique solution (Bruce Knoll's 'An existence doled out: Passive resistance as a dead end in Sylvia Towsend Warner's Lolly Willowes' [217])

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[214] Shin, Jacqueline. "Lolly Willowes and the Arts of Dispossession." Modernism/Modernity 16.4 (2009).

[215] Nesbitt, Jennifer Poulos. "Footsteps of Red Ink." Twentieth Century Literature 49.4 (2003).

[216] Sykes, Rosemary. "The Willowes Pattern." The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, 2001, 1-17.

[217] Knoll, Bruce. "An Existence doled out: Passive Resistance as a dead end in Sylvia Townsend Warner's Lolly Willowes." Twentieth Century Literature 39.3 (1993).

or comparing *Lolly Willowes* to another novel (Russell's 'Alternative Lives' [218]). An attempt will be made to find useful insights in their research on the novel, pointing towards a better understanding of her particular stance towards fantasy and realism.

Jennifer Nesbitt is particularly interested in the link between place, geography and feminism. According to her, setting is of crucial importance in this novel, not only as a way to reflect the protagonist's (Laura Willowes) inner conflict with the patriarchal space, but also as a real agent, who plays a specific part in this struggle.

Nesbitt sees setting as an ideological force of which one needs to be aware in order to reform it to support one's desires. Thus, Laura needs to come to a feminist geography, transforming the spaces, constructed with the traditional white male subject in mind, to provide her with a possibility of escaping from the repressive power of patriarchy.

Traditionally, women are seen as guardians of the domestic place, offering safety and peace. During the first world war, women were not only associated with the fertile country and safe haven to be protected, but, through the figure of Britannia, were also linked to the active mother-figure demanding sacrifice. Because of this more active role, women's rights started to be recognised.

It is in this same period that, in the novel, Laura's father dies and her relative freedom and authority as housekeeper to her father is transformed into a subordinate role by the strict patriarchal society of her brother's home. When she served as a housekeeper her single status was not felt to be wrong, but, now that she has entered the domain of her brother, she starts to be considered a spinster for the first time. When she refuses to marry, the traditional negative sentiment towards spinsters, and their association with witchcraft, is projected on Laura too. However, due to the possibilities arising from the increases in women's rights, Laure is able to rebel against her persona of 'Aunt Lolly', first by indulging her physical desires, but eventually through the escape into another setting.

Nevertheless, she remains locked into a masculine geographical reading of the landscape. Nesbitt states that only when Laura decides to drop her map and guidebook into a well, and after she has overcome the loving but dominating presence of her nephew Titus Willowes with the help of Satan, she is able to construct a feminist geography.

This struggle between the masculine and the feminine is also addressed by Bruce Knoll, in his article on the response given to the dualism between aggressiveness and passivity in *Lolly Willowes*. Sylvia Townsend Warner considers this dualism to be a creation of patriarchy limiting our freedom to act indepedently and therefore she declines to engage with both approaches. Thus, Knoll reads *Lolly Willowes* as Townsend Warner's search for an original response to these issues. This feminist

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[218] Russell, R.B. "Alternative Lives in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* and Arthur Machen's *A Fragment of Life*." The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, 2001, 25-31.

response is centred around the idea of assertiveness: Laura gradually transforms from a passive female into an active character, who acts upon her desires by leaving her oppressive family behind.

Knoll states that this assertiveness is connected by Townsend Warner with nature. Since Laura's youth, she had a special connection with nature, as a place where she can be herself. Her father and brothers try to prevent her from indulging in nature and natural acts, trying to steer her towards more conventional, patriarchally acceptable actions. However, even when Laura acts in accordance with social expectations, there remains a core within her resisting this oppression.

This resistance is, however, bound to lead to failure in the patriarchal social order she lives under in her brother's house. The journey from the countryside to London and her brother's house, is seen by Laura as a move from life to death. Passive rebellion becomes insufficient and thus the active approach of assertiveness is adopted by Laura in order to obtain power over her own life.

In her active opposition, she starts to use the supernatural to refute marriage proposals (more specifically by identifying a potential marriage candidate as a werewolf), a foreshadowing of her final escape from dominant patriarchy through witchcraft into the indifferent patriarchy of the devil. Her move to the countryside is initially characterised by a complete rejection of masculinity. The connection with nature as a feminine power is re-established, but this naive attitude is threatened by a subtle attack by patriarchal power in the figure of Titus, her visiting nephew and invoker of the 'Aunt Lolly' persona Laura has rejected.

To overcome this threat Laura turns to another patriarchal figure: Satan. Knoll considers Satan, in Lolly Willowes, as a female force, a wise and indifferent protector connected to nature and providing Laura with autonomy and freedom. Considering the fact that the devil is always portrayed as a male character - in traditional imagery, but also in Lolly Willowes, were he is presented as a woodsman or a huntsman- , he can of course never be a female force. He might be a protector of nature and of femininity, but, we must keep in mind that Satan seems at least to be just another Patriarchal figure.

Satan initially offers her that traditional stereotype of the Sabbath-attending witch, a highly submissive and socially determined role, which Laura does not accept. Together with Satan, she works out a personal, individual solution, far away from the social life and sexual threats of the witches' Sabbath. Knoll considers this ultimate solution as the perfect example of what he calls Townsend Warner's personal assertive feminist response to the dangers of patriarchy. Masculine aggression is refused because of its threat of sexuality, whereas the passive response is also avoided because would only lead to dependence and living death. Autonomy can only be acquired by a feminist active stance, refusing all kinds of patriarchy.

Jacqueline Shin tries to show, in her article, that Lolly Willowes is, however, not just a "revolutionary feminist text disguised as 'a charming British fantasy about witchcraft'[219]."[220] Although the novel can indeed be read as offering a critical view on patriarchy in British society, it is not just a manifesto for feminism. Witchcraft is not simply an element of fantasy but serves as "an allegory for the liberation of European women from everyday oppression"[221]. According to Shin, there is more to this novel than this rather simplistic feminist reading.

To this reading Shin adds the element of art and especially the emphasis within the narrative on works of art. In the description of the paintings, narrative, witchcraft and art seem to come together in an attempt to disturb the patriarchal vision.[222] This patriarchal vision is personified by her nephew Titus, who, even if he feels sympathetic towards his *aunt Lolly*, chains her at the same time to the patriarchal ideal female identity. He observes the landscape of Great Mop as a picturesque setting, but, by doing so, colonises it, so that it becomes attached to the patriarchal discourse and loses the uniqueness it had acquired for Laura.[223] It is the patriarchal sense of ownership that connects landscape, the female and works of art. Only through the unexpected act of accepting Satan and turning to witchcraft can Laura escape the patriarchal vision of the landscape as pastoral and of herself as aunt Lolly.[224]

Jacqueline Shin further develops this idea in an analysis of the occurrence of three works of art in the novel. The first is *Lady with an Ermine*, by Leonardo da Vinci, to be connected with a mirror sequence, where Laura's reflection reminds her of the dark lady with the contrasting white ermine in the painting. Laura herself is, at this point in the narrative, frequently described by her father in terms of animal imagery and is linked both to a reanimated ermine and a killed vixen. Thus, both the lady and the ermine in the painting can symbolically refer to Laura herself and a single patriarchal interpretation is rendered difficult and even impossible. Through this process of metamorphosis and reanimation, the power of witchcraft to liberate women seems not limited to the story itself, but able to enter the structure of the narrative itself and thus rise beyond the limits of the fantastical and the gothic.[225]

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[219] Lurie, Alison, "Introduction to Lolly Willowes" Lolly Willowes, New York: New York Review of Books, 1999.

[220] Shin, Jacqueline. "Lolly Willowes and the Arts of Dispossession." Modernism/Modernity 16.4 (2009), p.709.

[221] Shin, 2009, p.709-710.

[222] Shin, 2009, p.710.

[223] Shin, 2009, p.712.

[224] Shin, 2009, p.712.

[225] Shin, 2009, p.713-715.

Another important painting in the story is Fuseli's *Nightmare*. For Shin, these paintings serve as an uncanny subtext within the novel, undermining Titus' statement that "pictures [...] don't matter."[226] The scene where she makes her pact with the devil, after an inflated speech by Titus about Fuseli, clearly expresses that same atmosphere that can be found in Fuseli's painting. The sense of "claustrophobic inevitability"[227] so evident in Fuseli's bedroom is no less present here, in the field where Laura hides from her family as if they were creatures as vile as Fuseli's imp.

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[226] Shin, 2009, p.717.

[227] Shin, 2009, p.719.

The scene in the sour field, is, just like Fuseli's painting, an image of irrationality conjured up to counter the pastoral image of Great Mop offered by patriarchy. Even if this irrationality initially does not enable her to escape the oppression, it does give her power over her own terror, and will, eventually, lead towards a path out of the patriarchal clichés forcing her and the village into a pastoral and Gothic role.[228]

Thus, Townsend Warner shows her awareness of Gothic stereotypes in Lolly Willowes, such as that of the innocent female trapped by masculinity, but, instead of adopting them and creating a conventional fantastical tale, she takes them as an ironical starting point for a deeper narrative, turning the traditional feminine values upside down.

The last work of art discussed by Shin is a woodcut of a witch-finder standing over a coven of witches and their cats. One of these cat-demons is called Vinegar Tom, and, by naming her own cat companion Vinegar, Laura gives precedence to the animal over the witch-hunter and undermines the traditional conception of witch-hunting. This act also fortifies the already established connection with Satan after her pact with him in the field.[229]

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[228] Shin, 2009, p.719-720.

[229] Shin, 2009 , p.721-722.

According to Jacqueline Shin, these three works of art serve as the visual evidence of the gradual feminist empowerment of Laura, as a character who, through shape-shifting, can elude masculine possession. Male art is appropriated by the female and through narrative witchcraft, it tells a new story, questioning the original patriarchal reading.[230] Thus, Lolly Willowes is an account of the feminist struggle with patriarchy, but also an exemplum of the narrative possibilities of witchcraft to twist manipulative views around to offer a refreshing parody of its stereotypes.

Another issue regarding *Lolly Willowes* is addressed by R.B. Russell, in his comparison of the novel by Townsend Warner with a short story by Arthur Machen. Both stories show a conflict between an ideal world of the countryside with the actual middle-class world of the city, where everything that is natural is considered dangerous and which is felt by the reader to be more unreal than the fantastic world created by the protagonist.

Both stories stress the need to overcome the fear of the countryside and to live closer to nature in order to reach an alternative way of life. However, only in *Lolly Willowes* this natural world is allowed to exist. In this novel, this natural world is a location to escape sexual struggles.[231] Females in particular look for this natural world, since they feel the burden of society more often, inducing them to desire an escape. For them, the solution is witchcraft and the feminine society it offers. However, even in this natural world, the social is still dangerous. The Sabbath, as a social and religious gathering , fails in its attempt to become one with nature. [232] Only the individual and solitary stance of Laura can provide real freedom and unity with nature.

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[230] Shin, 2009, p.724.

[231] Russell, R.B. "Alternative Lives in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* and Arthur Machen's *A Fragment of Life*." The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, 2001, p.27.

[232] Russell, 2001, p.30.

Tradition, so fundamental in Peake's trilogy, also plays an interesting role in Lolly Willowes. Rosemary Sykes looks into the function and nature of the important family traditions in the novel. She questions these traditions, showing that they are easily adapted if needed and not a result of deliberate choice, but rather, like in Gormenghast, connected to adherence without question.[233]

This tradition, supported by dynastic symbols, can nevertheless be bended, and serves, for Townsend Warner, to throw light upon some trend within English middle class society in the Interbellum and upon the link between the moral and the material. It is the material, in the form of furniture, books and heirlooms - such as Ratafee, the parrot, and the prayer-book of Salome - , which regulates the traditions of the Willowes family. [234]

The Willowes themselves may present their adherence to a family tradition as a deliberate choice, it becomes clear that this is not the case. If they have chosen, it is a choice to overlook other options and limit their perception of the world out of inertia and a sense of strict conservatism. Thus, the Willowes use and abuse the past to control the present.[235]

Townsend Warner's ironic narrative shows, however, that the only fixed element in the family tradition is exactly this awareness of having a tradition to live up to. This Willowes pattern is not based on any written document and can be altered to suit particular situations and problems.[236] Its basis is the heirlooms and furniture of the family. There is no "canon of behaviour imposed upon them by the example of ancestors"[237], and the family occupation (from farmers to brewers) and family home have changed drastically over the years, but, as long as the material evidence of the family history is preserved and arranged in a similar way, the illusion of a moral continuum is allowed to carry on and, despite the changes, the Willowes' ideal continues.[238]

As the studies cited above have shown, these traditions have a clear patriarchal function, of reinforcing the existing class and gender ideology. At Henry's house, the female is powerless and "presented as a male responsibility"[239]. Not only gender issues are addressed in this novel: class becomes problematic

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[233] Sykes, Rosemary. "The Willowes Pattern." The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, 2001, p.1.

[234] Sykes, 2001, p.1-2.

[235] Sykes, 2001, p.12.

[236] Sykes, 2001, p.12.

[237] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.6-7.

[238] Sykes, 2001, p.10 and 16.

[239] Sykes, 2001, p.6.

too, questioning the rigid social hierarchy within Henry's house where "Henry and Caroline take their servants for granted."[240]

The terminology of possession and tradition, used for heirlooms and furniture, is applied to the servants too, and interdependence between family and servants, acknowledged at Lady's Place, her paternal home, is no longer accepted in London.[241] This materialistic view is not limited to the servants; Laura too is dragged into it when her father dies. By refusing to marry, no domestic power is available to her and she almost turns into an heirloom herself, "a piece of property forgotten in the will."[242] Her turn to witchcraft is, thus, an attempt to create an original - as in not traditional - and individual identity.

These studies of Lolly Willowes are all concerned with patriarchy and the struggle for individual freedom of the female, indicating the central theme in the novel, a theme shared with many Gothic stories. The personal response Townsend Warner offers her main character, however, evades the typical Gothic solutions, as a literary double for the evasion of the manipulated patriarchal traditions of the Willowes family. Thus, even if these studies do not address the Gothic as such, they do bring Gothic themes to our attention and show Townsend Warner's individual response to the genre.

Kingdoms of Elfin (1977) is the other work of Sylvia Townsend Warner to be discussed in this paper. It is a collection of short stories set in the Elfin kingdoms, published in *The New Yorker* towards the end of her life. It has attracted less attention from the critics than has the rest of her oeuvre. Most important critics discussing the collection are Helen Sutherland[243] and John Simons[244]. Where Helen Sutherland gives a more general overview, John Simons in particular tries to look for the source material used by Townsend Warner to base her short stories on.

Simons does not provide us with a research question, but refers to the source material by using a particular passage from *Kingdoms of Elfin*. In this passage from 'The Mortal Milk', where a werewolf named Duke Billy appears Simons discerns a connection with the tradition of Middle English romances. According to Simons, this is a clear reference to Duke William of Palermo, the protagonist

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[240] Sykes, 2001, p.7.

[241] Sykes, 2001, p.8.

[242] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.6-7.

[243] Sutherland, Helen. "From Elphame to Otherwhere: Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Kingdoms of Elfin*." The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, 2005, 21-31.

[244] Simons, John. "On the Compositional Genetics of the *Kingdoms of Elfin* together with a Note on Tortoises." Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978. Ed. Gill Davies, David Malcolm and John Simons. Lampeter: Edmin Mellen Press, 2006. p 45-57.

of a Middle English poem from the 15th century, which was a translation of an older French text. In this text, William is saved from his wicked uncle by a friendly werewolf.[245]

By initiating his article with this obscure reference, Simons attempt to make us aware of the nature of the intertextual references and source material which can be found in Townsend Warner's oeuvre and *Kingdoms of Elfin* in particular. Medieval texts are frequently referred to, whether implicitly or explicitly, as in 'The revolt at Brocéliande', where the early medieval poet Wace is mentioned.[246]

Simons discerns three major sources for Sylvia Townsend Warner's creation of the Elfin kingdoms. The first is Sir Walter Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, offering an account of various traditional legendary creatures, such as fairies and elves that can almost be considered as "an anthropological account of the other world."[247] Scott himself not only uses various Scottish legends, but also *Sir Orfeo*, a Middle English fairy romance based on the Greek myth of Orpheus.

A lot of the stories in *Kingdoms of Elfin* are situated in Scotland. Additionally, Scott and Townsend Warner share a similar starting point: they both use an historical and classificatory approach to describe these traditional folk tale characters.[248] They both seem to construct a biographical and cultural research of elves, rather than a fictional narrative, "ground[ing] the fairies in a reality that is every bit as rich and realised as that in Townsend Warner's more conventional novels."[249]

A second important source for Sylvia Townsend Warner are the Breton *lais* of Marie de France. These stories are characterised by the connection between the supernatural fairy world and the concept of courtly love. Rather than having a clearly definable influence on *Kingdoms of Elfin*, the *lais* share their atmosphere with Townsend Warner's stories and serve as a guide for her own experiment. Both forms are relatively short and revolve around the theme of love experienced by one or two protagonists in a courtly setting.[250] They also share a similar focus, often dealing with an intrusion from modernity upon this ancient world and thus combining the traditional fairy material with contemporary behavioural rules.[251]

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[245] Simons, 2006. p 45-46.

[246] Simons, 2006. p 46.

[247] Simons, 2006. p 48.

[248] Simons, 2006. p 48.

[249] Simons, 2006. p 47.

[250] Simons, 2006. p 51.

[251] Simons, 2006. p 51-52.

The third major influence mentioned by Simons are the *contes de fées* of the French 18th century salons, influenced by an earlier Italian tradition.[252] These sophisticated stories, based on French folk traditions, are characterised by an humorous and erotic undertone. Furthermore, they often express an interest for the Orient. Both the erotic undertone and the fascination with the Orient are features Simons discerns in some of the Elfin stories, especially in 'The search for an Ancestress', where this fascination is ironically mocked by transforming the ritualised violence of the European fairy courts into the Oriental erotic sadism. 'The Blameless Triangle' implicitly introduces another oriental theme: that of the homosexual Ottoman monarch.

According to Simons, the sudden shift of Townsend Warner from realism towards fantasy, can only partially be explained by her grief over the death of Valentine Ackland. It was also a response to the rise of Tolkienian fantasy in the fifties and sixties. Furthermore, Simons sees *Kingdoms of Elfin* as an attack on the Victorian fairy tales of her youth. By constructing her own versions of these fairy tales, without morals and full of violence and rituals, she attacks Victorian hypocrisy, which attempted to cover up the inherent violence of the fairy world (as a reworking of reality) by manipulating it to fit into a clearly definable morality.

Helen Sutherland's view of the Elfin stories is similar to Simons'. She too sees a connection with the traditional fairy tale. However, it is clear that Townsend Warner wants to create something original and innovative. Traditional fairy tales narrate the adventures of human heroes resulting in a happy ending and situated in a world where fairies are hardly ever present.[253]

In Townsend Warner's collection, however, fairies are not just present, they become the protagonists in these tales without a happy ending. The world these stories are set in, does, however, agree with the rules established by J.R.R. Tolkien in his *On Fairy-Stories*, as it is a world with its own rules, made credible by the stories set in it, which accord to these same laws.[254] Townsend Warner's Elfin kingdoms can follow different rules than those of reality, as long as these stories obey the logic of their own created world.

One of Townsend Warner's methods to render this world more convincing is "the specificity of location"[255] she adopts. All of the Elfin Kingdoms are clearly located: Elfhame in the Scottish Borders, Foxcastle in Peebleshire, Brocéliande in Brittany, Zuy in Holland. Additionally, these Elfin courts are

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[252] Simons, 2006. p 47.

[253] Sutherland, Helen. "From Elphame to Otherwhere: Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Kingdoms of Elfin*." The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society, 2005, p. 21.

[254] Sutherland, 2005, p.22.

[255] Sutherland, 2005, p.22.

given national characteristics, similar to those associated with these countries in our own world. As Holland is seen a trading and France as leading cultural nation, the kingdoms of Zuy and Brocéliande share these features, facilitating our acceptance of the existence of these Elfin courts.[256]

Another strategy adopted by Warner, apart from specificity of location, is to provide the reader with "touchstones of familiarity"[257]. The kingdoms of Elfin have a political and social structure similar to the structures of reality, and, frequently, historical personages from the real world appear in the fairy world. One only has to think of the monarchical court-society, the keeping of werewolves (comparable to the keeping of hunting dogs) and the inverted Salic Law[258], mentioned in some of the Elfin stories, to see a clear link with the real world.

Social distinctions in Elfin too mimic those found in our everyday world. Even if, in the fairy world, the social distinctions are based on other criteria, "the mechanisms for creating and maintaining social distinctions are all too familiar."[259]

According to Sutherland, the historical personages appearing in the fairy world also strengthen this sense of verisimilitude. Thomas of Ercildoune (1220-1297), mentioned in a story set in Elfhame, was a poet in a legend originated in this particular area of Scotland, just as Wace, a Norman poet, is connected to Brocéliande in some legends.[260]

For even stronger elements of verisimilitude, one can turn to 'The Occupation', where reference is made to Robert Kirk's natural history of Fairies, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*, used by a human minister to identify an infestation of fairies.[261] Sutherland does not limit herself to these examples alone, but provides many more.

The result of these elements is, as Sutherland claims, a sense of verisimilitude and reality, which is rendered even more prominent by "the accumulation of circumstantial detail"[262], such as human foodstuff eaten by Fairies, more credible than more traditional answers to the question of fairy

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[256] Sutherland, 2005, p.22-23.

[257] Sutherland, 2005, p.23.

[258] A code of law established under Clovis, king of the Salian Franks in the 6th century

[259] Sutherland, 2005, p.25.

[260] Sutherland, 2005, p.23.

[261] Sutherland, 2005, p.24.

[262] Sutherland, 2005, p.25.

nourishment, but also by refusing the traditional miniaturization of Fairies.[263] This usage of the familiar to open up a fantasy world, helps Warner to construct a convincing fairy world, not just fascinating, but also believable and engaging: it aids us to explore particular ideas and offers a new way to view the world, as only the greatest fantasy worlds can.[264]

This transformation of the fairy world into a realistic and well-constructed whole, is, however, not the only innovative feature in these stories. Another aspect addressed by Townsend Warner, is the inherent cruelty of the fairies, established in traditional fairy legends, but developed further in these stories.

First notion connected to this cruelty is the punishment by exile. In the fairy world, exile can be self-imposed or enforced, but is always connected to the idea of the strange becoming familiar, resulting in a fear to return home. The place of exile is not known at the beginning, not only resulting in a feeling of irrevocability, but also making the shock at the arrival even greater. Eventually, however, "the country of exile and home change places"[265] and the fear to return rises. A similar thing happens with human changelings, who are exiled from the fairy world into their own human world at the end of their lives, when readjustment is no longer possible.[266]

The concept of exile is, however, only one of the ways Warner displays the inherent cruelty and heartlessness of the fairies. As they have no souls, they also lack a conscience and cannot love, even when they are loved by humans, as is the case in 'Winged Creatures'. As Fairies do not have souls, this enables them to take a particular stance towards orthodox religion. Even if they often stay in holy places, they do not believe in immortality or the existence of ghosts, as both require the existence of a soul. This particular relationship of the elves with orthodox religion, can, according to Sutherland, be connected to Townsend Warner's own issues with religion, especially after Valentine Ackland's death.

Sutherland ends with an interesting statement: the Elfin stories are not so different from Warner's previous writing as is widely believed. She is still addressing the same issues she has addressed throughout her writing career. Even if she adopt a new style, she still is on the lookout for alternative visions, world and possibilities, breaking open social and literary boundaries.[267]

Just like *Lolly Willowes* before, *Kingdoms of Elfin* too can be seen as an attack on tradition as a device to limit individuality and innovation, and, in this case, in particular against the Victorian fairy tales

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[263] Sutherland, 2005, p.25-26.

[264] Sutherland, 2005, p.26.

[265] Sutherland, 2005, p.27.

[266] Sutherland, 2005, p.28.

[267] Sutherland, 2005, p.30.

tradition. Neither Simons nor Sutherland seem to focus on the supernatural or Gothic elements in the fairy world, and, indeed, if these are present, they do not serve a crucial role. Nevertheless, the emphasis on violence and the method of describing the supernatural in a realist way can be considered as similarities with the Gothic mode, showing us we might have to dig deeper to find the underlying Gothic qualities of these short stories.

What can we conclude from this analysis of previous research on Peake and Townsend Warner? First of all, the studies of Mills and Gardiner-Scott have shown that Mervyn Peake's trilogy is far more easily connected to the Gothic. Townsend Warner's Gothic qualities are clearly less easily discernable. Both show, however, a remarkable similarity with the Gothic in the choice of their dominant themes. Both Mervyn Peake and Townsend Warner focus on the conflict between the individual and society, governed by traditional and patriarchal values.

 In the Gormenghast trilogy, the setting of the castle is fundamental, as it serves as a personification of tradition, but also as a typical overpowering Gothic castle (both in Mills and Gardiner-Scott's analysis) that even develops into a character itself. In the last novel, *Titus Alone*, the overpowering castle is replaced by several overpowering female figures. Characters are important to, and often express stereotypical Gothic roles. Especially female characters fit in a recognisable and fixed comical or tragic role. All these characters are, however, carefully dehumanised by the satirical description Peake uses.

Thus Peake forces us to look beyond the simple stereotypes forced upon us by the Gothic tradition and question our perception of things. The only two characters who advance in some way out of a stereotypical role are Titus, the romantic hero, and Steerpike, the tragic Gothic villain, as two sides of one rebellious character, forcing us to question their identities and desires. Their conflict is eventually resolved by the identity-loss of Steerpike. He loses connection with his true self due to his attempts to hide his appearance and imitate traditional stereotypes. The result is identity-loss and a slow subconscious change towards absolute evil. We could conclude that our sources on Peake's novels point to a Gothic reading, but, at the same time, the satirical transformation of stereotypes suggest there is something more complex underlying the narrative.

In a way we could say the same thing for Sylvia Townsend Warner's novel and short story collection. They both appear, at first glance, to be relatively simple. Lolly Willowes seems a story of a feminist struggle with patriarchy, but its focus on the individual solution already hints at a deeper meaning. As Knoll stated, Townsend Warner opposes, in her story, the dualistic view of patriarchy of an aggressive male opposing a passive female. Townsend Warner shows the capacity of females to be assertive and active, cooperating with nature to achieve autonomy from the male world, ruled by patriarchal and materialistic traditions. Her novel does not limit itself to offering a solution, but, at the same time, by a satirical view on the Willowes' traditions, serves as a parody, indicating the relativity of tradition, and

the dangers it brings to any individual. She shows us tradition is an illusion to be manipulated. What we need to find out, however, is if Townsend Warner's views on literary and genre-specific traditions and stereotypes are similar to those expressed in Lolly Willowes.

Here Kingdoms of Elfin enter the picture, as in this collection Townsend Warner does use and abuse a number of genre-clichés and Medieval traditions. As in Lolly Willowes, the supernatural elements are described as realistically as possible, in order to prevent us from getting stuck in the fantasy without seeing the broader picture. The interesting thing here is that Townsend Warner shows a mixed attitude towards tradition, partly using them positively through intertextuality, but partly in a highly satirical fashion, to show, once more, the capacity of tradition to be manipulated.

To conclude, we could say that, even if all these sources have given us a lot of useful information, they are also responsible for the appearance of even more questions regarding the attitude of Mervyn Peake and Sylvia Townsend Warner towards literary traditions in general, and the Gothic in particular. Therefore, in an attempt to solve these issues, it is necessary, in the next chapter, to take a closer look at the novels themselves.

Peake and the Gothic

The first thing we need to establish, in order to be able to construct the importance of the Gothic genre in Peake's writing, is his familiarity with and knowledge of the genre itself. Seeing the tendency to consider the Gormenghast trilogy as a Gothic trilogy, it is remarkable that there has not been any research on Peake's familiarity with Gothic fiction before.

Even if Peake was not familiar with the genre, this does not prevent a Gothic reading of his oeuvre. A genre is never fixed and always open to new inclusions. Often a writer can adhere to a genre without consciously choosing it. Thus, the argument of Peake's unfamiliarity with the Gothic genre cannot offer any conclusive information on the classification of the Gormenghast novels.

In Peake's writing, however, we can find some proof of his familiarity with the Gothic genre, and especially the more modern ghost story, a sub-genre of American origin. Sebastian Peake mentions, in the preface to Peake's collection of short stories, titled *A Boy in Darkness and Other Stories*, his father's habit of telling ghost stories by the fire at Christmas time. These ghost tales did not limit themselves to the simple retelling of traditional Gothic clichés. Rather, Mervyn Peake used these Gothic conventions to provide false clues and lure his listeners in with a fake sense of security, before

frightening them with the horrors created by "his limitless imagination"[268]. These stories, originated at the family fireplace, seem to have found their way into this collection.

At least three of the short stories in *A Boy in Darkness and Other Stories* shows an innovative use of some Gothic traditions. Apart from the presence of the Gothic in these short stories, however, the stories are also highly relevant for their thematic similarities with the Gormenghast novels. It is hard not to be reminded of Titus Groan when reading 'The Weird Journey', as it deals with a protagonist on a journey in a dream-like landscape, trying to come to terms with his past.

This similarity of the protagonist with Titus Groan is even more evident in 'Same time, Same place', where we encounter a naive youngster, willing to "forgo [his] birthright"[269], who has a frightening encounter with the treats of real life and ultimately returns to his paternal home. Other stories, such as 'I Bought a Palm-tree' or 'The Connoisseurs', display, through their usage of the absurd and of nonsensical dialogue, a connection with the absurd nature of the Gormenghast society and its rituals.

Most evidently thematically linked to the Gormenghast trilogy is, however, 'Boy in Darkness', which, according to Maeve Gilmore[270], his wife, should be considered as narrating one of the many adventures of Titus Groan not described in *Titus Alone*, as the main character not only physically and mentally resembles Titus Groan, but is also tormented by similar preoccupations. He too desires freedom from the traditions of his ancestral home and, eventually, after breaking his solemn oaths by uttering a set of curses - "damn the Castle! Damn the Laws! Damn everything!"[271] - he escapes the familiar setting and enters a dreamlike landscape, reminiscent of the post-apocalyptic world of *Titus Alone*. [272]

This story is not easily categorised and shows tendencies to lose itself into small detail and to combine elements from different genres to come to a overwhelming whole, as occurs within the Gormenghast novels too. The main theme does not change: we are still following a main character who struggles for individual freedom in a frightening world governed by tradition and tyrannical authority figures. Once again, the young rebellious hero is contrasted with other characters who submit themselves to the power of authority.

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[268] Peake, Mervyn. Boy in darkness and other stories. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 11.

[269] Peake, Mervyn. Boy in darkness and other stories. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 132.

[270] Peake, Mervyn. Boy in darkness and other stories. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 17.

[271] Peake, Mervyn. Boy in darkness and other stories. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 25.

[272] Peake, Mervyn. Boy in darkness and other stories. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 8.

In the Gormenghast novels, these characters were often grotesque, described in metaphors and similes which rendered them beast-like. In this story, this dehumanisation is complete and the characters have become animal parodies of themselves. Peake seems to suggest that it is the result of the loss of their free-thinking and will eventually lead to the loss of their identity.

Thus, this story shows that Peake's usage of the grotesque in his description of characters is not simply a humorous device or a Gothic method to increase *otherness*. It serves a much more noble function: that of warning the reader for the danger of tradition and society. It seems that, in order to distinguish between themselves, as practitioners of tradition and servants of authority, Peake's characters have only the option of magnifying their own major character traits and turning into their own caricatures. Parody, thus, is the only way to deal with the overwhelming force of tradition. Peake shows us, however, that even this option will only lead to identity-loss, metamorphosis (for both Sepulchrave in *Titus Groan* and hyena and Goat in 'Boy in Darkness'), or moral decay or death, as is the case with almost all of the dehumanised creatures in 'Boy in Darkness'.[273]

The evil nature of the Lamb in 'Boy in Darkness', as a sinister, ghost-like, bodiless demon who experiments with humans and animals alike, logically reminds us of the atmosphere in *Titus Alone* in general, and of the character of the scientist in particular. The evil nature of the scientist returns here, once more in a caricaturised and dehumanised form, which prevents us from identifying with the villain, an option which was open to us both in Steerpike and Cheeta. Even Swelter, as the most dehumanised character of the Gormenghast trilogy, still displays human sentiments, such as gluttony and hatred for Mr. Flay. They are partly dehumanised, but they have not yet transformed into monsters completely.

In opposition to these characters, Lamb displays no humanity whatsoever and carries out his hellish experiments out of a instinctive hatred for humanity, which "caused the colour of his flesh to change"[274]. In Gothic terms, he is the *other*, but not in the same way as the grotesque characters around him, examples of the *other* too, but with a similarity to the *self* hidden beneath the external distortion. Lamb, however, is not presented as having an underlying goodness under the grotesque exterior. From a Gothic point of view, he is used as a warning of what might happen if we lose ourselves completely in our lust for power. By abandoning his soul and becoming empty, Lamb has completed the transformation from human into monster. As in all gothic stories, he is ultimately defeated by the naive innocence he was attempting to destroy.

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[273] Peake, Mervyn. <u>Boy in darkness and other stories</u>. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 52.

[274] Peake, Mervyn. <u>Boy in darkness and other stories</u>. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 60.

What can we conclude from 'Boy in Darkness'? First of all that it is a story discussing the struggle for individual freedom and identity against oppressive, demonic forces. It is a struggle of innocence against dark evil, and, in that sense, it is clearly a Gothic story. But, at the same time, this story goes so much further. In its description of Goat and Hyena, it shows us the dire consequences of thoughtless compliance and group behaviour.

Also, in opposition to the habit of Gothic stories to pose questions which remain unanswered, Peake does try to provide us with a road which enables us to avoid these dangers. This path is not a simple one, but it leads to self-knowledge and acceptance of one's own past. Peake seems to suggest that one needs to lose one' naivety through adventures and encounters in the real world, in order to be able to overcome both identity-limiting compliance to tradition and the dangers of limitless, but emotionally empty freedom and develop a more healthy awareness of their benefits and risks.

This view on the world is clearly influenced by Gothic tradition. Gothic stereotypes and themes also occur more explicitly in the short stories in this collection. Just like any good Gothic tale, 'The Weird Journey', questions the rational by making it unclear if the narrator is describing a dream of the main character, or if this dreamy world is supposed to be a twisted form of reality. Thus, we encounter in this short story one of those typical features of the Gothic: the contamination of reality by fantasy, in the form of subconscious dreams and a world created by the mind. Terror is introduced in this story by description and the use of colour and form, transforming this dreamy landscape of the protagonist's youth into a nightmarish and horrific setting.[275] This final coming to terms with one's memory of the past, is, of course, a recurring Gothic theme, also encountered in Gothic stories discussing psychological terrors.

Even more evidently Gothic is 'Danse Macabre', a story wherein traditional Gothic elements are initially evoked and rendered even more terrifying, but ultimately undermined through parody. This short story especially shows Peake's knowledge of an American Gothic tradition, started by Poe's domestication and internalisation of horror, which developed later on in the sub-genre of the ghost story.

The narrator in 'Danse Macabre', is, following a tradition started by Edgar Allan Poe and Washington Irving (*Adventure of a German Student,* 1824), presented as possibly unreliable, not only because he shows a tendency for melancholy and dreaminess, but, even more so, because of the recent death of his beloved. This death of a beautiful woman as a starting point is again a stereotypical Gothic motive, established by Poe's *Ligeia* (1838) and *Fall of the House of Usher* (1839), among others.

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[275] Peake, Mervyn. Boy in darkness and other stories. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 7-8.

Peake adopts and perfects other Gothic mechanisms too, such as the tension between anticipatory terror and the eventual surprise of the real horror. Right from the start of 'Danse Macabre', the narrator suggests a horrific ending, creating a sense of anticipation and fear in the minds of the readers. As in any good Gothic tale, the horrific event is only explained in the end, but we receive various hints towards this final outcome. This technique is found frequently within the Gothic genre, for example in Edith Wharton's *The Eyes* (1905) and Chesnutt's *The Sheriff's Children* (1889), and is used to make the final horror less overwhelming, enabling the reader to perform a serious mental investigation of the meaning of the horrific event.

Peake does the same in 'Danse Macabre', where a connection of the horrific event and "the ill-omen'd love"[276] of the narrator and his wife is immediately suggested, both by an explicit reference by the narrator to this "dreadful separation"[277] and, implicitly, by the fact that the narrator is hit by an uncanny familiarity when observing the encounter between two ghosts, one wearing his own clothes, the other dressed in an "ice-blue evening dress"[278]. This sense of the uncanny, of familiarity, and of repetition, is, in any Gothic tale, a clear sign of an horrific event in the protagonist's past trying to return from the repressed and invisible subconscious into the visual world. These hints strengthen the reader for the final blow of finding out that the story might be told by a ghost, and that both the narrator and his wife are death.

This unexpected ending is a clear sign of Peake's ironic view on Gothic stereotypes, such as the fear of death and the return of the past, and the existence of ghosts. By his reworking of a supernatural ghost story, he undermines it not only by questioning the reality of what occurs, but also the human nature of the narrator himself, and even the order of events. His ghost of the past is made into an actual ghost, and, by doing so, Peake seems to question some of those Gothic truths, such as the return of the repressed past.

The last story of the collection, 'Same Time, Same Place', is another example of a Gothic tale, and especially interested with the grotesque and the risk of being blinded by appearances. Dehumanisation and metamorphosis, as both features of the Gothic and of Peake's own narrative style, occur and symbolise the dangers of the outside world for the innocence of a young and naive protagonist. The female figure, initially desirable, turns out to be demonical, and drives the protagonist back into another world, whether it is that of safety in the maternal home in Peake, or that of madness in a mental institution, as in Irving's *Adventure of a German Student*.

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[276] Peake, Mervyn. <u>Boy in darkness and other stories</u>. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 117.

[277] Peake, Mervyn. <u>Boy in darkness and other stories</u>. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 117.

[278] Peake, Mervyn. <u>Boy in darkness and other stories</u>. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 122.

'Boy in Darkness' itself has a Gothic scene too, where the main character is hunted down by dogs on the riverbank which serves as dividing line between his own familiar world and the nightmarish world beyond. This scene is based on Peake's own encounter with a group of dogs during a nocturnal walk in France. The dogs stayed behind the "gates which led to a rather desolate chateau"[279], but, nevertheless, the memory of this encounter remained vivid in Peake's imagination, forever connected to the emotion of fear.[280]

Even if, for Peake, these dogs were the embodiment of fear, in the story their presence is not simply used to instil fear in the reader. They also exemplify the fear within the main character, and, in the end, help this character to overcome his own doubts about crossing the river and moving into a new life. Thus, these dogs serve as an example of Peake's tendency to transform simple Gothic elements into important narrative features that bring about change and have important moral implications.

By investigating this collection of short stories, before turning to the Gormenghast trilogy itself, we have seen that this collection, disregarded by previous researchers, has indeed a lot of information to offer. We now have conclusive evidence that Peake did indeed have some knowledge of the Gothic genre, although not the continental, castellated variety, but rather the American, psychological, internal sub-genre. It might be that Peake had never read those stories from which originated the ghost-story subgenre, but, as has become clear from 'Danse Macabre' and 'Same place, Same time', he was certainly familiar with some stereotypical examples of this genre.

Also, this collection has shown us that in these short stories too, the same themes from the Gormenghast novels return, sometimes in a clearly Gothic fashion, but not always. It makes us aware that the theme of the struggle for freedom, although important and recurring in a lot of Gothic stories, is not limited to this genre, and can occur in other genres too. It is simply a theme of some importance to Mervyn Peake himself and should not simply be read as a signpost of the Gothic.

If Peake's usage of Gothic themes is, thus, not a conscious choice for the genre, but simply an aspect of his deeply personal narrative style, it still remains a question if the trilogy can be regarded as Gothic or not. If we encounter several Gothic elements, this does not simply mean that the three novels can be considered as Gothic to the very core. Rather, it might mean that Peake is just one of those modern writers fuelled by an large imagination, enabling him to combine techniques, motives and themes from different genres. The question is, thus, if the trilogy should be considered an amalgam of different genres, with the Gothic as a prominent one, or, rather, as a Gothic text influenced by other genres and a postmodern sense of parody.

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[279] Peake, Mervyn. Boy in darkness and other stories. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 19.

[280] Peake, Mervyn. Boy in darkness and other stories. London: Peter Owen Publishers, 2007, p. 20.

If we take this neutral and objective view as a starting point, the fact that the main theme of the novels is a struggle between society and the individual, a theme strongly linked to American literature in general and American Gothic in particular, is no proof of the Gormenghast trilogy belonging to the Gothic Genre. What it proves, however, is that Peake's narrative style and main themes do indeed fit right into the Gothic stereotype and, thus, that it is very likely that some kind of influence must be taken into account.

A first sign of both the huge importance of the Gothic and of an attitude of parody towards it, can be found in the obscure reference in the name of the castle. It does not seem strange to connect the latter part of *Gormenghast* with the English word *Aghast*, and its Old English equivalent *Ageasten*, and its meaning *'to terrify'*. Thus, right from the start, the setting for the narrative is presented as a place which might induce terror. Where the terror lies, however, is never made explicitly clear in the narrative, and the absolute absence of supernatural monsters and events seems to suggest, in the naming, an ironic reversal of the Gothic technique of hinting at a future horrific catastrophe.

Normally, in a Gothic tale, the terror created in the reader is followed by an unexpected and even more terrifying supernatural event, but, in our trilogy, regardless of the dark acts which do occur, this initial terror does not find its horrific counterpart, and thus, the Gothic anticipation is turned into an element to be manipulated and transformed, for the benefit of the author himself.

The amount of details and information we receive on minor characters in the trilogy is remarkable too. In a traditional Gothic tale, the number of characters which are fully developed and receive a complex personality, are limited. Even in a complex and lengthy novel, such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, only Emily and Valencourt are truly developed characters, and, even if several other characters enter in dialogue with these two, these other characters are never allowed to develop their psychology any further than is needed for the plot.

In *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* especially, the perspective is not limited to the main character. Instead, as the conflict between individual and society is so crucial to the novels, the reader is given an accurate and detailed, albeit grotesque, description of the side characters too. Additionally, he is allowed to delve into their minds, which enables Peake to introduce different preoccupations and desires into the main narrative.

The typical Gothic novel can often be read as a monologue or dialogue, with either an innocent of a villain at the centre, overshadowing other characters and setting alike. Peake's first two novels are different, as they clearly are presented as the result of an ensemble of characters, in dysfunctional communication with one another. They are all used as individual perspective at some point, and contribute to the development of the plot in their own way. Even the setting, traditionally limited to a awe-inspiring function, if not identified with the villain and his mind, becomes an individual

participant in his own right here. This stress on individuality serves to undermine the concept of society and communication in the story, indicating the crumbling nature of the castle's traditions.

The fact that this novel is more of an ensemble play than is considered normal in Gothic literature, does not mean, however, that the inhabitants of ghastly castle do not, occasionally, act in a Gothic fashion. Every single one of them can be connected to a particular stereotypical character-type from within the Gothic tradition.

Rottcodd, as the attendant of the hall of the Bright Carvings, is the first character to be described in *Titus Groan*, after the initial description of the castle, and he is immediately presented as a secluded character, living in isolation of the human world.[281] This attitude is clearly supported by Peake's description of Rottcodd, and particularly when Peake states that "He [Rottcodd] was enjoying solitude for its Own Sake, with, at the back of his mind, the dread of an intruder"[282]. Rottcodd does not like to be disturbed, "even when information of this magnitude [the birth of Titus Groan] was brought."[283]

Rottcodd, in his solitude, feels physically connected to the castle and thus becomes an instinctual observer of the changing atmosphere, as we can see at the end of Titus Groan, when Rottcodd discerns, with the earling of Titus, a change in the atmosphere of the castle.[284]

All this should remind us of the clichéd image of the hermit living in the wilderness, one with nature and capable of noticing changes whilst or even before they occur. We could say that the protagonist of James Fenimore Cooper's gothic tales[285] in the American wilderness is thus transported to a dusty and decaying castellated setting, where he, invariably, still looks for solitude and a connection with nature, even if this particular natural environment is mostly made of brick and mortar. The fact that Rottcodd is simply locked away in a dark hall in the castle, rather than roaming free from society in the wilderness, not only serves to mock this Gothic stereotype, but might also be seen as one hint at the ultimate failure of Titus Groan to escape the castle.

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[281] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 10-12.

[282] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 12.

[283] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 15.
[284] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 391-396.

[285] Cooper, James Fenimore. The Leatherstocking Tales I: The Pioneers, The Last of the Mohicans, The Prairie. New York: Library of America, 1985.

Another taciturn hermit-like character, first within the castle, as part of the ceremonial protection of rituality, but eventually banished into the wilderness, is Mr. Flay. His conflict with Swelter, the cook, is one of the most important Gothic themes of the first novel, as a conflict based on the hatred created by the evident otherness of the two. The battle between the taciturn, loyal and insect-like Flay, and the obese, egocentric and witty cook becomes, due to their conflicting bodily features, a typically Gothic battle of opposites.

The build-up to the eventual nocturnal battle between the two is filled with traditional Gothic moments. It all starts with the humiliating slap of Swelter by Flay, right before the christening of Titus, when Flay's anger about the fact "[t]hat he, the first servant of Gormenghast, [...] should be introduced to Swelter's ten-a-penny kitchen boys"[286] leads him to pull "the chain over his head and slash the heavy brass links across the face of his taunter."[287] This act serves as a starting point for their bloody feud, exemplified by the gleeful and disturbing nocturnal practise-sessions of Swelter in his kitchen, glowing in an unnatural green light.[288] Flay observed this and "as he scrutinized it, something terrified him, something nameless, [...] something from which he recoiled."[289] In other words, Flay becomes aware of the danger erupting from the cook, and of Swelter's transformation in a Gothic villain. The tension is heightened even more by the threats of Swelter, first only expressed in fleeting whispers and regards, but eventually objectified in a cake he leaves next to Flay's dormant body.[290]

Once more, Peake does not indulge our expectations: the ultimate battle sequence is occasionally horrific in its detail, especially when Swelter's loving relationship with his cleaver is developed[291], but, due to Peake's tendency to slow down the action by inserting ironical descriptions, as well as his decision to dehumanise Swelter through a boat metaphor at the point of his death[292], the overall effect

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[286] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 80.

[287] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 80.

[288] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 162-165.

[289] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 163.

[290] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 256.

[291] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 339.

[292] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p.343

of this sequence is not terror, but laughter and confusion, and, thus, another ironic reworking of Gothic tradition.

The second major Gothic event, in *Titus Groan*, is the burning of the library by the twins Cora and Clarice[293] and the subsequent madness (shown by his imaginary reconstruction of the library[294]) and metamorphosis of the earl, Sepulchrave, into a death-owl[295]. This sequence, and the characters concerned by it, are filled with Gothic meaning.

Sepulchrave is a weak character, haunted by melancholy, on the verge of a mental breakdown, and only protected from this by his ceremonial function and his collection of books. He reminds us of Roderick Usher[296], as he too is a character, hiding in a world of books and art, and showing signs of an increasing rupture with reality. The madness only surfaces after one last terrible event of reality, the death of a sister or the burning of a beloved library, and, ultimately, they both turn to death as the only possible outcome. The difference is, however, that Sepulchrave is not the last of the family line, a fact which not only renders his disappearance less troublesome, but also serves as a sine-qua-non in Sepulchrave's conscience. Without an heir, he would probably not have abandoned his sanity so easily, as Sepulchrave himself reminds us that "[w]ithout Titus the castle would have no future when I [Sepulchrave] am gone."[297]

Metamorphosis and identity-loss is of course a traditional element within the Gothic novel. The struggle with one's identity and vision of the self is omnipresent in all Gothic tales. The outcome of this struggle is often negative, ending in a religious misreading of the self, as in Hawthorne's *The Minister's Black Veil*[298] and *Young Goodman Brown*[299], in disillusion (Chesnutt's *The Sheriff's*

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[293] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 237-249.

[294] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 270-272.

[295] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 286.

[296] Buelens, Gert, ed. American Gothic: Innocence and Trauma in American Literature, 1776-1910, Part 1. Gent: Academia Press, 2010, p. 130-145

[297] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 178.

[298] Buelens, Gert, ed. American Gothic: Innocence and Trauma in American Literature, 1776-1910, Part 1. Gent: Academia Press, 2010, p. 110-121.

[299] Buelens, Gert, ed. American Gothic: Innocence and Trauma in American Literature, 1776-1910, Part 1. Gent: Academia Press, 2010, p. 75-86.

Children), in a dehumanisation (Jekyll and Hyde) or in death (William Wilson[300]). The internal metamorphosis of Sepulchrave, and his eventual death by owls, fit in this traditional Gothic scheme, not as a Gothic villain dying because of his own evil deeds, but as an innocent, traumatised by the pressure of everyday life and the burdens of reality, resulting in a distorted self-image.

Another stereotypical Gothic element we encounter is the double, more logically in the characters of Cora and Clarice, identical twins with joined desires, but also, and much more importantly, in the conflict between Titus Groan and Steerpike, developed in *Gormenghast*, as rebellious characters opposing tradition and ritual, but for different reasons altogether.

The twins are reasonably easy to describe. Through the sisters, Peake ironically abuses the traditional importance of the double and of repetition in the Gothic, as a sign of internal struggle with the different sides of the self. The doubling of the sisters is, however, not a sign of internal complexity, but, rather, a sign of their mental limitations, and their joined exclusive focus on power. The utterances they repeat are not signs of a repressed past returning to the surface, but rather of memories repeated too often, as the only thing they care about is taking revenge on some vague injustice of which they have been the victim. Their simplicity also makes it remarkably easy for Steerpike to manipulate them, thus transforming them into almost Faustian characters, who, by making an arrangement with the devil (Steerpike) have signed their own death-sentence.

This ironical usage of the double in the twins and in Flay and Swelter is, however, countered by the psychological doubling of Titus and Steerpike. Their opposition is a typical one within the Gothic genre, as Titus stands for the naive and innocent youngster, without knowledge about the real world, but ultimately the protector of the society he wants to escape from. He is the rebellious son, connected to the lawful tradition, but desperately looking for a way out, preferring individual freedom over social standing and wealth.

Steerpike is his opposite, the stereotypical Gothic villain, corrupting the innocents, such as Fuchsia, and manipulating the guilty twins in order to obtain power. He is a character who gradually works his way upwards in the hierarchical society of Gormenghast, rebelling against some of its traditional concepts, but only if this rebellion can improve his own position. He is a manipulator who adopts different roles in order to come to the desired result. His ultimate goal initially seems noble, as he wants to break down the aristocratic and fixed society, but, in the end, his only goal is personal power and success.

Titus Groan and Steerpike, as the main characters of the trilogy, are both reworking of classic Gothic character-types. Steerpike, initially presented as a young rebel willing to subvert tradition to obtain

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[300] Buelens, Gert, ed. <u>American Gothic: Innocence and Trauma in American Literature, 1776-1910, Part 1</u>. Gent: Academia Press, 2010, p. 146-161.

equality, quickly transforms in a Gothic villain. As Mills said in her research on Steerpike, his transformation into a Gothic villain is indeed rather stereotypical, predictably following the examples within the Gothic tradition. Steerpike turns into a Gothic villain when his initial ideas change for the worse, as his hunger for power increases and his sense of decorum and moderation decrease. Where, in the first novel, his efforts are directed towards universal equality and freedom from dusty traditions, in the second novel Steerpike comes closer to the traditional role of the Gothic villain, when he uses his manipulative powers and other techniques, such as masks, to improve his own position exclusively. He starts to enjoy the pain he causes in others too, and, thus, just like the rational Jekyll transformed into Hyde, so is Steerpike ultimately overwhelmed by the vicious devil he had tried to repress in his soul.

However, what Mills does not realise is that the surprising and genre-renewing element is to be found in the initial description of Steerpike. Peake seems to suggest that things might have turned out differently if Steerpike would have been raised in a different, less constricting society. Thus, he questions the ultimate evil nature of the Gothic villain, inducing us to take his perspective into account too. His gradual transformation serves as a reminder of the relatively limited psychological reading of other Gothic villains. Gothic literature has hardly ever offered such a close view into the mind and psyche of the villain before. We never knew what drove Radcliffe's Montoni, Walpole's Manfred or Wharton's Andrew Culwin (*The Eyes*) to act the way they did.

As Steerpike serves as a negative double of Titus Groan himself, they share several concepts, such as their mutual attempt to develop a clear idea of their own, individual identity, free from the social swamping around them. In Steerpike it leads to a transformation (and thus identity-loss) and eventually to death by his double, in Titus, however, it leads to questions about his identity, seemingly resolved after the killing of his nemesis, but reappearing in *Titus Alone*, only to be answered completely at the very end, when he comes to terms with his origin:

> *"He [Titus] no longer had 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."[301]*

In a sense, this struggle between the two versions of the rebel reminds us of other Gothic doubles. As in Poe's *William Wilson* (1839), where the narrator kills his conscience by stabbing his double, and in *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886), where the monster prevails over the rational mind, here too Titus and Steerpike serves as one another's nemesis. Their story cannot end but in the death of one of them, but, once again, Peake reworks Gothic tradition in order to surprise us. In *Gormenghast*, after Steerpike's rationality is defeated by the monster within, it is Titus, as the good double, who comes out victorious.

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[301] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 1022.

In the end it is not Titus who is the main agent in Steerpike's death, but Steerpike himself, through his unlimited desires and his increasing loss of rationality and humanity. This theme of evil leading to one's own downfall, even if not typically Gothic, is definitely not new. Shakespeare already made clear to us in *Titus Andronicus*, *Macbeth* and *Measure for measure* that evil is always responsible for its own downfall.

Thus, the twins and the duo Steerpike-Titus, as instances of the double, point out, in Peake's trilogy, that actual Gothic elements and Gothic parody can occur next to one another, as two sides of the same medallion, both contributing to the enormous and wonderful complexity of this work of fantasy.

Apart from the Twins, and their symbolic use as parody of the double, other female characters too are used to play with several Gothic stereotypes. The role of the silly spinster attempting to be a femme fatale, desiring a husband at all costs, without looking at the consequences, is played in the Gormenghast trilogy by Irma Prunesquallor. This role is a recurring one within Romantic and Gothic literature, and most famously portrayed by Madame Cheron, wife of Montoni in *the Mysteries of Udolpho*[302]. Irma Prunesquallor is, of course, a satiric version of this stereotype. Her witlessness is contrasted to Dr. Prunesquallor's intelligence and renders her as easy a victim to Steerpike as the twins. Whenever Irma appears in the narrative, she offers comic relief, in particular in *Gormenghast*, where she finally finds a suitor, in the personage of Professor Bellgrove, after inviting all the residing professors to a party.[303] Irma's literal blindness, as well as her symbolic blindness or unawareness of her own idiocy, combined with the professor's social ineptitude, make this scene one of the most hilarious moments in any of the three novels.

Another character falling victim to the manipulations and lies of Steerpike is Fuchsia Groan. When he invades the attic[304], her secret shelter, it can be seen as the beginning of her emotional and sexual awakening. Her naive, imaginative and romantic spirit creates, in the tradition of other naive gothic victims before her, a false image of Steerpike as a kindred spirit and, as a result, they engage in an interesting relationship. Steerpike attempts to strengthen Fuchsia's heroic image of him, but, being a highly unemotional and cold character, he has difficulties adopting the right attitude to seduce or manipulate Fuchsia, and, due to his brutality, never gains her trust completely, although he comes very near at certain occasions, such as the adventure in the grotto in *Titus Groan*[305], or at several occasions

[302] Radcliffe, Ann. The Mysteries of Udolpho. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

[303] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 564-600.

[304] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 131-128.

[305] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 213-219.

in *Gormenghast*[306], before his satanic transformation, symbolised by the appearance of Satan, Steerpike's pet monkey[307], takes place.

When Steerpike's mask falls away and he can no longer suppress his subconscious violent and bloody nature, his attempts to seduce Fuchsia change in nature and Fuchsia finally becomes aware of the evil creature lurking within the object of her love.[308] Fuchsia, as the sentimental and fragile creature she is, can only opt for the romantic solution of suicide. However, in this sentimental storyline too, Peake is ably to subvert the traditional romantic expectations of a happy ending or a emotional suicide by letting her drown by accident.[309] Passion and love are thus eliminated from the castle environment.

There is only one female character not touched by Steerpike: Gertrude, the countess, sees through his schemes. She is, in general, highly unaffected by what happens around her, only acting when the traditions and hierarchy of the castle are threatened. She represents another stereotypical Gothic character: the abjected and powerful mother-figure, so important in Mills' reading of the trilogy. These female figures inspire both dread and longing in the protagonists of the Gothic, an attitude we encounter in several stories by Poe too, such as *Ligeia* and *the Black Cat* (1843), where the cat represents the abjected feminine power returning to the surface.

For the protagonists of Gothic stories, everything within their own psyche which they cannot accept is suppressed and connected to a hateful other, which thus becomes the personification of the abject, this object of hate and disgust with which one feels a secret connection.

This attitude towards the feminine returns frequently in the oeuvre of Peake, and especially in Titus, a character who does not receive enough attention from his emotionally detached mother. She only cares for her animal companions and for the upholding of tradition. His longing to break free from the embrace of the castle, serves as an ultimate attempt to disconnect himself from his mother and gain independence.

It is for this very reason that Titus feels so connected to the Thing, as she is both motherless and free of the castle, and thus represents for Titus everything he desires but cannot obtain. In other words, she is, to him, the personification of ultimate liberty.

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[306] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 414, 552 and 672-673.

[307] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 676-683.
[308] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 713-715.

[309] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 759-761.

Titus' unclear attitude of both love and revulsion towards his mother is also responsible for his difficult relationship with Juno and Cheeta in *Titus Alone*. He likes to be taken care of, but at the same time he longs to be alone and indulge in the freedom he has acquired. After his previous experience with Juno has shown him the risks of entering a relationship with a woman, he refuses to enter in one with Cheeta, declaring he only wants to possess her.[310] At this point, Cheeta transforms in a Hecate-like spirit of revenge, another stereotypical female role within the Gothic (similar to Madeline Usher in *Fall of the House of Usher*).

Swelter, the chef who is often represented as a homosexual and sadist in *Titus Groan*[311], is, as Alice Mills has correctly pointed out, the only male character connected to the abject. As with more traditional examples of the abject, he too is, through his actions, his habitat (the kitchen) and his name, associated with filth, cannibalism and bodily liquids and he serves, for Steerpike, but also for the rest of the castle, as a symbolic nurturing mother. Flay's emotions towards Swelter are close to Kristeva's concept of jouissance, a combination of disgust and fascination, as the feeling associated with the abject. Swelter clearly is the character made to be despised by the reader the most, in order to facilitate the reader's acceptance of Swelter's complete dehumanisation in death.

As Sepulchrave and Flay have already pointed out, not only female Gothic stereotypes are abused. Titus Groan, Steerpike and even Dr. Prunesquallor can be seen as an reworking of some of the male Gothic clichés. Dr. Prunesquallor is used as a ironic comment on the battle within the Gothic between rational science and the unexplainable supernatural events. Prunesquallor's weird behaviour seems to suggest the failure of science, especially when he too is manipulated by Titus.[312] However, soon enough we notice that his ridiculous behaviour is only a mask, an abuse of the stereotype of the fool, enabling him to study those around him in more detail, almost like a psychologist digging in the psyches of the inhabitants of the castle. Just like the fool in *King Lear* he looks through appearances and makes the link between the changes in the castle and the appearance of Steerpike, and uses all the power of his inquisitive mind to protect Fuchsia, as her dreamy nature might put her in immediate danger from the calculative methods of Steerpike.

Now, what can we conclude from this analysis of the characters in the Gormenghast novels? They are, very clearly, influenced by Gothic stereotypes, and, for the duration of their presence in the novels, they do not change, but maintain this fixed stereotypical position, making it easy to image their

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[310] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 947-948.

[311] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 22-27.

[312] Peake, Mervyn. The Gormenghast Novels, Titus Groan, Gormenghast, Titus Alone. New York: The Overlook Press, 1995, p. 140-146.

responses and attitudes. By making their stereotypicality so obvious, however, Peake goes much further than authors of traditional Gothic. He lays bare those devices the original Gothic writers secretly used to increase the novel's emotional effect. Peake does not simply apply the traditional character stereotypes, but abuses them, moulding them for the particular postmodern effect of laying bare the evidence of the creative process. In Peake's characters, the Gothic tradition is manipulated, showing its weaknesses, but also its intrinsic qualities for describing mental attitudes and desires from the outside, without the need for psychology and its tendency to delve into the minds of the characters. Combining his Gothic caricatures with his highly specific narrative style, based on an abundance of description, Peake is able to offer us something we have never seen before.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from the usage of setting in the trilogy. At a first glance, Gormenghast castle may seem the ultimate Gothic castle, with its gloomy atmosphere and its impenetrable society, haunted by madness and death. If we delve deeper into the description of the castle in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* than Punter did, however, it is relatively easy to see that Gormenghast lacks several features of the Gothic castle.

Even if Gormenghast is clearly a sublime setting, overpowering everyone in it and everything around it, Peake does not connect the feeling of awe and respect, felt by all its residents, with the feeling of fear and paranoia so evidently present in Walpole's Otranto or in the Apennine castle of Udolpho. Peake's castle is, in a way, more connected to the abbey in Lewis' *The Monk*, which simply serves as a backdrop for horrifying events, and does not, as in Radcliffe's and Walpole's classics, actively contribute to the gloomy atmosphere and the dark deeds.

Gormenghast is, however, like traditional Gothic castles before it, personified and almost given a separate identity as a being with changing moods. As the labyrinth-like castle of Otranto, Gormenghast castle too is presented as ever-changing and expanding, but, not in an attempt to trap its victim, but rather to retain its freedom. Steerpike not only threatens the individuality of the characters, forcing them into fixed stereotypes, but also tries to fix the castle itself into a mould. Gormenghast, however, does not limit itself to exteriorising the mind of Steerpike, but continues to express the moods and desires of all its residents.

Thus, it is not only Titus who is struggling to remain a free and complex individual, not willing to be limited by his ceremonial function, but also Gormenghast itself tries, through expansion, to remain complex and never completely know. Steerpike attempts to transform it into a Gothic location of paranoia in order to become its master, but, by allowing himself to come closer to his own stereotype of the Gothic villain, he loses grip on the surrounding setting of the castle once more, and, as the castle is swept clean of dirt by the flood, it is also spiritually cleansed of the traces of change, imprinted on it by Steerpike's Gothic influence. Unlike traditional Gothic castles, who are often a metaphor for the

villain's own subconscious mind, Gormenghast is able to shake of its villain and lead an autonomous life.

Additionally, even if Gormenghast is, for Titus, Fuchsia en Steerpike, just as connected with tyrannical patriarchy as traditional Gothic castles, Gormenghast castle also has a feminine dimension to it, connected with Mills' concept of adherence, as the maternal protector of its inhabitants from outside occurrences, offering tradition as a comfortable response to questions and doubts. For those characters who opt for adherence, the castle is their life, the only thing connecting them to reality and society.

Although it might look like one at first sight, Gormenghast castle is thus not just a Gothic setting, but rather, once more, an ensemble wherein the Gothic elements that are present are ridiculed and questioned, while individuality and independence is stressed. By combining traditional elements with some new insights, Peake shows us the sublime powers of fiction and its ability to renew ancient ideas by taking them as evident starting point for a new kind of narrative.

This becomes even more clear in his third Titus-novel, *Titus Alone*, where the traditional Gothic setting disappears, but the actual amount of paranoia and fear radically increases. Where, in the first two novels, the danger was limited to the character of Steerpike, here it is the post-apocalyptic world itself that creates dangerous obstacles for the individual. In the Gormenghast society, the ritual, even when a character acted in opposition to it, offered some sort of guidance or framework. In *Titus Alone*, however, Titus, after breaking away from his original background, realises he is completely lost in this new world, where everything is different and individuality has turned from being disrespectful to being outright dangerous.

Mills stated correctly that every act of individuality, of access into a new world, is accompanied in *Titus Alone* by the risk of death. What she did not realise, however, is the importance of the city of Under-river as a society of outcasts, of those who had taken a risk, but failed miserably. It seems as if, in the futuristic world of *Titus Alone*, the myth of man's absolute power is to be maintained by casting out all those who failed. In this world, all the grotesque individuals, whether bad or good in nature, are limited to the labyrinthine space of Under-River. They are not allowed into view and, unlike the castle society, where the whole social world consisted of outcasts, here they do not play any social role. In this world, individualists are forced into the position of a hermit, thus proving both the limitations of individual freedom and the dangers of a fixed society.

This new world, filled with factories and machines, has no connection to the crumbling dynastic world of Gormenghast. Stone is replaced by metal and glass. It is a world of Gothic Science-Fiction, with seemingly no connection with stereotypical Gothic settings. However, the factories and buildings of this world are expressions of the sublime too, and, in opposition to Gormenghast, here setting and

nature are not free, but can be manipulated by humanity, as becomes evident from Cheeta's manipulation of the Black house into a caricature of Gormenghast.

This Black house, as Cheeta's version of Gormenghast, shows a fundamental difference between the two worlds created by Peake. The Gothic qualities Gormenghast lacked are present in this futuristic world. Madness, paranoia and revenge are some of the Gothic characteristics discernable in Cheeta, and the Black House caricature, with the transformation of its natural appearance to fit the Gothic villain's desires, expresses a Gothic mood much more easily and consistently than Gormenghast ever did.

In this new world which seems to be governed by rationality, the Gothic is fully evoked, serving as a proof of the difference with Gormenghast's original stance towards the Gothic. At the same time, by making us subconsciously choose between the two worlds, Peake warns us for this fixed modern world, where rituals, traditions and words are no longer necessary, and where limitless freedom and innovation is no longer a feature of fiction, but exclusively connected to science.

Thus, Gardiner-Scott was right to point out the particularity of this final novel, albeit for the wrong reasons. Where the first two novels transgress the traditional boundaries of the Gothic, by manipulating some of its stereotypical images, this third novel follows the Gothic in a more conventional fashion. Gothic scenes occur in the novel and are responsible for the reader's awareness of some gloomy wrong underlying this post-apocalyptic world. The partly pessimistic view of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* has grown even stronger after the abandonment of parody in *Titus Alone.*

What have we learned about the usage of the Gothic in the Gormenghast trilogy? First of all, it has become clear that Peake has indeed been influenced by the Gothic genre. His approach of the Gothic, however, is not traditional, and should be connected to the postmodern tendency to lay bare the fictional nature of texts through parody and caricature. Peake combines stereotypical elements from a large number of genres in his texts, but transcends these limited perspectives to come to a story which not only offers more extreme sensations, but also a story that enables the reader to dig even deeper into the psyche of the characters. By showing that their stereotypicality is only a mask, Peake invites us to look underneath, to look at ourselves from a stereotypical point of view and to find new way of perceiving the world. The third novel is innovative in a different way. Here, Gothic clichés occur too, but they are more traditional in nature, and characters such as Cheeta are far less developed as the residents of the castle. Innovative is here the change of scenery. The traditional Gothic castle or natural wilderness are replaced by a nightmarish distopia, where the negative aspects of tradition and ritual seem to have gained in importance and oppression is omnipresent. Peake's choice for this remarkable setting should be seen as a warning for the inherent Gothic qualities of our modern world, where perception is constantly guided and individuality starts to become more and more difficult.

Gothic Elements in Lolly Willowes and Kingdoms of Elfin

In opposition to Mervyn Peake, whose writing style can easily be connected to some of the traditions of the Gothic genre, Sylvia Townsend Warner's usage of the Gothic is much less evident. Even if critics have overlooked this particular aspect of her writing, this does not mean, however, that the Gothic is not a fundamental part of her novels.

In Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*, Fantasy and the Gothic do not serve as the background and setting of the narrative, as is the case in Peake's trilogy, but, instead, they are used sparingly, in order to question the clearly realist view of the world offered at the beginning and the universal truths connected with this conventional reading of the world.

Even when Townsend Warner uses Gothic imagery, themes or characters, she is able to give it an touch of originality, by refraining from expressing excessive emotions. Not only in *Lolly Willowes*, but also in the stories in *Kingdom of Elfin*, emotions are hardly ever excessive. Warner seems at all times to maintain a certain distance from the events occurring in the narrative and thus prevents 'the suspension of disbelief' so crucial in fantasy literature. Her narrative style is that of a biographer or historian, firmly rooted in the real and the rational. If excessive emotions do appear, they are not seen as positive, but rather, as something to be avoided. This attitude is one which cannot easily be connected to the Gothic genre, and already hints at Townsend Warner's critical stance towards literary tradition.

What makes her work so interesting, however, is that she combines this very un-Gothic refusal of tragic emotions, with the highly Gothic usage of supernatural imagery and violence. As we will see later on, this feature is particularly evident in *Kingdoms of Elfin*, where folk-tale violence and emotionless narration frequently occur together. In *Lolly Willowes*, this supernatural element is found in the character of the devil and in the practises of witchcraft.

By delving into the text, we become aware of the intrinsic connection of the story of Laura Willowes with the Gothic and its tradition to highlight the struggle for freedom in an oppressive society. She is similar to a lot of Gothic heroes who refused the role put onto them by society in order to live a life of freedom, found through a reconnection to nature. Laura obtains this freedom when she decides to escape from her brother's house in London and return to the countryside. In her youth she felt strongly connected to the landscape around her father's house, at ease both on the border of the pond and

underneath the trees where "Laura would still have been sitting bound to the Bon Chrétien pear-tree"[313] if her family had not prevented this union with nature.

Thus, it is the natural part of herself, her individuality and her sensuality, that Laura tries to reconnect to, after being repressed by her family and by their rigid sense of tradition. This repressed nature has become, to female members of her family limiting themselves to preordained social roles such as the good wife or discreet mother, the abjected other. The feeling towards nature is one of fear and hatred, as can be clearly seen in Caroline's statement that, once summer is over, "the fallen leaves [...] ma[k]e the country unhealthy"[314]. It seems just another excuse they tell themselves in order to prevent any indulgence in nature. Apart from limiting her own experience, Caroline's fear of nature also prevents Laura from adopting this natural female role. Only by escaping from this stifling London environment can Laura hope to lay bare these hidden fragments of her identity.

Eventually, as in any Gothic tale, the repressed returns to the surface, through the powers of physical sensation, more specifically when Laura is haunted by the smell of ripe autumnal nature in a grocery shop in London[315], the climax of her own gradual increased indulgence in physical pleasures, such as the enjoyment of "sumptuous and furtive tea, [...] marrons glacés"[316], and the transformation of her room by the introduction of "an unreasonable luxury of flowers"[317].

Sylvia Townsend Warner was, of course, not the first to give women a new role in Gothic literature, different from the traditional beautiful victim-role of the British classics (Walpole and Radcliffe) or from the dangerous, intelligent and powerful beauty of the early American Gothic (Poe and Irving). Once the traditional Gothic settings and themes were domesticated and internalised, women started appearing more prominently as active protagonists, especially in authors such as Edith Wharton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Henry James (*Turn of the Screw* 1898).

Their stories narrated the struggle of females with the social expectations and pressures, and often had ambivalent endings, where freedom, if acquired, was accompanied by madness. We might expect that this consequence of madness, beautifully described in Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), will appear in Townsend Warner's story about the victory of a female over the overwhelming powers of tradition and patriarchy too. In *Lolly Willowes*, however, freedom is not acquired through madness, but

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[313] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. <u>Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman</u>. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.16.

[314] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. <u>Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman</u>. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.74.

[315] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. <u>Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman</u>. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.82-86.

[316] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. <u>Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman</u>. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. P.78.

[317] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. <u>Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman</u>. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.79.

through witchcraft and the introduction into a different society, enabling Laura to free herself from the forces of patriarchy.

The difference with other female protagonists is the active stance Laura takes. She does not passively adhere to the roles offered to her by society, whether it is the role of Aunt Lolly in the patriarchal reality, or the role of a practising sabbatical witch in the society of the devil. Laura searches for a highly personal solution to the issues she needs to deal with, and the eventual solution should not be seen as the initial moment of another relationship bringing limitations. Instead, it stresses the ultimate victory of the individual over society and religion, pointing the way for other women, who should "be active, and still not noticed."[318] Just like Laura, the adherence to patriarchal role patterns and the unfulfilling quality of their habits should "rouse them up"[319] into action.

By allowing Laura to remain outside society, Townsend Warner shows us the danger of fixed roles, as another method to support patriarchy. However, she does not simply attack patriarchy from a feminist point of view, but also shows its narrative limitations. By combining a realist narrative with the traditionally opposing genre of the sensational and emotional Gothic, she proves the relativity of these distinctions, as well as pointing to the possibilities of a literature which does not limit itself to one of the traditional genres. Where Peake transforms the stereotypes of Fantasy to show its wider possibilities, Townsend Warner uses Fantasy to question the truths and solutions offered by a rational and realist approach to the world. At the same time, however, she stresses the dangers of fantasy and dreams, and the importance of an active stance, as the only way one can reach freedom and happiness.

As women start to take their lives into their own hands in reality, Townsend Warner stresses the importance of a change in fiction too. As a result, the traditional view of the victim as a passive female no longer holds and feminine power, with the help of a male devil, and through the connection with the maternal force of nature, is able to cross the boundaries of the patriarchal morality. The devil is no longer a force to be used exclusively by the male villain. Females make arrangements with him too.

This power Laura has over the supernatural can also be seen in her use of the supernatural to prevent Henry and Caroline from making her marry Mr. Arbuthnot. She decides "to wreck [...] the good intentions of [...] many months"[320] by delving into her knowledge of the supernatural, and by comparing Mr. Arbuthnot to a werewolf, warning him that "February, of all months, is the month

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[318] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p. 236.

[319] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p. 236.

[320] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p. 57.

when you are most likely to go out on a dark windy night and worry sheep."[321] This statement not only serves to indicate Laura's increased connection with the supernatural, but also the change in roles which is occurring: the supernatural is no longer exclusively a masculine matter, but becomes an element of feminine power, capable of striking males with dread and astonishment.

However, Townsend Warner warns us not to make the same mistakes male characters made before. One has only to think of Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown* [322] (1835), where the protagonist participates in a Sabbath, but ends up paranoid and unhappy, to realise that Sylvia Townsend Warner's Sabbath should be seen as a ironic reworking of traditional religion based on sexuality and loss of innocence. In *Young Goodman Brown*, the protagonist is still clearly limited by his patriarchal and religious views, whereas, in Lolly Willowes, Laura's independence enables her to perceive the dangers of the Sabbath as another institution of patriarchy, where the female is, once more, threatened by male sexuality.[323] Thus, she is able to come to the solution of isolation from the social, a solution which does not threaten her individuality and allows her to lead her life in peace, not even limited by the devil, who, as it turns out, does not care about the kind of life his 'victims' lead once he has obtained their soul.[324]

The end also differs from a traditional Gothic ending, in the sense that it does answer the questions the story has raised. Where Gothic stories, such as James' *Turn of the Screw* and Hawthorne's *The Minister's Black Veil* (1836), do not provide an answer to the raised issues, here, Townsend Warner does show us the path towards independence and self-reliance. One can become independent by reducing the peer-pressure and influence of others on our way of life, not by actually turning to the devil of course, but simply by taking an active stance and actively choosing for a particular lifestyle, without taking into account what society might think of it.

Setting, in Townsend Warner, can hardly be regarded as Gothic. However, at certain moments within the novel, some locations temporarily take on a Gothic mood, as, for example, Henry's house becomes the location of oppression, symbolically representing the urban patriarchal society of London. Some locations within Little Mop receive a Gothic colouring too. This is the case with the field where Laura hides from Titus as the personification of patriarchy. This field combines a sense of natural freedom

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[321] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p. 57-58.

[322] Buelens, Gert, ed. American Gothic: Innocence and Trauma in American Literature, 1776-1910, Part 1. Gent: Academia Press, 2010. p.75-86.

[323] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.200-202.

[324] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.242-245.

with an underlying feeling of a dark power inhabiting it, stimulating Laura to ask the devil for assistance.[325]

These occurrences of a Gothic setting are, however, limited to particular moments, often by the stimulating effect of works of art, as Shin has correctly observed. These work of arts become thus almost like Gothic objects, bringing with them a large number of explanations and implications, forcing us to look for its complex, not easily determined meaning. Fuseli's *Nightmare* in particular is a Gothic object in this narrative. It serves almost as the symbolic double of the narrative, as it shows a female struggling with masculine powers to gain independence. Nevertheless, even in her dreams, the female is not freed from the shackles of patriarchy.

Where Fuseli's maiden fails, however, Laura is able to overcome the simplistic fascination for the painting and everything it symbolises. She looks beyond the surface and is able to move on with her life. Here, Warner once more twists our usual understanding of the Gothic object as something that completely grips the attention of the protagonist. One has only to think about the veil, universal object of fascination and dread in Hawthorne's *The Minister's Black Veil*, where it serves as a mechanics of stuckness, preventing characters to evolve naturally, to see that Laura's attitude of looking beyond the clichéd, painterly images is highly innovative.

In general, however, setting is not Gothic in *Lolly Willowes*. Nevertheless, it does play an important function in the narrative, as it serves to symbolise the struggle between patriarchy and feminine powers, and, in that sense, can be connected to the setting's central role in the Gothic once more. Traditional masculine space is transformed, through Warner's narration, into a space where the female has power and importance too. Laura's escape to the countryside shows that women are not limited to the domestic space and that they can also turn to witchcraft to protect their position, wielding extraordinary powers to claim a space for their own.

One last, partly Gothic, theme of some importance in *Lolly Willowes*, is the role and function of tradition, addressed already by Rosemary Sykes. She sees it, as we have seen, more as a state of mind, an attitude of believing the importance of maintaining certain ancient rules, than an actual appliance of age-old moral codes. For Sykes, tradition in *Lolly Willowes* is based on physical, material signs, and not on some mental continuity from one generation upon another.

Townsend Warner's own view seems to coincide with this view on tradition established in her novel. Her own usage and adaptation of fictional traditions, shows she is aware of the continual changes occurring within genre boundaries with every publication added to it. She refuses to adopt some of the

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[325] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. <u>Lolly Willowes or The Loving Huntsman</u>. London: Chatto & Windus, 1928. p.162-165.

typical material (as in character or setting-based) clichés of, for example, the Gothic. Her devil is very different from the traditional image we have become accustomed to through the literature of the past centuries, such as the bible, *Divina Comedia* and *Faust*. She wants to show us the oppressive powers of genre, forcing us to think in a particular direction, and, furthermore, with *Lolly Willowes*, she proves that a novel does not need to belong to a particular genre. Innovation and independence, so important for Laura Willowes, are crucial in the writing of fiction too. Parody and ironic reversal of expectations are especially important in Townsend Warner's uncovering of the lies of tradition, bringing her closer to Mervyn Peake reworking of the Gothic we have discussed previously.

Kingdoms of Elfin, her collection of short stories, shows a similar awareness of the importance of tradition. Just as Townsend Warner criticised the Christian image of the devil, but adhered to the medieval attitude towards black cats in *Lolly Willowes*, Townsend Warner criticises in *Kingdoms of Elfin* the Victorian adaptation of fairy tales, and their transformation into moralised and conventional stories, while still adhering to the original version of these fairy tales, as found in, for example, the *lais* of Marie de France.

Townsend Warner re-establishes the original court-like setting, with its emotionless and violent rules, and, additionally, gives back the fairy tales to the fairies themselves, returning the human population to their original role of side characters, as may become clear from the way Aquilon, Master of the Royal Pack of Werewolves at Brocéliande, looks at humans "with a naturalist's unimpassioned interest in some familiar variety of the lesser creation."[326]

Townsend Warner's narrative style is even more impersonal and neutral in this collection of stories. She adopts the tone of the historian or biographer, offering her fictional stories as historical truths and amusing anecdotes. This is particularly evident in her description of violence occurring in the Fairy courts. She describes this constitutional violence as one would discuss the ritual cruelty of the Aztecs. Only when its victims are human, a slightly ironic undertone enters the narrative, which, occasionally, almost resemble tragic irony. This is the case in the ultimate story, 'Foxcastle', where James Sutherland, a literary professor, is ultimately rendered speechless after his visit to the local fairy kingdom.[327]

Due to the highly realist and historical narrative style Townsend Warner adopts in these stories, it is hard to consider them as true fantasy stories. While reading, we forget that fairies do not exist and the created world seems to come alive, as a result of all the detailed historical and cultural information we receive in the stories themselves. By creating such a realistic fantasy world, Townsend Warner might

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[326] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 67.

[327] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 221-222.

have attempted to mock the fascination for fantasy, arising at that time. Her work shows a particular similarity to J.R.R Tolkien's fantasy, as both use ancient literary sources to create original worlds of fantasy, delving into cultural, linguistic and geographic detail to create a credible and realistic world filled with familiar concepts (as can be seen from the maps both Tolkien en Townsend Warner use to contextualise the stories). The difference lies, however, in the fact that Tolkien's stories, written originally for his own amusement, became the object of a cult, whereas Townsend Warner's short tales, written to provide financial security, never became more than the amusing stories they were meant to be.

By imitating this newly founded genre, Townsend Warner once more attacks tradition, and, already shows a particular awareness of the danger of losing connection with the strength of original fantasy literature to offer a critical view of our own society, in favour of some stereotypical elements, soon to be automatically connected with the genre. To oppose this tendency in fiction, Townsend Warner firmly roots her stories in historical reality, by consciously and explicitly referring to her sources. Therefore, if 'Gothic' elements do occur in Townsend Warner's Elfin stories, these elements turn out to be more connected to the Medieval fairy stories, than to the Gothic clichés and fantasy stereotypes of contemporary literature. The result is that the view provided to us by literary genres is questioned and shown to be limited. Thus, Townsend Warner stresses the crucial role of the individual qualities of fictional writing, bringing the importance of originality in fiction once more to the foreground.

When Townsend Warner introduces werewolves in the Elfin court of Brocéliande ('The Mortal Milk') they are not used to instil fear in the reader, but serve as a ironic double for the hunting dogs kept by the aristocracy. At the same time she shows the inherent violence and indifference of the Elves towards humans, as the werewolves' sickness is connected to the lack of human meat in their diet.[328]

Thus, the werewolves are used to increase the similarity between fiction and reality, but, at the same time, they also bring in a sense of the uncanny, but not of the traditional Gothic uncanny, as a feeling of something strange in the familiar, but rather of the familiar found within a seemingly different world. Thus, Townsend Warner stresses the importance of to combine fiction with reality, as a way to evade stereotypical narratives and create original stories which offer the reader an insight into another world, but at the same time making this world highly recognisable to our own social, cultural and psychological world.

When the Gothic does appear, it is often ironically, to make fun of human credulity and greed. This is the case in 'Elphenor and Weasel', which tells the story of Elphenor's job as the assistant of a necromancer, for whom he often impersonated the devil [329], but also in 'The Blameless Triangle' where

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[328] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 67.

[329] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 25-26.

we witness an exorcist's attempt to cleanse a fairy-inhabited church, ultimately brought to death more by his own stupidity than by the fairy's suffocating grip.[330] A similar thing happens in 'The Occupation' where a minister gradually grows mad after becoming aware of a fairy-population living in his church.[331]

A similar ironical attitude is adopted by Townsend Warner regarding another theme of sensationalist literature: the cult of Orientalism. Since the rediscovery of the Orient in the 19th century, the Orient often appeared in this type of literature as the location of weird rituals, limitless sexuality and strong female figures. Townsend Warner uses and abuses all these stereotypes in 'The Search for an Ancestress' to create a Gothic tale seemingly centred around a naive fairy interested in cultural differences, but eventually dealing with erotic tension and the life-threatening dangers of despotic power.[332]

Another original reworking of a Gothic cliché is the concept of ghosts and spirits haunting the world of the living. As Fairies do not have souls, however, they also cannot conceive an idea of immortality and a survival after the physical death, and therefore, their vision of the world does not include ghosts. It is not that they do not believe in them, but, rather that ghosts cannot be explained in their way of perceiving the world.

When in 'The Late Sir Glamie' the ghost of the Lord Chamberlain of the Elfin Court of Rings does appear, he does not provoke fear, even if he does take on the traditional Gothic ghost-role, as he is "semi-transparent"[333], "frowning portentously"[334] and "holding his head under his arm."[335] Instead of striking the fairies with fear, he evokes irritation in the aristocratic fairies, who decide to forbid the working fairies to mention this ghost, turning him into a "persona non grata"[336], as his ghostly appearance proved that he was not as good an Elfin as he should have been. As all Elfins know that "Elfins have no souls: when they die, they are dead"[337], this means that Sir Glamie's return as a ghost indicates that his genes were corrupted by the immortality of the human genetic material. To point out

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[330] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 45-46.

[331] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 198-207.

[332] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 138-151.

[333] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 169.

[334] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 169.

[335] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 169.

[336] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 169.

[337] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 169-170.

the lack of interest of the fairies for Sir Glamie's ghost, Townsend Warner does not provide us with a reason for his appearance or a solution which would enable him to find a final resting place. Instead, he is ignored by most. Especially ironical is the fact that, eventually, the ghost is accepted into the community and even politely addressed, indicating that the Fairies' response to ghosts, after the initial irritation, is exactly contrary to the traditional human response. This ironical view is very clear at the very end of the story, when the Master of Ceremonies encounters the ghost on a evening walk by the river, bids him a good evening, bows and walks on.[338]

Thus, the only fear this ghost is capable of forcing upon his living companions, is the fear of degradation into humanity and a fear of a life after death. Clearly, these fears, ironic reversal of humanity's fear of death as the final end, are used by Townsend Warner to mock our own fears and the salvation we seek in religion, as a method to account for our "unsatisfactory lives"[339]. Townsend Warner seems to prefer the fairy world at this point, with its cold practicality, absence of religion and capacity to reflect rationally. This can be clearly seen in the passage where some of the fairies discuss humanity's view on death and afterlife.[340]

However, even if religion is absent from the Elfin world, this does not main their everyday life is not governed by rituals and portents. One of the stories actually deals with one of these dark portents, the sighting of black swans as the sign of the imminent death of the queen. The story of the death of Queen Tiphaine, narrated in 'The Five Black Swans', is, however, not dark or depressing at all. At the point of death, she remembers her love-affair with Thomas of Ercildoune, a mere mortal. However, as so often happens in *Kingdoms of Elfin*, this seemingly romantic and emotional moment is disrupted by a scene of human violence, when two recent changelings rip a monkey in half.[341]

The concept of the kidnapping of human babies into Elfin society is one of the recurring themes in this collection which allows a relatively easy connection with those feelings of unease and fear usually linked to the Gothic. Once more, however, even in traditions originated in the middle ages, Townsend Warner is able to innovate in her approach of this theme. What constitutes the cruelty and violence is not the act of kidnapping the babies, but the fact that, once they have fully grown and become accustomed to the Elfin world, the fairies lose interest in them. As proof for this attitude we could cite Queen Tiphaine's statement in 'The One and the Other' that it is "such a pity they [the changelings]

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[338] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 174-175.

[339] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 172.

[340] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 172-173.

[341] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 19.

grow up."[342] Ultimately, the changelings are banished from the court they have grown up in and send back into the unfamiliar human world.

In 'The One and the Other' , Tiffany's banishment is particularly harsh because of the changeling's love for one of the fairies.[343] Even more unsettling, however, is his death, caused by the anatomic tendencies of the elfin child originally put in his place[344], showing how the inherent cruelty and soullessness of the fairies only becomes more dark and grotesque when influenced by a human upbringing. Thus, both in 'The One and the Other' and in 'The Five Black Swans' it is the human world whose influence turns out to be the most dangerous and aggressive.

Generally, in the Elfin courts, changelings are treated as if they were toys. They have nothing to fear as long as they remain "novelties"[345], but once the interest for them start to diminished, they are either forced out of the court, or transformed in order to give renewed pleasure, as is the case in 'The Revolt at Brocéliande', where two changelings are castrated and forced to fight one another in an eunuch fight, clearly reminiscent of cock-fights or gladiator fights as humanity's violent way to provide pleasure.[346]

This is, of course, the way we should interpret all the violence of the fairies. By transforming humanity from aggressor into victim of the strange and even uncanny traditions, rituals and ideas of the fairy world, Townsend Warner tries to provoke us to question the inherent violence in our own society. The Elfin world is an grotesque caricature of our own violent and immoral world, and serves to make us aware of our own weaknesses and of the dangers of religion, class, tradition and human egocentrism. It forces us to question our ways and the knowledge we have of the world, and, in that sense, shows a remarkable and unexpected similarity to the Gothic as a genre that offers a stage for our animal side to question the limitations of the rational view on the world.

One thing we should keep in mind, however, is the fact that fairies are cruel to one another too. Banishment is not just the punishment for changelings; Fairies too can be exiled from their native kingdom to another, as is described in 'The Climate of Exile'. Complete rupture with the maternal home seems to be especially important in this punishment, in order to make the shock of the new home felt even more strongly. What is even worse is that, when the exiled fairy is finally used to his

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[342] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 1.

[343] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 13.

[344] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 12-14.

[345] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 59.

[346] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. Kingdoms of Elfin. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 62-64.

new surroundings, he starts to fear his ultimate return home, as this event would make him truly homeless.[347]

Lolly Willowes and *Kingdoms of Elfin* both show a tendency to attack some of the cruel traditions of our human world. Supernatural elements are used in both, because it both facilitates the writer's capacity to insert implicit criticism on contemporary society and the reader's acceptance of the written world. Only gradually does the reader realise the similarities between the world of fantasy and the real world.

By the time he has become aware of this, he is no longer able to evade the questions the story poses. Thus, in a time when female empowerment was only just starting to develop, the solution of stereotypical Gothic witchcraft was the only one available for Sylvia Townsend Warner, but, she succeeded in transforming it into a positive act, an assertive and active stance not aimed at the doom of others, but at personal independence.

Where Townsend Warner abuses the Gothic in *Lolly Willowes* to address certain social issues, in *Kingdoms of Elfin*, her preoccupation is no longer social, but, rather, concerned with literature itself. She still attacks patriarchal traditions limiting the liberty of the individual, but, in these short stories, her attack is focused on some of the literary traditions established in the Victorian era, in an attempt to show the moral limitations and guidelines they implicitly try to enforce. As we have seen, Townsend Warner does this by re-establishing the connection with Medieval literary traditions and by confronting her readers in the Elfin world she describes with a mirror of human cruelty. She shows that moral guidelines, rituals and traditions should not be simply adhered to. We must question them in order to find out if they limit our freedom to act, think and observe the world around us.

This feeling of tradition as limiting our perception of reality by offering false truths, found in *Lolly Willowes* and *Kingdoms of Elfin*, as well as the central theme of the struggle for freedom in *Lolly Willowes* are, as we have seen in our investigation, major themes in Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast trilogy too.

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[347] Warner, Sylvia Townsend. <u>Kingdoms of Elfin</u>. New York: Dell Publishing, 1977. p. 168.

Similarities and differences between Mervyn Peake's and Sylvia Townsend Warner's stance towards the Gothic

Before we started this investigation, there seemed to be relatively few similarities between the Gormenghast trilogy of Mervyn Peake and the novel and short story collection of Sylvia Townsend Warner. Apart from their membership of the broader fantasy landscape, they seemed to have little in common. Their narrrative styles were clearly different: Mervyn Peake is more easily connected to Gothic and Fantasy genre clichés, even if his typical description-based style does question a simple adherence to these traditional imagery. Sylvia Townsend Warner's stories are much less grounded in this traditional view of the fantastic, and it is not difficult to spot her unique combination of realism with fantasy.

However, as we have seen in our research, this initial view can no longer be supported. The authors and their novels have much more in common than just their belonging to the broader fantasy genre. They not only share several themes, both of them also show a remarkable flexibility in their attitude towards genre clichés and boundaries.

Peake uses grotesque description and satire to transform the traditional Gothic setting and character into something a lot more interesting. As in his paintings, Peake's writing style too looks for the disruption of boundaries and clichés. Through elaborate description, Peake creates a world that invites us in, but, at the same time, his usage of satire and the grotesque alienates from this world too, enabling us to become aware of the artist's capacity to distort our perception. His oeuvre is thus a continued questioning of our perception of fiction, of ourselves and of the world around us. Peake thus questions any fixed - and therefore limited- view of the world, as it also limits our capacity to understand ourselves.

The division within literature in different genres, connected to particular themes and stereotypes, is, of course, one of these limited perspectives. It is against this limitation in particular that his characters are struggling. They try to disconnect themselves from some of the stereotypical character-types attributed to them by Peake and by the expectations of his audience. Most of these characters, however, fail to break free from this limited perception, and do not reach self-knowledge. Most obvious examples are, obviously, the twins and Fuchsia. Mr. Flay, Titus Groan, Juno and Dr. Prunesquallor seem to be the only characters developing into something more than their initial description suggested, while Steerpike undergoes the opposite development, from a complex personage into the stereotypical Gothic villain overpowered by the evil in his own psyche.

Townsend Warner's reworking of tradition is different in nature. Her main weapon is not the grotesque, but Realism, and especially the introduction of fantasy within a seemingly realist narrative. This is the case in *Lolly Willowes*, where the narrated attack on the patriarchal values of the Willowes family, supported by the family traditions, is described as an invasion within the boundaries of realism of an element of fantasy, stereotypically connected with the independent and aggressive female: witchcraft. Townsend Warner's description of witchcraft, however, shows us that Laura's solution does not fit within this traditional patriarchal division between aggressive masculinity and passive femininity. Her alternative is not aggressive femininity, as this would once more limit her to this patriarchal dualism, but it is not limited to a retreat from the social in a natural environment either. It includes the masculine, in the form of the devil, who, once more, is very much unlike his traditional and stereotypical image, and is centred around an active, assertive female, who acts upon her will without disturbing the independence of others through aggression. Sylvia Townsend Warner's witchcraft and devil-worshipping is, thus, as original and different from the Gothic clichés (as found in Hawthorne's *Young Goodman Brown*), as the castle of Gormenghast is different from those evil fortresses of Otranto of Udolpho.

The same can be said about the collection of Elfin stories written by Townsend Warner. They too clearly attack the limited perspective and implied moral guidelines of the fairy tale, as another one of those popular Victorian genres. Sylvia seemingly strips the fairy tale of its moral message and reconnects it to its medieval origin, with a restoration of the central role of the fairies, a return of the original violence inherent to this type of stories, and, by her adoption of a neutral, realist tone, which increases the sense of uncanny familiarity of the Elfin world, which is already partly established by the frequent appearance of concept and historical figures from the human world. Her aim is to prevent the willing suspension of disbelief, and to evoke a shock of recognition in the reader, when he realises this seemingly unfamiliar and different world is as violent and devoid of human emotions as our own.

This is, of course, a sentiment we find in Mervyn Peake too. The desolate and futuristic landscape we are confronted with in *Titus Alone*, strikes us, after having gradually fallen in love with Gormenghast castle in the first two novels, as different, strange, unfamiliar and dangerous. This initial alienation, however, does not last, and soon, through a similar shock of recognition, we realise that this desolate and cold world of science is our own world as it could become. It is Peake's own dystopia, his fears, developed during the second World War, of what our world could turn into. We are shown that it is no longer the medieval castle that strikes fear in our hearts, but our own modern world with its scientific advance and destruction of society. In this new world, the only society which is allowed to exist, is a caricature of society, a bunch of misfits living in a damp underworld, banished from the surface and repressed into the subconscious. It is in this sense that the third novel of the trilogy should be considered as thematically the most traditionally Gothic, even if the setting itself is not stereotypical

for the genre, and seems to be more easily connected to *1984*, *Brave New World* or other classics of science fictional dystopia.

Even when the overall image seems to be one of a mutual attitude shared by Peake and Townsend Warner, we must take into account that Peake is much less evidently protesting against the dangers of tradition. Peake's capacity, in the trilogy, to make us aware of the relativity of perception, is not the result of a conscious choice of the author, as it in Sylvia Townsend Warner's novels. Rather, it seems to be a natural result of Peake's typical narrative style, as it is based on his boundary-crossing, perception-questioning pictorial style. Sylvia Townsend Warner's rebellion against patriarchy and moral-enforcing traditions is, however, clearly conscious and in correspondence with her own assertive and unconventional lifestyle. Therefore, even if the results of their work are more connected than they seem at first sight, we must still keep in mind that their attitude towards writing is highly divergent, and the desired effect of their novels, must, therefore, also have been different: the conclusion might be that Townsend Warner focuses on the necessity to overcome genre boundaries in fiction, while Peake is uniquely concerned with the pleasure of writing novels unlimited by genre boundaries.

Conclusion

In our research, it has become clear that the originality of Peake and Townsend Warner, mentioned in our introduction, is not only limited to their individual narrative styles. Additionally and more importantly, their originality is strongly connected to their stance towards tradition. It might seem an oxymoron, but it is in their attitude and adaptation of traditions, that both these writers are most original.

Our analysis of the Gormenghast novels, as well as *Boy in Darkness and other stories*, have shown us Peake's familiarity with Gothic images and themes. His usage of these, however, prevents us from simply categorising his novels as Gothic creations. Peake is clearly influenced by the postmodern, and, as a result, their tendency to cross traditional generic boundaries by inserting themes and images from other genres, can easily be distinguished in Peake's oeuvre. There is no genre capable of grasping and labelling the entire novel. Instead, we encounter scenes adhering to different genres.

When the Gothic is present, however, in setting or character, it is never a complete imitation of traditional imagery. Through satire, parody and exaggeration, Peake is able to twist these images away from the traditional expectations, showing us a seemingly Gothic picture, but, at the same time,

emphasising these instances of difference and irony, in order to make us question our own perception and warning us for the powers of tradition as a perception-distorting device.

Gormenghast castle seems a Gothic castle at first sight, but we soon realise that this way of looking at the castle is limiting, and cannot explain all of its unique qualities. Peake starts from the Gothic cliché only to delve deeper, showing us that the castle is not just one of the tools of the Gothic villain. Instead, it is presented as an individual entity, which is not threatening to most of its inhabitants, and seems to become, for some of them, like an (over-)protective mother.

A similar thing happens with the characters. They all seem to fulfil the role of a particular Gothic cliché, but, through his typical descriptive style, these clichéd elements are exaggerated and thus questioned. Through this exaggeration we are invited to look beyond the obvious, and, once more, look into the individual and powerful impulses behind some of these characters. Steerpike does not start out as a Gothic villain, but by taking on this role within the narrative, he gradually turns into one. Fuchsia too only becomes the naive and romantic victim because of the limited freedom she has as part of a fixed society (or genre), inducing her to be swept away by anyone thinking outside of this traditional box.

The third novel, where the castle is abandoned as a setting for a journey into dystopia, only strengthens this image of the first two novels as questioning tradition and clichés. Especially important in this light is the *Black House-* sequence, as the exaggeration and clichéd representation of the exaggerated Gothic society of Gormenghast. Another important insight the third novel has offered is that, even if the first two novels might seem a lot more Gothic from the outside, the true Gothic spirit of fear and paranoia, is only really established in the third novel, where the traditional Gothic scenery is absent, but is replaced by an actual Gothic sense of awe and dread. Additionally, the theme of the quest for freedom, as found in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, is a minor Gothic theme. In *Titus Alone*, this theme is made more Gothic by Titus' increased problems to deal with the past he has repressed in order to gain this freedom. Thematically, *Titus Alone* is thus the most Gothic novel of the trilogy, with an overpowering setting providing a feeling of dread, and the truly Gothic theme of the struggle with one's own past and identity.

It seems that Peake's goal is to make us aware of the limitations of clichés and traditions, forcing us to look beyond, to broaden our view on literature, and, thus, on the world. By distancing Gormenghast castle from the traditional Gothic castle, and instead bringing forth the true Gothic only when the castle is left behind, Peake reverses our expectations and shows the capacity of the writer to go beyond the stereotype, to rise above genre boundaries and create an world, which seems familiar and stereotypical at first, but turns out to be complex, unique, and worthy of serious attention. The trilogy is not Gothic in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, it should be seen as an innovative work, renewing the genre of the Gothic by going beyond what has been done before. If we need to classify it,

it should probably be seen as postmodern fantasy classic and a predecessor to the neogothic, which renewed attention for the Gothic in Postmodernism.

Townsend Warner's novels might seem very different from Peake's trilogy. In the previous chapter we have nevertheless shown that there are also a great number of similarities between them. In our analysis of Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes*, we have been able to see that Townsend Warner uses fantasy in her realist narratives to question some of the traditional patriarchal values of our society. As she writes in a time when female empowerment has only just started, she cannot simply offer a realist solution for women who are fixed in gender roles. Her solution is founded in fantasy, but is nevertheless much wider in scope.

The solution Townsend Warner offers to her main character might be based on fantasy, it is also highly symbolic, and the main element in it is not the fact that the solution lies in witchcraft, but, rather, that women have to take an active, assertive stance if they want to break free from social conventions. Laura Willowes does use witchcraft as a method, but it is not this method which is important, but rather her attitude of independence, and her willingness to take action to obtain freedom. The crucial value of independence and freedom, in this story, is also established by Laura's negative attitude and ultimate refusal of the traditional, stereotypical and patriarchal view on witchcraft, as a female counterpart of male religion and society, still governed by a patriarchal figure offering sexual threats. Her view on witchcraft is different, and, once again, focuses on independence and the bond with nature, as a female force, rather than a patriarchal slavery to the devil. Townsend Warner's devil does not adhere to traditional, patriarchal imagery. He is not a overpowering figure, but turns out to be a indifferent lord, giving his vassals the opportunity to live their life in complete freedom, only appearing when his aid is required in the struggle with patriarchy.

Fantasy has thus become, for Townsend Warner, a useful device, especially in combination with a realist narrative style, to question the morals, guidelines and truths offered to us by reality. It is, therefore, not strange that Townsend Warner has a negative attitude towards genres and the imagery traditionally connected to them. It becomes evident from Townsend Warner's stance towards the Willowes' traditions, as well as her abuse and transformation of generic elements, that she considers clichés and boundaries as tools of patriarchy, limiting our view of the world as well as our freedom to think for ourselves. Boundaries limit our capacities to think, and, therefore, it is necessary to oppose manipulative traditions, such as the traditional view on witchcraft, the devil and the role of the female as passive victim.

In *Kingdoms of Elfin* too, the manipulative and moralistic tradition of Victorian fairy tales is abandoned in favour of a reconnection with the original fairy tale of the Middle Ages, with fairies, rather than humans, at the centre. Additionally, Townsend Warner reconnects her stories to the capacity of these medieval fairy tales to address political issues. The stories in *Kingdoms of Elfin* are,

as its medieval counterparts, used as a mirror of our reality, laying bare those same issues of political and social injustice the Victorian fairy tales tried to hide. The negative qualities of the fairy world, its violence, cruelty and lack of emotion, only serve to make us aware of these same qualities in our own world.

We could say, therefore, that Townsend Warner shares Peake's stance towards tradition and genre as a way to limit one's perception of the world. She adds to this view on tradition the dangers of it being used by a particular force (in her case patriarchy) to limit the freedom of a certain group, forcing them into the roles fixed by this tradition or genre. Where Peake simply tries to make us aware of the limited perspective adherence to a genre offers, Townsend Warner's response is a lot more aggressive, trying to make us act against these boundaries, crossing them and laying bare the tyranny and inhumanity in our society.

Townsend Warner's attitude towards the Gothic, as one specific genre, is not different from her stance towards other genres. If she presents us with a stereotypical and clichéd image from the Gothic, which only occurs at a limited number of occasions, she does so in order to rework it into something new and entirely different from the traditional image, often to facilitate the connection between the fantastic fairy world and our own world, based on familiarity, as is the case in her vision of the Gothic character of the werewolf, transformed into the equivalent of humanity's hunting dogs.

Although Townsend Warner does not use the Gothic as abundantly as Peake does, she does show a similar postmodern approach to generic tradition. Both writers attempt to show the reader the limitations of tradition, using genre clichés only to abuse them, twisting them into new images and roles. They both have that fundamental quality of the postmodern writer: they are aware of generic traditions, but, at the same time, capable of looking beyond the boundaries and create an individual, story, influenced by, but, due to their innovative reworking of it, completely independent from traditional imagery.

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