

“The castle was breathing”: a study of the fantastic in Mervyn Peake’s Gormenghast Trilogy

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**"THE CASTLE WAS BREATHING":
A STUDY OF THE FANTASTIC
IN MERVYN PEAKE'S
GORMENGHAST TRILOGY**

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE GORMENGHAST TRILOGY

Titus the seventy-seventh. Heir to a crumbling summit: to a sea of nettles: to an empire of red rust: to rituals' footprints ankle-deep in stone.

Gormenghast.

Withdrawn and ruinous it broods in umbra: the immemorial masonry: the towers, the tracts. Is all corroding? No. Through an avenue of spires a zephyr floats; a bird whistles; a freshet bears away from a choked river. Deep in a fist of stone a doll's hand wriggles, warm rebellious on the frozen palm. A shadow shifts its length. A spider stirs...

And darkness winds between the characters.

(*Gormenghast* 1)

With these words begins the second novel of the Gormenghast trilogy, the name commonly received by the series written by Mervyn Peake about the castle of Gormenghast and Titus Groan, seventy seventh heir of the Gormenghast earldom.

The first novel of the trilogy, *Titus Groan* (1946), describes the birth and first year of life of the homonymous protagonist. Because of the short age of Titus, the novel focuses on the experiences of other inhabitants of the castle —such as the pregnancy of his wet nurse Keda, the dreams and longings of his sister Fuchsia or the antagonism between the chef Swelter and the servant Flay. Particularly, the novel follows the schemes of the kitchen boy Steerpike to usurp the earldom of Gormenghast, which eventually leads to the madness and suicide of the earl of Gormenghast, Titus' father Lord Sepulchre.

The second book, *Gormenghast* (1950), comprises the life of Titus as the 77th earl of Gormenghast. From his seven to his seventeen years, the plot recounts his abhorrence for the numerous rituals and duties that must be observed by the lord of the Groans, as well as his desire of freedom. Meanwhile, a parallel storyline follows Steerpike's rise to power by murdering several people. Eventually, Steerpike is discovered and exposed as a traitor while a rainstorm floods Gormenghast castle. Titus kills Steerpike, eliminating any threat to his heirloom; but nonetheless leaves Gormenghast in a search for a world beyond the castle.

The third novel, *Titus Alone* (1959), narrates how Titus reaches a society of complex technology and industrialization where nobody has ever heard of Gormenghast or the Groan dynasty, believing Titus to be either a liar or mad. Titus himself starts doubting his memories and travels disoriented through this unknown world, trying to find a way of proving the existence of Gormenghast castle and by extension his own

existence. At the end of the book, Titus finally finds the way back to Gormenghast grounds. However, he decides to abandon the place without seeing the castle: in an epiphany, he is aware that he has achieved a full identity apart from the influence of Gormenghast, beginning his adulthood.

Though the series is popularly known as a trilogy, Peake planned its continuation for at least a fourth book left unfinished at the time of his death in 1968 (Gardiner-Scott 70). The few pages in existence of the draft were later expanded by his widow Maeve Gilmore into a sequel for the Gormenghast series, which was published in 2011 with the title of *Titus Awakes*. Peake also wrote a short novella, *Boy in Darkness* (1956), with Titus as protagonist—though his name is never mentioned in the story.

2. THE GENRE OF THE GORMENGHAST TRILOGY

2.1 Problematic Classification

In the introduction of his work *The Voice of the Heart* (2006), Peake's biographer and critic G. Peter Winnington expresses his surprise at the scarce amount of critical study of Peake's work. He deliberates on what he considers to be a small number of analyses dealing with Peake's life, art and poetry; but specifically, he laments the "tiny body of criticism" dealing with the Gormenghast series (*The Voice of the Heart* 1). For the fact is that the trilogy achieved certain recognition among reviewers. Anthony Burgess maintains that the critical response to the first book, *Titus Groan*, in 1946, was largely approving — "very favourable, in some instances ecstatic" (4)—; while Winnington speaks of the "critical acclaim" that followed the publication of the second book, *Gormenghast*, in 1950 ("Critical Reception" 11).

But in the same breath that these authors praise Peake's Gormenghast series, they recognize that it never reached major fame. Burgess admits that, despite the critics' appreciation (which, if one were to believe Winnington, was not that frequent to begin with), the work *Titus Groan* "never reached the widest possible public, it was destined to be something of a coterie obsession" (4). On the other hand, the third book of the trilogy, *Titus Alone*, arouses mixed opinions that are far from the general approbation that the first two books receive: its quite significant deviation in terms of plot, scenery and tone seems to disturb the enthusiasts of the Gormenghast series, up to the point that it has been declared "the target of critical dissatisfaction ever since [its publication in 1959]" (Edelman v). All in all, the words that Winnington uses to describe the reception of *Titus Groan* could very well be applied to the reaction to the trilogy as a whole: "It was generally well received –with reservations" ("Critical Reception" 9).

As far as Winnington is concerned, the reason behind the little criticism and sometimes unfavorable reception of the Gormenghast series is directly connected to its difficult classification. As he points out in several works, he believes that the critics' main objection to the trilogy is that they are unable to agree on a single, specific literary genre in which to categorize what he calls the Titus books. "Placing Titus Groan in a category remains a problem, which explains the ambivalence of many of the reviews", he states in 1992 ("Critical Reception" 9); a sentiment that he repeats as late as 2006:

“Unfortunately for Peake, critics like pigeon-holes and they resent a writer whose work they cannot easily classify” (*The Voice of the Heart* 2).

It is, indeed, interesting to note how extended is the struggle among reviewers of the trilogy to define the literary genre of the Gormenghast series. While critics have successfully argued for the presence of essential characteristics of numerous genres — as diverse as the Gothic, the Romantic, tragedy, romance or the Bildungsroman, among others (Mills 58-59)—, no consensus has ever been reached. If anything, Winnington's concerns emphasize the fact that, fifty years after the publication of the books, the literary genre of the trilogy is still a controversial issue.

2.2 The Titus Books as Fantasy

Strangely enough, the popular response to the Gormenghast series does not seem to hold the same doubts regarding the categorization of the trilogy: on the contrary, it looks like it is slowly coming to an agreement. During the last decades, an increasing number of readers appear willing to consider that the Titus books belong to the fantasy genre. In websites where the information is managed by its users the trilogy is likely to be categorized as fantasy —as can be seen in the Wikipedia article on the series ("Gormenghast (series)") or the literature-focused social network Goodreads ("Top Shelves"). In the same way, distributors also seem to support this classification when they promote the trilogy as fantasy —as they do in the book publisher's site, Overlook Press ("Category: Fantasy"), or the online commerce Amazon ("Books: Science Fiction & Fantasy"). The influences of other genres or literary modes are also frequently pointed out —most of the reviews left on these sites emphasize the marked Gothic atmosphere or the futuristic, almost science-fictional turn of the third volume—; but in the end, these are regarded as secondary traits. The dominant component, the popular categorization of the books seems to suggest, is still fantastic.

This is not a brand new suggestion for the Gormenghast novels, nor are contemporary readers pioneering an approach that has not been yet considered by literary criticism. During the last decades of the 20th century, several studies analyzed the fantasy status of Peake's trilogy. Works such as Colin Manlove's *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (1975) or Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (1981), Brian Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) and John Clute and John Grant's *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997) demonstrate that the fantastic component of the Titus

books has been regularly recognized —up to the point that the series has been sometimes labeled as a classic of the fantasy genre (Gunn 144-145). However, it can also be safely assumed that these publications did not settle the long-standing critical debate about identifying the genre of the trilogy. Scholar Joe Young pointed out in 2013 that critics were still hesitant to use the term “fantasy” when writing about the trilogy (49), while Winnington wondered in 2006 if the books can be considered fantasy at all (*The Voice of the Heart* 2). Literary criticism, thus, seems far from sharing the apparent willingness of the public to label the trilogy as fantastic, regarding it rather as yet another attempt to force a category upon the Gormenghast series.

Part of the problem to establish the fantastic status of the trilogy may stem not only from the eclectic nature of the books, but also from the definition of the fantasy genre itself. Although fabulous elements have always been present in fiction, it is not until the late nineteenth century that a series of works devoted to display these fantastic features while sharing a particular structure and general traits appeared. Fantasy, as a genre, can be considered fairly recent: Edward James dates its appearance as late as the 1960s and 1970s, pointing out the enormous influence that the paperback editions of J. R. R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* and C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*, as well as the 1969 imprint Ballantine Adult Fantasy, had in the gradual inception of the genre (72-73). In present times, fantasy is still a genre in development, far from being completely delimited: its popularization in modern fiction contributes to stretch and redefine what were generally considered the boundaries of the genre. And accordingly, fantasy's evolving status is bound to be reflected in literary criticism: fantasy critic Farah Mendlesohn affirms in 2008 that an agreement on the definition of fantasy has yet to exist (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* xiii), similarly expressed by Young in 2015 when he says that “the question regarding what constitutes fantasy is a controversial one” (49).

The lack of a unified concept of fantasy complicates any kind of standardized analysis of works such as the Gormenghast series. Young points out that “obvious critical difficulties are created by placing novels such as *Titus Groan* on the same bookseller's shelf as *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Doctor Who* novelizations” (49) —and yet, there is not a critical work evaluating the fantastic traits that such disparate examples would have in common. The Gormenghast trilogy has been included as a fantasy work in numerous studies of the genre; but few offer a formal examination of why it can be considered fantasy at all. Thus, a precarious point has been reached,

where several critics and a great number of readers take as a given the fantastic status of the Gormenghast books, while the imprecise boundaries of the term "fantasy" hinder every argumentation of why the trilogy should be regarded as such.

2.3 Goals

The controversial relation between the Gormenghast series and the fantasy genre is the object of study of this work. My aim will be to explore the fantastic component of the Titus books, with the final objective of ascertaining to which point can they be considered to belong to the fantasy genre.

Firstly it will be necessary to provide some general guidelines of what the term 'fantasy' entails in this study. To this end, Brian Attebery's understanding of the genre of fantasy as a 'fuzzy set' constitutes the starting point for my definition. Attebery proposes to regard the fantasy genre as a group of texts that ultimately exhibits the same three distinctive characteristics. The features that Attebery believe essential for a work to be considered fantastic—which concern the presence of preternatural elements, an inherited folktale structure and a distinctive impact on the reader—will be used as a tool for examining the fantastic component in the Gormenghast trilogy. Additionally, to prevent objections against the possible obsolescence of the three characteristics, Attebery's hypothesis will be expanded upon and commented with the aid of later criticism. Thus, works by Farah Mendlesohn, Edward James and even Attebery will be taken into account for the modernization of the three traits originally proposed.

Once the definition of fantasy has been outlined, I will analyze the extent of the characteristic's presence throughout the trilogy. The examination of the three features will prompt, in turn, an effort to recover hypotheses about the trilogy that may have been prematurely disregarded or forgotten. My intention is not only to recuperate previously overlooked criticism, but also to synthesize it with modern views on the fantasy genre. As a consequence, the evaluation of the fantastical elements in the Titus books will not only illuminate our conception of the trilogy and its relation to the fantastic, but, hopefully, will lead us to a reflection on the boundaries of the fantasy genre itself.

3. DEFINITION OF THE FANTASTIC

In order to categorize the Titus books as fantasy, it would be advisable to identify first which are the most common features of the fantasy genre. An elucidation of some key concepts —such as a basic definition of the term 'fantasy', the differences between 'fantasy' and 'the fantastic' (if any exist), conventional tropes or expected structure— would help to discern how many of those features are actually being used in the trilogy, facilitating the categorization of the books in the fantasy genre.

This task may prove to be not so easy to accomplish. While modern research acknowledges that fantasy as a genre does indeed exist, it seems impossible to agree on an exact definition of what fantasy *is*. In their 1997 work *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, Clute and Grant already pointed out the remarkable lack of critical agreement when describing the main characteristics of fantasy: "There is no rigorous critical consensus over the precise definition and "reach" and interrelation of any of the terms [included in the *Encyclopedia*]", they warn in the entry "Fantasy". Recent analyses on the genre echo the same contention about what the term fantasy entails: in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, published in 2008, Mendlesohn states that "the debate over definition is now long-standing", and expresses the belief that researchers nowadays have grown to regard all definitions equally valid (xiv).

Both Clute and Grant as well as Mendlesohn recognize the essential contribution that Attebery made to the field of fantasy definition when he introduced the mathematical concept of the 'fuzzy set'. In his publication *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992), Attebery does not regard the genre of fantasy as a delimited field, with clearly defined boundaries that encompass every fantasy story in existence. Instead, Attebery proposes the alternative classification of the 'fuzzy set', where the arrangement of elements in groups depends on the amount of characteristics shared among them. Under the fuzzy set categorization, the fantasy genre would be regarded as a cluster of works that share certain specific tropes or characteristics. Texts that display a great amount of these particular features would be considered to represent the quintessence of fantasy; while a low employment of them would make unlikelier the association of the texts to the fantasy genre (*Strategies of Fantasy* 12).

It could be argued that the 'fuzzy set' categorization could be successfully applied to any literary genre, not just fantasy; and this would be true. Attebery himself illustrates his explanation of the 'fuzzy set' with examples extracted from the mystery

genre: "a book may be a classic murder mystery, like Dorothy Sayers's *Strong Poison*, or more or less a mystery, like her *Gaudy Night*, or somewhat of a mystery, like Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, or similar to a mystery in some respects, like *Crime and Punishment*", he writes (*Strategies of Fantasy* 12). Indeed, Attebery's suggestion of the 'fuzzy set' should not be regarded as an attempt to confine the fantasy genre into a new exclusive categorization that is not valid for any other literary genre. Instead, the proposal of the 'fuzzy set' ultimately encourage critics not to focus only on what the term 'fantasy' should or should not entail; but also on the characteristics that fantasy stories hold in common. And as his categorization of the 'fuzzy set' grew to be accepted by criticism, the results could be seen in the aim of most recent fantasy studies, where the search for a precise definition is not the main priority. "As Brian Attebery has indicated [...], it may be that fantasy is *inherently* best described and defined through prescriptive and exploratory example", muse Clute and Grant ("FANTASY"); a strategy shared by Mendlesohn when she warns on the very first page of *Rhetorics of Fantasy*: "This book is not about defining fantasy. [...] I want to reach out for an understanding of the *construction* of the genre" (xiii).

In the same way, this study will also work on the premise that the fantasy genre is nowadays best described as a 'fuzzy set'. The definition of fantasy that will be used for the analysis of the Gormenghast trilogy will be provided through the features most frequently used in the genre. The following sections will focus on enumerating recurring traits of the fantasy genre, with the objective of identifying them later —or not— in the Titus books.

The Centre of the 'Fuzzy Set': Characteristics of Fantasy

The starting point for the recurring traits of the fantasy genre will be provided by the three features that Attebery suggested as common to all fantasy works. These characteristics —which concern the content, the structure and the reader response to the work and will be defined later— constitute, in Attebery's words, the "center" of the 'fuzzy set'. Stories that display the three features are considered the epitome of fantasy; but when some are lacking, it is more difficult to demonstrate that the work belongs to the fantasy genre. "The category has a clear center but boundaries that shade off imperceptibly, so that a book on the fringes may be considered as belonging or not, depending on one's interests", he explains (*Strategies of Fantasy* 12).

The three features were proposed on the basis that all fantastic works resemble what he considers to be the most representative fantasy oeuvre: J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Attebery's reasoning is that the trilogy, as one of the best-known fantasy works in the English language, dictated the standard for what the general public regards as fantasy. The wildly popular *The Lord of the Rings*, together with the subsequent body of works that tried to replicate its style and structure, would gradually be established as the main current of fantasy in fiction, thus determining the most representative features of the whole genre.

Recent criticism agrees with Attebery about the "mental template" that Tolkien's work established (*Strategies of Fantasy* 14). The *Encyclopedia of Fantasy* gathers several traits popularized by the trilogy that were constantly reproduced in subsequent fantastic literature, to the point that they became formulaic for the genre —such as the careful construction of a secondary world, a map that records said fictional world's geography or the appearance of creatures such as dwarfs and elves. Clute and Grant call Tolkien the "20th-century's single most important author of fantasy" ("TOLKIEN"), while Mendlesohn affirms that "*The Lord of the Rings* proved a lodestone around which fantasy post-1975 was to form" ("Peake and the Fuzzy Set of Fantasy" 3). It would seem reasonable, thus, that the most recognizable fantastic texts —in this case, *The Lord of the Rings* and similar following works— are the ones essential for delimiting the centre of the 'fuzzy set' of fantasy.

This is not to say that Attebery's three characteristics will be followed to the letter. While their usefulness as a preliminary definition of fantasy cannot be doubted, it must be noted that they were first proposed in the work *Strategies of Fantasy*, published in 1992. It begs the question whether the following twenty years of fantasy fiction, not to mention academic criticism, could contribute to discern the most representative characteristics of the fantasy genre. It is for this reason that Attebery's suggested three features will be used as a foundation upon which to add modifications with the aid of more modern publications. Works such as Mendlesohn and James' *The Cambridge Companion of Fantasy Literature*, as well as Mendlesohn's *Rhetorics of Fantasy* and even Attebery's subsequent elaborations on the idea of fantasy will be used to complement these initial three features.

An hybridization, thus, between Attebery's work on the one side and Mendlesohn's and James' works on the other will be constructed in the following sections. While Attebery's three characteristics offer clear boundaries with which to

analyze literature, Mendlesohn's and James's works provide essential adjustments with their more updated approach. My intention, ultimately, is to suggest an update for the three features that constitute the center of the 'fuzzy set' of fantasy, and to construct — through the amalgamation of the works mentioned— my own definition of what the term 'fantasy' entails in this study. The resulting features will be used as a tool with which to dissect the Gormenghast series, with the final purpose of determining whether they can be considered part of the fantasy genre.

The following sections will describe the three features that conform the center of the fuzzy genre of fantasy. After all, it is known: all tests in fantastic stories come in threes.

3.1 The Impossible

The first feature that Attebery regards as fundamental in order to consider a work fantasy is the subversion of reality. Attebery believes that fantasy demands "some violation of what the author clearly believes to be natural law" (qtd. in *Strategies of Fantasy* 14). He points out that he is not the first person to suggest such an idea, as several authors seem to have expressed the same opinion with different wording: "Kathryn Hume refers to 'departure from consensus reality', C. N. Manlove mentions the supernatural, Jane Mobley calls it magic—but there is general agreement that some such violation is essential to fantasy" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 15). Attebery summarizes these transgressions against reality—every magical, numinous or supernatural element—with the term 'the impossible', as they can only conceivably happen in fiction.

Later criticism agrees with Attebery's notion that fantasy concerns, first and foremost, impossible features. Clute believes that "fantasy can only exist if the ground-rules of reality are being broken" (qtd. in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* 107), while James and Mendlesohn use Attebery's terminology when they describe fantasy as "the construction of the impossible" (Introduction I). However, a small modification could be suggested in regards to who determines the plausibility of the events recounted. For although Attebery establishes that fantasy depends on what the author believes to be impossible, more recent studies suggest that the reader is the one who deems what constitutes a violation of reality.

The importance of regarding the impossible as a reader-oriented feature can be observed in Mendlesohn's analysis of magic realism. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn analyzes—among other fantastic texts—magic realist narratives by South-American writers such as García Márquez or Isabel Allende. These works usually depict a nineteenth-century Latin America where multiple preternatural events take place, but are accepted as ordinary. Happenings such as ghost apparitions, celestial assumptions or flower rains are regarded as mundane and normal by the characters, while readers know that they transgress the boundaries of reality. As a result, these stories have been generally considered to take place in a fictional Latin America, which diverges from our reality in key natural elements—such as physics or biology.

Mendlesohn suggests an alternative reading of those texts. Instead of considering that Márquez's or Allende's narratives necessarily imply that the world depicted is a

fictional realm, Mendlesohn's proposition is that they constitute descriptions of our very world from the perspective of Latin American folklore. In this case, it should be considered that there could be a perfectly reasonable explanation to justify these apparently preternatural events—but the narrative voice sincerely *believes* that there are magical or supernatural phenomena taking place. The narrator's point of view depicts a set of impossible beliefs, and thus, the reader can only conclude that the world where such unreal events take place cannot be but fictional.

In such a reading, the reader's background determines whether the events described are impossible or not. A reader familiarized with Latin-American lore may realize that these narratives attempt to convey a vision of our very own world from the perspective of a specific culture. However, readers ignorant of such a framework might conclude, as has regularly happened with magic realist works, that the only explanation is that they present fantastic realms. According to Mendlesohn, to regard such an interpretation as the only valid one would constitute a mistake, as it inevitably enforces an Anglo-American reading experience: "Seeing these books as [...] fantasies of any sort is to say to the culture in which these novels are born: *this is not real* in the sense that we mean real; that is, to colonize them with our expectations" (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* 107).

The struggle between the receptions of the same magic realist narratives in different cultures demonstrates that the fictional status of the invented world is not decided by the narrative's voice or the author's beliefs, but against the reader's perspective. The fantastic element in these magic realist stories will depend on the reader's understanding of the text. A concept that, in turn, can be expanded to a point crucial for fantasy literature: it is the reader who determines if a story can be regarded as fantastic or not, for it is for the reader to judge the degree of unreality fiction portrays. With this idea in mind, Attebery's definition of the impossible could perhaps be expanded: in fantastic stories, the violation of reality depends on what the *reader*, not the author, believes to be natural law.

This suggested modification might seem of small significance, but in fact reveals the importance of considering the role of the reader in the fantasy genre. This idea will be tackled again in this work in subsequent sections. For now, suffice it to say that the impossible can be regarded as the first characteristic that is certain to define the fantasy genre.

3.2 The Structure

The second characteristic that Attebery believes to define fantasy is a folktale structure. Fantasy, claims Attebery, typically "begins with a problem and ends with a resolution" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 15). In this structure, the final act where the conflict is settled holds a greater importance than the initial predicament. In fantastic stories, no matter the difficulties or obstacles in the plot, everything will be solved in the end. Narration will invariably undertake an optimistic turn that will resolve any previous conflicts before the conclusion.

This pattern seems to be directly inspired by traditional fairy tales. Attebery recalls J. R. R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories", where Tolkien defends that such an uplifting turn—which he calls 'eucatastrophe'—always takes place in fairy tales (68). Attebery believes that modern Fantasy stories have come to follow this folktale structure—once again, taking as an example *The Lord of the Rings*, as it follows the morphology of the traditional fairy tale described by Vladimir Propp.

It could be argued that fantasy is not the only genre that follows the pattern of folktales. Attebery himself recognizes in later essays that Propp's morphology may be applied to several forms of fiction that do not attempt to resemble fairy tales, such as detective stories or Western ("Structuralism" 83). But fantasy differs from these other genres from the fact that it does not only follow a fairytale structure, but exhibits that composition without concealing the main influence. Fantasy, finds Attebery, "typically displays and even celebrates this [folktale] structure" (83). Its narration strives to exhibit—or at least recall—the basic patterns of storytelling, making its structure purposefully visible. This effort to expose its fairytale-like structure is deeply self-conscious in nature, and may even lead to a metafictional narration: fantasy may become not only a particular method of presenting a story, but also a medium where to reflect on the process of storytelling.

One of the questions that may arise is to what extent a pre-established pattern may be emulated when the purpose of the text is to reflect upon that same fixed structure: how, in sum, fantasy may follow a folktale structure while at the same time commenting on or even subverting it. This will be one of the issues that the present study will consider when analyzing the Gormenghast trilogy.

3.3 The Reader

The last concept essential for a definition of fantasy is the reader's response. For Attebery, fantasy is meant to produce a specific emotional response in the reader, which consists in a sort of satisfactory catharsis or relief. This emotional effect is relevant to the fantasy genre due to its inherited wonder-tale structure, as it seems to be a direct consequence of fantasy's distinctive 'eucatastrophe'. The optimistic ending that fantasy guarantees is meant to produce a certain emotional gratification that comforts the reader (*Strategies of Fantasy* 16).

Tolkien already theorized about this emotional response to the 'eucatastrophe', qualifying it as the "joy" and "consolation" characteristic of fantastic texts (69). Attebery goes a step further and names this effect on the reader as 'wonder'. He believes that the term expresses better the fact that fantasy does not only aim to awake an emotional response, but also searches to provide a different perspective from which to regard the world.

To elucidate this point, Attebery recovers Victor Shklovsky's concept of estrangement. According to Shklovsky, estrangement is the most essential function in fiction, as all fiction strives to provide a distance from reality so it can be better examined. "Through the formal manipulation of their linguistic representatives we are made to see familiar objects and experiences as strange, distant from ourselves", explains Attebery. With this reasoning, Attebery sees fantasy as a reformulation of the estrangement operation. While fiction aims to portray reality in such a way that it seems foreign, fantasy uses what is already foreign to the reader —what we have established as the impossible— to inspire a renewed attraction for the real world. Attebery defends, as Tolkien argued in *Tree and Leaf*, that fantasy helps us envision familiar objects with the admiration and fascination of those who see them for the first time. Common day items, relatable experiences are placed in a fantastic environment, fictionalizing our reality so we are given a renewed interest for what we thought to know. "In order to recover our sense of something like a tree, it is only necessary to envision a dragon curled around its trunk. [...] Our fictional representatives will survive their encounter with the dragon and [we] gain new understanding thereby" (16). Hence the term 'wonder'.

While I hold no objection to the argument that fantasy seeks to inspire a comforting emotional response as well as renovate our awe for the real world, it might

be convenient to point out that these reactions constitute an end result. As it is my intention to use Attebery's features to analyze the Gormenghast trilogy, it might not be enough to focus on what fantasy provokes: it is also necessary to delineate the methods it employs to do so. It would be impractical to affirm that a horror story causes a reaction of terror and fright in the reader without outlining the themes or the techniques used to achieve that end. In the same way, it would constitute an equally incomplete explanation to state the 'wonder' that fantasy causes without describing what elicits it.

Attebery theorized that part of the 'wonder' was determined by the plot: fantasy's recognizable patterns prompts the 'eucatastrophe', a gratifying relief for the reader. However, I would propose that the story line is not the sole factor responsible for said element of 'wonder', nor is the reader's only function to be stimulated or moved by it. As was established in previous sections, fantasy's unrealistic or impossible events depend on what the reader regards as possible or realistic. As a consequence, we might consider that the way in which the impossible is constructed will inevitably affect the reader's perspective on it —as might also influence the emotional response of 'wonder' that fantasy strives to cause.

Farah Mendlesohn upholds a similar argument in her study *Rhetorics of Fantasy*. She establishes a taxonomy of categories of fantasy works depending on how the fantastic —her term for the 'impossible' magical or preternatural events— is introduced to the reader. Mendlesohn argues that the way in which the fantastic is presented —the choice of language and the rhetoric employed— will impact the reader's capacity to participate in the fiction. Language is responsible for the transition from the reader's reality and the known world to the impossible fictional setting. When the rhetoric fails to present the fantastic in such a way that it feels natural for the reader, fiction will fail to be convincing. "Like a perspective puzzle, if the reader stands in "the wrong place," the image/experience will not resolve", she explains (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* xviii).

In principle, Attebery and Mendlesohn's arguments do not collide in any crucial point, and could even be considered complementary. Both believe the relation between the reader and the narration of the impossible events might be an essential feature to understand fantastic texts. Attebery focuses on the final purpose and effect of fantastic texts, while Mendlesohn provides an analysis of the means by which said goal is achieved. Therefore, for our last characteristic that defines fantasy, both are taken into consideration.

As a conclusion, we can consider the reader as the last essential feature that defines fantasy, in the sense that he or she determines how the fantastic events are presented and what their final effect will be. On the one hand, Mendlesohn considers that the reader will enormously influence the choice of language in fantastic texts. The reader's degree of participation in the fantastic (and, by extension, in the fiction) will determine the rhetoric employed; this makes the reader's position in the text crucial to understand how fantasy is constructed. On the other hand, fantasy intends to provoke in the reader what Attebery identifies as 'wonder'. 'Wonder' partly consists in the reader's emotional response to the typical fantasy structure, which generally follows the pattern of traditional folktales. The formulaic structure, which demands a final resolution of any conflict through a "happy ending", aims to cause in the reader a satisfactory relief. But the 'wonder' also encompasses the impact that fantasy has on the reader's perspective on reality. By placing fabulous objects and experiences in a recognizable pattern, fantasy restores the appeal —the magic, if you will— of what is familiar to the reader.

4. THE FANTASTIC IN THE GORMENGHAST TRILOGY

In previous sections, we have proposed a cluster of distinctive features as defining the fantasy genre. Attebery's three characteristics have been combined with theories from recent fantasy criticism, mainly from Mendlesohn, with the hope of providing a broader—and more updated—concept of what constitutes fantasy. In this section, we will analyze these characteristics in the Titus books, with the final purpose of ascertaining the extent of their presence.

Here we can anticipate one of the most evident obstacles that may hinder the categorization of the Gormenghast series as fantasy: it predates *The Lord of the Rings*. Obvious problems may arise when trying to fit the Titus books, published from 1946 to 1959, in a genre deeply marked by Tolkien's trilogy, which first appeared in 1954 and 1955. If we are to recognize—as many critics have argued—the influence that *The Lord of the Rings* had in the formation and structuring of the fantasy genre, it may be expected that earlier fantastic works should "diverge" from what Tolkien's trilogy established as fantasy, as the former could not possibly follow the lead of the latter.

Nevertheless, even with such an expectation in mind, an analysis of modern fantasy's characteristics in the Titus books should be considered valuable not only for the understanding of the trilogy, but also for the discussion of what constitutes fantasy. The study of what has been generally considered an early fantastic trilogy with the traits that have since been established as prototypical of fantasy allows us to perform a helpful comparison between two periods of the genre. Regardless of whether we find the Gormenghast series remarkably similar to later—and perhaps more canonical—fantasy works; or whether to the contrary, they are nothing alike, we will obtain information about the features specific to the early fantastic, as well as about their development in time. Thus, our examination of the fantasy features of the Titus books will not only cast some light on the trilogy's categorization, but might also tackle the issue of the boundaries of the fantasy genre and its main characteristics—a debate which, as has been already shown, is still relevant in modern criticism.

4.1 The Impossible in Gormenghast

When encountering the Titus books for the first time, one seemingly common reaction is to assume that the story should not be taken at face value, but that there must exist a hidden meaning that is not obvious at first sight. In his work "The Critical Reception of the Titus Books", Winnington collects the testimony of several critics who were convinced at the time of its publication that the plot of *Titus Groan* resisted a literal reading and suggested a deeper interpretation. "They sought in vain for a meaning", says Winnington, and enumerates several reviews that regarded *Titus Groan* as an allegory, a dream, a surrealist work, even "perhaps just a dull book" —as if when divested of a secondary symbolic meaning the book were devoid of value ("Critical Reception" 10).

As the critiques gathered by Winnington show, the Gormenghast series possesses a suggestive nature that leads readers to believe that there is more to the narrative than meets the eye. But this insinuating essence is not exempt from controversy. Fantasy critic Colin Manlove, seconded by critic Alice Mills, also found that the Titus books seem to hint at a secondary distinct meaning beyond the literal one, but they concluded that this implication contributed virtually nothing to the plot. Although Mills and Manlove agreed that the text appeared to connote a figurative purpose —which Mills qualified as allegorical in nature—, they argued that it is not unequivocal enough to be resolved satisfactorily. Because of this, the critics concluded that the allegedly metaphorical quality of certain scenes in the books promises a misleading interpretation that digresses senselessly from the main narrative, which in the end undermines the credibility of the story (Manlove 238).

Manlove and Mills' objections could be better understood if we take into account their analysis of what they considered particularly polemical episodes from *Titus Groan*. We will illustrate what causes this suspicion of a secondary figurative meaning, as well as the reasons why it is rejected, with two passages —those concerned with Titus' Christening, twelve days after his birth; and with the ceremony known as the Earling, one year later, where Titus becomes the Earl after the disappearance of his father Lord Sepulchrave. In both events, an infant Titus appears to consciously rebel against the sacrosanct rituals of the castle.

During Titus' Christening, the old Master of Rituals Sourdust accidentally drops him to the floor. While falling, Titus grabs a page of one of the books used in the

ceremony, tearing it off. This action is qualified as "his first act of blasphemy", effectively predicting other sacrilegious deeds he will commit in the future. We are told that Titus "had violated the Book of Baptism", and immediately, quite symbolically, that "the metal crown fell from his head" (*Titus Groan* 91). A similar irreverence is shown in his Earling. Titus, who is barely one year old, first refuses to hold the symbols central to the ceremony—a stone and an ivy branch—, then he finally grabs them and drops them into the lake. Then he throws away the necklace he wore as required by the ritual, but the consequences of this event are far more dramatic: "And as he cried he swung the necklace across the sparkling water; and as it sank a rainbow curved over Gormenghast and a voice answered him. A tiny voice [...] from the throat of the little child of Keda's¹ womb—the bastard babe, and Titus's fostersister, lambent with ghost-light" (TG 389).²

Both of these episodes heavily forebode Titus' adolescent reluctance to follow the rituals central to the life of the castle. Much of the second book's plot revolves around Titus' aversion to his duties as the 77th Earl and "the fear that his life would become no more than a round of pre-ordained ritual" (*Gormenghast* 273), which will finally lead Titus to abandon the castle. However, these critics found this level of foretelling excessive. Manlove argues that on both occasions Titus is too young to fully comprehend the events he participates in, and therefore, there could not be a premeditated deliberation or awareness in his sacrilegious actions. "We are being asked to take this action, which any baby might have committed, as an instance of Titus' early treachery to the Line", he says about Titus ripping the book during his Christening (233-234). As Manlove rules out the possibility of the infant Titus acting consciously, he concludes that the symbolic prediction of Titus' later rejection of the ritual does nothing but undermine his credibility as a character: "The child is made to behave like a deliberate, knowing agent, and this the reader simply cannot accept" (235). Mills supports Manlove's argumentation, as she agrees that it is not possible to believe in the intentionality of Titus' actions. "However plausible the next two books' characterisations of Titus as an adolescent and young man, the act of conscious rebellion is not plausible for Titus as an infant", she states (63).

Additionally, both Mills and Manlove find particularly questionable what Mills qualifies as the "supernatural connection" between Titus and his half-sister that takes

¹ Keda is Titus' wet nurse.

² Quotations from *Titus Groan* will from now on be indicated as "TG".

place during the Earling (Mills 62). When Titus calls, Keda's daughter answers him; the rain stops falling and a rainbow appears over them. Extraordinarily, at this point of the story Titus and his half-sister have never met—and they will not meet until their adolescence, when Titus finally encounters her as a savage creature living in the forests and known as 'the Thing'. This episode may be read as the symbolic manifestation of the blood ties they are unaware of, as well as a presage of the deep influence they will exert on each other's lives—Titus' adolescent obsession with the Thing, her death while she was fleeing from Titus, the craving of freedom she will inspire in Titus that will finally lead him to leave Gormenghast. But neither Mills nor Manlove believe that the text provides a satisfactory justification for the children perceiving each other's presence, let alone for the weather reacting to them. Manlove absolutely condemns this event, saying that it is "too much to take [...] too contrived and melodramatic: the rainbow and the voice have an unreal 'pat' air about them" (235). And once again, Mills agrees with his opinion: "the mystic connection between the infants, described only in terms of what it is not, carries no more conviction than the episode's altogether-too-convenient rainbow" (62).

For Mills and Manlove, the children cannot possibly be cognizant of their actions in the lake, in the same way that Titus' rebellion against the Christening ritual cannot be deliberate. Both events are regarded as arbitrary, unplanned behavior typical of children of such young age. Therefore, the metaphorical reading that these particular events seem to indicate—Titus' later abhorrence for his role in the castle, or Titus and the Thing's complex bond—is found to be artificial and exaggerated. The symbolism is criticized as unfounded, and accused of not contributing in any significant way to the story: on the contrary, it is said to damage the narrative, as it undermines the logic behind the characters' motivations.

This is, in sum, the figurative content that these particular events seem to imply, and these are the objections it raises. Regarding this matter, Mills' final analysis of these two episodes is particularly revealing. On the one hand, she cannot but recognize their inherent symbolic potential: "the weight of evidence in the Titus books overall does not permit room to manoeuvre around [the two episodes]. The following two Titus novels reinforce these allegorical readings of the two desecrations by reiterating Titus' rebelliousness as a boy and young man, his rejection of Gormenghast and all its ritual demands on him". But as Mills does not believe that there is a solid foundation that justifies the secondary meaning, she cannot but conclude: "Manlove's analysis is

correct. In the Christening and Earling episodes, events are given an untenable allegorical rendering" (63).

It is the last part of the sentence, "untenable allegorical rendering", which is of particular interest for my thesis. For it is precisely the figurative rhetoric employed in the trilogy that both causes this search for a secondary meaning and provides a feeling of phenomena beyond natural law —or, in one word, of the 'impossible' that is central to the definition of the fantastic.

Far from being isolated, these two episodes are particularly illustrative of how the metaphorical narration imbues the text with a symbolical significance, as well as the difficulties that such an allusive presentation entails. Through a frequent use of figurative language—which often results in an ambiguous, suggestive narration—the existence of an additional meaning besides the basic literal storyline is continuously implied. Take as example how, in the Christening and Earling ceremonies, incidents that could otherwise be considered purely coincidental are permeated with a suggestive transcendence. There is an intentionality in the description of Titus' fall or the rainbow's appearance which indicates they cannot be the product of chance. Witnesses attribute to Titus an agency that as a child he should be incapable of when he is affirmed to have "violated the Book of Baptism" (91) or when he refuses to grab the ivy branch and the stone ("It was as though the child had a mind of its own", thinks the master of Ritual Barquentine [TG 389]). Titus hurling of the ceremonial necklace is accompanied by a cry that the multitude regards as "neither [...] of tears nor joy; nor was it fear, or even pain – it was a cry that for all its shrillness was unlike the voice of a child" (TG 388); which raises our suspicion of an unknown motivation behind his behavior. In a similar way, the rainbow and the Thing's shout are depicted as responses to—or even consequences of— Titus' actions (the rainbow only appears "as [the necklace] sank", Titus' foster sister "answered him" [TG 388]). The figurative description of these passages, which continuously insinuates either a deeper reason or a deliberate purpose behind them, discourages the understanding of these events as haphazard in nature and instigates the search for an alternative meaning.

Mills and Manlove believed that this symbolic connotation could be taken as metaphorical—in the sense that significant events are given a secondary reading when they appear to foreshadow major conflicts of the plot. Manlove states that these two passages are meant to illustrate that "the boy was born with a free spirit" (232), which would justify Titus' later rejection of Gormenghast and the Ritual. Similarly, Mills

believes in an allegorical interpretation of both ceremonies, which she identifies with the themes of "youth's rebellion against age and its attempt to overthrow ritual and law" (61). Both of these analyses have their merits —however, neither of them account for the meaningful intentionality embedded in these episodes. Manlove argues —quite rightly— that, at the Christening, no witness was standing at the place where the Ritual demanded them to be, so "the scene [...] locates such blasphemy as there is in the behaviour of other people present in their careless disregard for the Ritual, not in Titus" (233) —yet Barquentine is clear in the accusation that Titus is the one that commits blasphemy, going as far as attributing to him deliberation in his actions. Regarding the Earling, Mills states that the rainbow appearing after Titus' sacrilegious deeds is "altogether-too-convenient" (62), while Manlove states that the whole passage "does not happen naturally; it is imposed on the story" (235) —yet they do not analyze the consequences of this remarkably providential sequence of events. They conclude that Titus is depicted "as a responsible agent", which "jeopardizes our belief in him as a child" (Manlove 235), but they fail to provide an answer why Titus would be portrayed like that in the first place.

The heightened symbolism of these episodes, as well as the need to account for their inherent deliberation, gives me grounds to suggest a different interpretation: that they are meant to provide a sense of the fantastic. The figurative significance attributed to the Earling and Christening episodes not only negates the possibility of a fortuitous causation, but hints instead at a transcendental explanation that surpasses the normalcy of reality —enough for Mills to qualify these episodes as "mystic" and "supernatural" (62), and for Manlove to call them "unreal" (235). If we were to conclude that Titus is indeed able to foretell his future and precociously reject it; or that the rainbow appearance is the actual manifestation of the uncanny connection between him and his half-sister, the logical consequence is that these episodes should inevitably fall under Attebery's concept of the impossible.

It should be noted, however, that although a clairvoyant Titus or a magical rainbow could only be analyzed as preternatural elements, such hypotheses are just speculations, as nothing in the text ever endorses or denies that that is the correct interpretation for these phenomena. The singular events connote what appear to be fantastic explanations —an awareness behind the children's actions, a deliberation in their behaviour, a preternatural rainbow—; but these implications are never confirmed. The figurative rhetoric that gives significance to these episodes insinuates a subversion

of reality, but the text provides no evidence to prove —or disprove— that it actually occurs. And these are hardly the only cases in the trilogy. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn argues that the series is brimming with elements that, due to their symbolic content, allude to an infringement of the ground-rules of reality that cannot be corroborated:

Titus is born with violet eyes (40), which prove significant of nothing; the Countess calls her cats who appear "through the narrow opening of the door and moved into the fumid atmosphere of the room an undulation of whiteness, so that, within a breath, there was no shadow in all the room that was not blanched with cats" (50). But the cats have no supernatural powers [...]; Fuschia [*sic*] experiences a love "that equals in its power the love of man for woman and reaches inwards as deeply" (64)—but there are no catastrophic consequences of this love. Peake studs the novel with warnings and prophecies that appear to have no meaning. (191)

And yet, even if the impossible is never confirmed to actually take place, Mendlesohn defends that it is precisely this continuous insinuation of its presence that makes of the trilogy a fantasy work. Mendlesohn believes that the fantastic of the Gormenghast books is not clearly presented, but appears instead as an allusion in events that seem to surpass the normalcy of reality. In such a case, the fantastic would be implicit in the figurative rhetoric that implies said subversion. "In Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan* (1946), the fantastic is embedded in the linguistic excesses of the text" (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* xxi), Mendlesohn argues; to which later she adds: "Each time Peake raises the stakes with intense, Gothic language, yet denies us the supernatural, the stone of the castle becomes imbued with these qualities of the fantastic. We accept this novel as fantastical because we are encouraged to see the supernatural lurking, ever around the corner" (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* 191).

Mendlesohn's argumentation of the fantastic, thus, would provide an explanation for the character's lack of credibility that Mills and Manlove found in the Earling and Christening episodes. The figurative language, which conveys a feeling of transcendence beyond the literal story, would not point at a metaphorical secondary meaning, but would indicate instead a transgression of a different sort —one against reality, in which the extraordinary events are meant to destabilize natural law. What is more: the hypothesis of how the rhetoric connotes a fantastic subversion of reality is not only useful to understand the two ceremonies mentioned, but can also account for the suspicion of a metaphorical interpretation generally associated to the Titus books. The

reviews gathered by Winnington show that, although the trilogy was often believed to contain a figurative message of some sort, critics were unable to agree on what exactly this secondary interpretation consisted in: as Orville Prescott from the New York Times expressively put in 1946: "An allegory it may well be. But of what?" (qtd. in "Critical Reception" 10). Mendlesohn's analysis would justify the recurrent search for a metaphorical meaning that achieved no resolution: the figurative rhetoric, which has often been interpreted to imply an unsolved allegorical content, is meant to denote instead a fabulous breach of normalcy.

We have to consider, though, that Mendlesohn's interpretation requires a revision of our understanding of what constitutes fantasy. As was previously explained, Attebery's notion of the fantastic comprehends what is clearly established as 'impossible' —such as the elves or wizards featured in what he believed to be the quintessential fantastic work, *The Lord of the Rings*. However, Mendlesohn argues that fantasy also comprises events that appear to denote a transgression against reality even when they lack an actual confirmation of their impossible nature: for instance, Titus' violet eyes could be taken —due to their symbolic charge— as a sign of the exceptional nature of this particular heir of Gormenghast; but actually his eyes play no part in the narrative. The latter conception of the fantastic raises a series of questions relevant not only for the analysis of the Titus books, but also for the whole fantasy genre. It might be questioned how the presence of the fantastic can be ascertained if the transgression of natural law is not explicitly made. What clues present in the text prompt this reading in a fantasy key? And how can we, as readers, determine whether a strange phenomenon in the Gormenghast trilogy is fabulous enough to be considered impossible?

The relation between the readers and the figurative narration will be explored in subsequent sections. But firstly it is necessary to examine the construction of this fantastic in the Titus books, and why it is often identified with a metaphorical quality. While Mendlesohn argues that "the fantastic is embedded in the linguistic excesses of the text" (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* xxi), she only provides the few cases already presented to illustrate her point. Thus, it is my intention to support Mendlesohn's argumentation with the aid of earlier criticism, which interpreted the figurative rhetoric as a mark of the metaphorical meaning ingrained in the trilogy. An analysis of the passages that in the past have been found to contain an allegorical message would help to explain why the text suggests such an interpretation; at the same time that an examination of these episodes will demonstrate that the figurative language provides a subversion of reality

characteristic of fantasy. My intention is not only to expound on Mendlesohn's interpretation of these events as fantasy with examples of my own, but —hopefully— to merge it with previous criticism.

We might begin our examination of the figurative rhetoric of the Gormenghast series with one of the features that has been found to deliver an allegorical message: the weather. In *Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake*, Mills notes that, during the appearances of Titus' wet nurse Keda, the weather seems to react to her personal circumstances. Mills disapproves of what she considers to be obvious pathetic fallacies, as she believes that the weather and environment reproduce too closely the sentiments of the character (59). For instance, Mills presents as example the night when Keda conceives the Thing; which is foretold by "the first howls of a young wind" (TG 186). Similarly, the fight to the death between Keda's two lovers has a corresponding echo in their surroundings: "The crags of the mountain were ruthless in the moon; cold, deadly, and shining" (TG 219). In these cases, Mills argues that there is a misuse of figurative language, as she does not believe that it enhances the suspense of these episodes in any way: on the contrary, she finds them too melodramatic to be believable. As a result, she concludes that the episodes are poorly written:

The least slippery of Peake's images, the most readily categorised, are to be found in the Keda episodes. [...] Every feeling is labelled, and an allegorical label might just as well hang on each thorn and grass-blade. [...] With weather and locale straightforwardly pointing to events acted out by the human characters and to the emotions they feel, these episodes are the most purely allegorical in Peake's fictional opus, and arguably the worst written. The reader is instructed how to interpret, and the melodrama bombastically and sentimentally insists on a particular emotional response on the reader's part. (59-60)

It is precisely this unsuccessful use of the pathetic fallacy that gives Mills reason to dismiss the Earling ceremony as implausible: she describes the rainbow's appearance, synchronized with the children's cries, "as portentously vague as the earlier Keda episodes" (62). However, I would argue that these are hardly the only cases throughout the trilogy where the weather reacts to significant incidents or to the character's actions: in fact, we may consider that the weather's reaction is one of the steadiest features of the series. For instance, immediately after Flay's exile from the castle, the Countess notices that "the sky has become overcast with a blanket of ominous dark rose-coloured cloud, and of a sudden the light fades from the lawn and the cedars" (TG 297). Similarly, Titus'

defilement of the Earling ceremony is already foretold by a morning rain, as we are told that "for [the rain] to descend on such a day was sheer gloom. It was as though it defied the Castle's inmost faith; taunted it with a dull, ignorant descent of blasphemy" (TG 381). It rains during the fight to the death between Swelter and Flay —and "in the very sound of [the rain] could be felt an unnatural weight" [TG 331]). As it also rains during Titus' birthday breakfast —in a chapter named "the dark breakfast", in which the room shaded by the rain mirrors the depressive mood of a ceremony which later will be described as deeply unsatisfactory: "Instead of Titus's birthday bringing with it a feeling of completion or climax as it should have done, there was, conversely, a sense of something beginning. Obscure forces were, through the media of the inhabitants of the castle, coming to a head" [TG 320].

Even the flood that almost destroys the castle at the end of the second book appears to be a response to Gormenghast's circumstances. The storm that would eventually inundate the castle's grounds begins to form soon after Steerpike is exposed as a murderer. As the Countess quickly realizes, this storm is essential for the search of Steerpike: the flood reduces drastically the castle's width, which would otherwise have been impossible to explore: "'The mounting water draws us all together. [...] We are driven up, are we not, into a confine. [...] Can traitors live in air and feed on it? [...] Can they live beneath the surface of the water? No'" (*Gormenghast* 348). When the rain finally falls, it is described through a personification that makes of the weather a conscious phenomenon that can share outrage with the castle's inhabitants: "This was no ordinary downpour. Even the first streaks from the sky were things that lashed and kicked the dust out of the ground with a vicious deliberation" (G 326).³ The implication of the rain as an active collaborator in the hunt for Steerpike is supported by the tranquility that the traitor's death brings to both the weather and the castle: "There was no more rain. The washed air was indescribably sweet. A kind of natural peace, almost a thing of the mind, a kind of reverie, descended upon Gormenghast - descended, it seemed, with the sunbeams by day, and the moonbeams after dark" (G 401).

These episodes, in sum, could be taken as examples of what Mills described as pathetic fallacies, in which "weather and locale replicate the characters' actions and emotions" (59). However, the recurrence of the weather's response makes of these pathetic fallacies more than just occasional dramatic resources to enhance the suspense

³ Quotations from *Gormenghast* will from now on be indicated as "G".

of these scenes. The numerous illustrations of the weather's receptiveness throughout the trilogy demonstrate that its function goes beyond a punctual reminder of what the reader should feel: instead, its regularity seems to suggest an active participation in most key episodes of the plot. The element's reaction becomes an almost reliable fact that transcends natural law: in the realm of Gormenghast, the weather consistently replicates major incidents in the life of the castle. Thus, following Mendlesohn's argumentation, the constant pathetic fallacies could be considered instances of the fantastic embedded in the language. While acknowledging that the figurative rhetoric presents pathetic fallacies that mirror the character's emotions, they do not only serve as simple imagery, as the consistent personification of the climate appears to insinuate a preternatural nature.

But the most representative example of the connoted fantastic in the trilogy arguably appears in the descriptions of the castle of Gormenghast. Widely acknowledged as one of the most captivating and enigmatic aspects of the Titus books, Gormenghast plays a major part in the novels, insofar as it can be considered, in Manlove's words, both the "place and society" central to all action (217). Its sheer magnitude dominates the first two books, which makes its disappearance in the third even more striking. Tad Williams observes how its presence seems somehow to be more prominent than that of the protagonists Titus and Steerpike—singularly passive for characters that play the roles of the main hero and his villain (x)—; an opinion that Manlove supports when he believes the castle to be the most important character of the trilogy (217). This fascination with the castle's notable presence may stem from the continuous insinuation of its fantastic nature. Though never explicitly established, the figurative rhetoric constantly suggests a transgression against reality, where the castle is a fictional impossible space separated from the reader's world. In this fantastic realm, Gormenghast is not just the background scenery where the action takes place, but seems to be sentient, possessing the capacity to react and to be affected by the plot's events as much as any other character.

The implication of the fantastic quality of the castle first appears in the instability of its dimensions. Gormenghast's space is not static or clearly defined, but shifts and grows: as Manlove accurately points out, the castle's size seems to increase throughout the trilogy (218). The castle's initial description gives the impression of an average fortress almost engulfed by the Outer Dwellings' houses:

Gormenghast, that is, the main massing of the original stone, taken by itself would have displayed a certain ponderous architectural quality were it possible to have ignored the circumfusion of those mean dwellings that swarmed like an epidemic around its outer walls. (TG 9)

However, when shortly thereafter we meet the kitchen apprentice Steerpike, the castle's interior appears to spread to such a wide extent that it is impossible to navigate. When running away from the Great Kitchen, Steerpike confronts a "labyrinth of stone corridors" (TG 31), so intricate that he is certain he will never be able to find the castle's exit on his own —and indeed, he has to beg the Earl's servant Flay to guide him to freedom. The exterior expands in the same way when Steerpike climbs to the castle's roofs and finds himself in a "stone field" (TG 100), "bigger than a meadow" (TG 122). The landscape acquires a size that can only be described in orographical terms: "he saw spread out before him in mountainous façades a crumbling panorama, a roofscape of Gormenghast, its crags and its stark walls of cliff pocked with nameless windows" (TG 104). Manlove also notes this comparison, as he remarks how the geographical analogies are constant and keep increasing the size of the castle (218): Keda regards an outer wall as a "sheer cliff" (TG 186), but the Eastern Wing "protruded like a narrow peninsula" (TG 158); while Steerpike walks through "this isthmus that joined together one great mass of sprawling masonry to another"(G 209). The castle's expansion continues in the same fashion during the flood that takes place at the end of the second book. Manlove considers that at the time of the inundation the castle reaches its "maximum 'dilation'": "it strikes one as at least twenty miles across and two thousand feet high: even the remote bay of masonry in which Steerpike is trapped is a mile across" (218). At the end of the second book, the final vision of Gormenghast has grown into a huge impossibility: it is not a castle anymore, but a landmass. "

The sheer sea-wall of a continent; a seaboard nibbled with countless coves and bitten deep with shadowy embayments [...] and stark peninsulas of wandering stone - an inexhaustible panorama whose every detail was mirrored in the breathless flood below. (G 403)

The space of Gormenghast, described only through hyperbolic metaphorical terms, gives the final impression of a shifting phantasmagorical vision that cannot possibly exist within the boundaries of reality. Furthermore, the allegedly fabulous measurements do not constitute the sole insinuation of the fantastic nature of the castle,

as we can also take into account its extreme isolation. During the first two volumes, the existence of any civilization besides Gormenghast and its surroundings is persistently and completely negated. Gormenghast appears to exist in an absolute void, with no cultural context or relation with an exterior world: "As in many fairy tales, Gormenghast is a nowhere land, outside our chartered geographical world", writes Le Cam (24). The focus of the action is invariably directed inwards, to what happens inside the castle; and it rejects the possibility of any external influence. The occasions where the inhabitants appear to acknowledge the existence of a world beyond the castle are infrequent and kept in vague terms—from the stone that Prunesquallor gifts Fuchsia that "comes from another land" (TG 134), to the allusion to exotic animals that cannot possibly live in the castle's domains (such as sharks, lions or giraffes). The repudiation of the existence of a world beyond Gormenghast finds its maximum expression in the ominous warning the Countess addresses to Titus when he leaves the castle: "There is nowhere else. You will only tread a circle [...] for everything comes to Gormenghast" (G 409). And—as Winnington points out—it is remarkable how prepared the reader is to believe her ("Burning the Globe" 12).

It is in this context of hyperbolic isolation that we must consider the personification of Gormenghast. The castle is often represented as an extension of its inhabitants, fulfilling the dual role of the symbolic embodiment of the citizen's collective mentality as well as an additional member of the community: "There were always a hundred heads at the windows of the North wing that stared into the sky, into the rain. A hundred figures leant across the sills of the Southern wall, and stared. [...] The East and the West of the Castle watched the rain" (TG 379). The association between the castle and its surroundings, or the castle and its occupants, is often emphasized. Gormenghast is described through the influence that external events exercise on the castle, while its citizens appear to be highly susceptible to its changes:

Autumn returned to Gormenghast like a dark spirit re-entering its stronghold. Its breath could be felt in forgotten corridors, – Gormenghast had itself *become* autumn. Even the denizens of this fastness were its shadows. The crumbling castle, looming among the mists, exhaled the season, and every cold stone breathed it out. (TG 152)

However, Gormenghast's personification is not only associated to the environment or the citizens' behavior. Much as happened before with the weather, the connection

between the castle and major occurrences in the plot often transcends the simple function of anthropomorphized imagery. The depiction of the castle does not only serve as a symbolic manifestation of every disturbance in the inhabitants' daily existence: it also suggests that Gormenghast is very much aware of these happenings. The castle appears to possess a mind of its own, affected by external problems as much as the characters and able to influence them in turn. After the master of Ritual Barquentine is murdered by Steerpike —as the traitor hopes to take his place—, we are told that Gormenghast is invaded by "A kind of lull (...) It was not that events were lacking but that even those of major importance had about them a sense of unreality" (G 270). We soon discover that this atmosphere does not come from the inhabitants' worries, but is inspired by the vigilant castle:

It was as though the castle was recovering from an illness, or was about to have one. It was either lost in a blur of unfocused memory or in the unreality of a disquietening⁴ premonition. The immediacy of the castle's life was missing. There were no sharp edges. No crisp sounds. A veil was over all things, a veil that no-one could tear away. [...]

It was the influence of Gormenghast, for what else could it have been? It was as though the labyrinthian place had woken from its sleep of stone and iron and in drawing breath had left a vacuum, and it was in this vacuum that its puppets moved. (G 271-272)

The implication of a sentient Gormenghast is reinforced by the fact that, as suddenly as the depressing mood appeared, it is also banished by the building: "And then came a time when [...] the castle exhaled and the distances came forward in a rush, and the far away voices grew sharp and close, and the hands became aware of what they were grasping, and Gormenghast became stone again and returned to its sleep" (G 272). Once again the atmosphere is described as the castle's deliberate reaction —"as though [Gormenghast was] satisfied that the course of events is not finally disastrous", Manlove claims (220).

With its uncertain measurements, its extraordinary isolation and its anthropomorphized characterization, the castle of Gormenghast surpasses any semblance of an ordinary building and becomes what can only be considered a fantastic space. It should be noted, though, that this fabulous nature of the castle does not concur with Attebery's concept of the 'impossible', as Gormenghast is never actually confirmed to be a literally expanding, conscious organism. Descriptions of the castle as a labyrinth,

⁴ Neologisms such as "disquietening" or "labyrinthian" are characteristic of Peake's writing.

a mountain or even a continent could be nothing more than hyperbolic comparisons, employed to magnify the castle's presence and create a claustrophobic, enclosed atmosphere; similarly, the continuous personification of the building could be taken as the symbolic embodiment of the community. But the fact is that there is no external point of view to give a more realistic portrayal of Gormenghast. The figurative rhetoric, which always presents the castle in metaphorical terms, provides an imprecise characterization of Gormenghast, and accordingly, the castle's space and essence appears as deeply unreliable. Gormenghast's depiction transgresses the normalcy of a realistic representation and shows a fabulous enormity that actively participates in its inhabitants' life.

To recapitulate, my examples illustrate how the fantastic in Gormenghast exists built into the text, as Mendlesohn argued, even when there is not an explicit transgression of natural law. Furthermore, this analysis could provide an explanation for the search for an allegorical interpretation generally related to the Titus books. The continuous use of figurative language inspires the suspicion of a secondary meaning in the trilogy —the belief that there is "something more" aside from the literal story. However, the suspected allegorical reading can ever be realized, as there is not an additional meaning in the story to gather the multiple symbolic layers. The figurative rhetoric of the trilogy continuously provides a metaphorical dimension: inanimate objects —such as the weather or the castle— are personified, relevant episodes in the character's life are given a heightened significance. However, this symbolism does not point at an allegorical interpretation, but serves the purpose of insinuating the subversion of reality, where Gormenghast becomes a fantastic space.

Through the cases studied in this section, my intention is not only to illustrate Mendlesohn's hypothesis with much-needed examples, but also to combine it with previous criticism —in the hope of uniting what at first sight appeared to be different assumptions. In works such as the Titus books, where their categorization is still a polemical controversy, to explore the common ground between diverse analyses could not only contribute to the discussion about the trilogy's classification, but also to the debate on the limits between genres. For this reason, and following Mendlesohn's steps, my analysis of the Gormenghast series could help to challenge the notion that the 'impossible' features must have delimited boundaries. Thus, this section serves the purpose of exploring a different construction of the fantastic in the Gormenghast series —one that does not make explicit the transgression against reality.

4.2 The Structure of Gormenghast

In *Strategies of Fantasy*, Attebery argues that fantasy typically follows a folktale structure. This does not mean that any narrative with a folktale composition should be considered fantastic—in later works, he clarifies that other genres may also employ patterns similar to that of the folktale ("Structuralism" 83). The difference is that fantasy, more than any other genres, strives to exhibit the basic model of storytelling: "If it were a shirt, the seams would be on the outside", Attebery says ("Structuralism" 83). To determine, therefore, whether the Titus books employ a folktale structure would constitute an additional piece of evidence to ascertain whether the trilogy can be categorized under our modern conception of fantasy.

My analysis is hardly the first to study the influence of the folktale in the Gormenghast series. In "Folkloristic Elements in the Titus Trilogy", David Sutton claims that "Peake achieves unity, integration and continuity by a [...] dependence upon a framework of norms derived from folklore, as expressed in folktales" (8). Regarding its structure, Sutton considers that the trilogy's plot follows the composition of the wondertale proposed by Vladimir Propp in *Morphology of the Folktale*. Sutton provides few examples of the passages that can be interpreted through functions of the folktale:

In Propp's first stage, "The initial situation", which includes the birth of the future hero, we find that he is characteristically a mischievous and disobedient child—like Titus. Similarly, the first appearance of the villain is from the outside (Propp's example is "flies in through the ceiling"). One is reminded of Steerpike's climb over the roofs and unexpected arrival in Fuchsia's attic. Towards the end of Propp's scheme the hero and the villain must fight an elaborate and complicated duel, which, of course, the hero wins. Such a pattern is followed at the end of *Gormenghast*. The last stage is the incognito wanderings of the hero, which end in return and recognition (as in the *Odyssey*). This is the subject-matter of *Titus Alone*. (9)

Sutton's reinterpretation of specific events of the Titus books as Proppian functions sets the basis for establishing a connection between a folktale structure and the Gormenghast series. But to the best of my knowledge, there has been no further attempt to analyze the folktale patterns present in Titus books. Therefore, a thorough exploration of the similarities and differences between Propp's model and the plot of the Gormenghast series would be convenient: not only for the sake of providing a better understanding of the trilogy, but also because it is essential for the analysis of the fantastic features it may exhibit.

Following Sutton's line of argumentation, it could be claimed that the main storyline of the trilogy concurs, to a certain extent, with Propp's folktale structure — specially in what concerns the folktale hero, the young heir Titus Groan, and the villain Steerpike. A possible application of Propp's model⁵ to the Gormenghast series might be as follows:

α) Initial situation. The future hero, Titus, is introduced: Flay informs Rottcodd —the curator of the Hall of the Bright Carvings— that a Groan heir has been born. The importance of such an announcement is emphasized by the fact that, as Flay knows, "the news would be new to no one else" (TG 16), as the rest of the castle is already aware of the birth.

β) Absence of a family member. Although not physically away from the castle, both Titus' parents are absent from his life. His mother sends him away the moment he is born, with the order not to see the child again until he is six. His father, the Earl Sepulchrave, is described as "too proud and too melancholy to unbend and be the father of the boy in anything but fact; he would not cease to isolate himself" (TG 179). Additionally, he dies before Titus is one year old, which Propp qualifies as "an intensified form of absence" (25).

γ) Interdiction addressed to the hero. No interdiction is explicitly made at this point of the story, let alone addressed to the newborn Titus. However, we could consider a type of interdiction the first doctrine of Gormenghast, introduced along with Titus' birth: as Flay shouts to Rottcodd, there must be "No *Change*, Rottcodd. No Change!" (TG 15). Under this light, Titus' birth fulfills Propp's concept of the background "prosperity" that will be challenged throughout the folktale, as Flay celebrates the birth of a male Groan as "challenge to Change" (TG 15).

δ) Violation of the interdiction. If the castle's dogma of "No Change" is accepted as the interdiction, its first major violation would take place during Titus'

⁵ Although Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* has been used as the primary text for the analysis of a folktale structure in the Titus books, the usefulness of the essay "An Outline of Propp's Model for the Study of Fairytales" by Manuel Aguirre must be mentioned. Meant to be read as a complementary reading to *Morphology of the Folktale*, Aguirre proposes significant corrections to the inaccuracies replicated in several editions of Propp's model. The accuracy of the commentaries and concision of the outline makes of the essay a valuable tool when working —as was the case in this study— with first translations of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, which contain inexactitudes that were not corrected until later publications.

Christening, an event which has already been analyzed as Titus' strangely conscious "first recorded act of blasphemy" (TG 91).

ε, ζ) Reconnaissance: the villain arrives and attempts to obtain information; Delivery: the villain receives information about his victim. Here we encounter what could be considered a chronological disruption of the folktale functions. Steerpike's first reconnaissance occurs before Titus' violation of the interdiction —when Titus has just been born and Flay allows Steerpike to watch the Groan family through a spy hole. In the same manner, the following twin function of "Delivery" would have already taken place —as Steerpike overhears that the Groan's heir is particularly hideous. However, curiously enough, Steerpike does not appear again until Titus' Christening is recounted. Only then do we learn the events that took place twelve days before —how Steerpike escaped from Flay climbing the castle's walls. According to Sutton, the reintroduction of Steerpike in the story constitutes his first arrival as a villain (9). Although Steerpike worked in the kitchen, and therefore could be considered part of Gormenghast's community, Sutton argues that his path as antagonist begins when he reenters the building through Fuchsia's attic; which Sutton relates to Propp's argument that a villain might first appear when he "flies down upon a particular setting" (26). From this perspective, the sequential alteration of the narration of these episodes favors, in a manner, the folklore structure, as the hero's violation of the interdiction should take place before the villain appears.

η, θ) Fraud: the villain assumes a disguise in order to deceive the victim; Complicity: the victim is persuaded to help the villain. Steerpike immediately recognizes in Fuchsia "a romantic" (TG 124), and understands that "to win her favour he must talk in her own language" (TG 122). He then proceeds to describe himself as a rebel, a dreamer and an adventurer (TG 123-124). Although Fuchsia is first suspicious, she ends up trusting Steerpike, and agrees to introduce him to doctor Prunesquallor so he can employ Steerpike as a servant. A similar deception is carried shortly thereafter with the twins Cora and Clarice, aunts of Titus, as Steerpike pretends to admire them, then tricks them into burning the library.

A) Act of Villainy. Propp says of this function that it is "exceptionally important, since, by means of it, the actual movement of the folktale is created. [...] The plot is begun by an act of villainy" (29). This description can also be applied to the fire instigated by Steerpike. The burning of the library is the catalyst of

significant alterations in the castle's hierarchy: the loss of his books leads to the madness of the Earl of Gormenghast and his eventual death; while his servant Flay is banished soon afterwards, after trying to punish Steerpike for mocking Sepulchrave's madness. The master of the Ritual Sourdust is murdered in the fire, which favors Steerpike's rise to power when he begins to be trained as the next apprentice (G 129). The fire, in sum, is the first instance of what later will be described as the "intangible suggestion of *change*, that most unforgivable of all heresies" (TG 320), and the misfortunes that will continue during the second book.

a) Lack: one member of the family desires something. According to Propp, not all folktales begin with an act of villainy: a shortage of a vital element also "provokes quests analogous to those in the case of villainy" (32). I would argue that Titus' frequently commented passiveness as a hero may be explained by his engagement in a quest of his own: the search for his personal freedom. Titus' desire to escape his responsibilities controls his actions during the second book and explains his complete disinterest in the main concerns of the rest of the castle —the unmasking and elimination of the villain. Titus' lack does not affect the narrative yet, but ultimately will provoke his flight from Gormenghast at the end of the second volume and the beginning of a new adventure.

B) Mediation: misfortune is made known, the hero is approached with a request or responds to it of his own accord. At this point in the narrative, we have moved onto the second book. The misfortune caused by the villain —the threat to Gormenghast's traditions— begins to be noticed by the castle's inhabitants. The Countess "was not satisfied that the immemorial sense of duty and observance was universally held sacrosanct in the wide network of the castle" (G 18), while she and Prunesquallor note that "There is mischief in the castle. [...] Rebellion" (G 30). This should be the function that, according to Propp, "brings the hero into play" (33) — but such is not the case in the trilogy. Several characters actively attempt to unmask the villain —Gertrude, Prunesquallor, Flay—; however, Titus is never approached with any requirement, nor appears to be concerned about the castle's predicaments. In a similar manner, he will not perform the following function, in which the hero agrees upon counteraction (C).

D, E, F) The hero is tested in preparation for receiving a magical agent or helper; the hero reacts to the actions of the future Donor; the hero receives a magical aid. Perhaps the best character to fulfill the role of the Donor is Flay, the exiled servant, as his help is crucial in exposing Steerpike as a villain. Titus encounters him in one of his frequent escapades, and their conversations could be considered the type of folklore testing in which a polite exchange of information between the hero and the future Donor may result in the Donor's providing a magical agent. In this regard, although Flay cannot be magically summoned nor bestows on Titus any object, by encountering and housing him Titus obtains a helper that protects him and guides him to the object of search. As Flay ponders, "It was his duty to unmask if possible his enemy, for upon so doing hung the safety of the young earl and all he symbolized" (G 289).

G) The hero is transferred, reaches, is led to the whereabouts of an object of search. Flay guides Titus and Prunesquallor to Steerpike and the corpses of Cora and Clarice, first by awakening Titus, then by drawing chalk arrows on the floor.

H) Struggle: the hero and villain join in direct combat. After discovering the place where Steerpike hides, Titus decides that he must be the one to confront him. He and Steerpike fight alone covered by an ivy.

I) Branding: the hero is branded. During the struggle, Steerpike cuts Titus's face. It is later revealed that the slash leaves a mark on his cheek —a "long scar across his face [...] the envy of the castle's youth, the pride of his mother – and his own secret glory" (G 402). This scar does not only fulfill the 'Branding' function, but is also essential for the subsequent function of 'Recognition' (Q), where the hero is recognized for his particular mark.

J, K) Victory: the villain is defeated; The initial misfortune is liquidated. Titus manages to kill Steerpike, and with this, comes the end of the misfortune: "It was as though all that had happened over the last decade, all the violence, the intrigue, [...] had need of rest and that now, with Steerpike dead, the castle was able at last to close its eyes for a while" (G 402). However, this victory only applies to the afflictions caused by Steerpike, and Titus finds that his lack —his yearning for freedom— is still to be resolved. Therefore, he leaves Gormenghast and a new quest begins in the third book.

This is, in essence, my suggestion for an underlying folktale structure in the first two books of the series—one that covers most of the major events of the story.

Of course, it is quickly apparent that the application of a folktale pattern to the overall plot of the trilogy cannot encompass the whole scope of the books. Inevitably, we find that some subsidiary storylines are left out. There is no function that can possibly account for Irma Prunesquallor's search for a husband—a remarkably slow process that includes the presentation of the castle's professors as the pool of suitable candidates, the celebration of the Prunesquallor's ball and Headmaster Bellgrove's courtship. But, as Manlove maintains, "these doings have little or nothing to do with the central persons or events of the castle" (247): in the end, we might consider that these episodes have a minimal impact on the main plot (apart from providing a certain tension or atmosphere). This argument can also be applied to the fight to the death between Braigon and Rantel, Keda's suicide, or even the animosity and final confrontation between the cook Swelter and Flay—events that concern equally secondary characters. More important is perhaps that Titus' frequent escapades from the castle, so determinant in creating his longing for freedom, are also left out of Propp's model—although, as I have argued, they could be regarded as part of the initial situation that precedes the adventure of the third book. But all in all, the analysis performed demonstrates that, in general, the first two Titus novels conform to a folktale pattern. Major events of the plot may be identified with particular functions of the folktale, which in turn follow the expected order of a folktale narration. Therefore, after applying Propp's model to the Gormenghast series in order to back up our claim, it becomes possible to argue that, indeed, the first two novels exhibit a folktale structure.

Regarding the third book of the trilogy, an examination of a possible folktale pattern may encounter more difficulties. At first reading, *Titus Alone*—which deals with Titus' turbulent travels—appears not to follow any organized structure. After leaving Gormenghast, Titus wanders aimlessly, with the sole purpose of getting as far away as possible from the castle. As the novel progresses and he meets more and more people that question the existence of Gormenghast, Titus himself starts to doubt his memories and becomes desperate about finding a way back to his realm. His chaotic descent into uncertainty and distress is documented in abrupt short chapters, along with fragmentary descriptions of the unfamiliar land, haphazard encounters with eccentric locals and the incessant chase of Titus by the law. The result is an irregular narration, which brems with leaps from an unknown place to another and new characters that

disappear after a few paragraphs. As David Louis Edelman says in the 2008 introduction for the book, "Even by the standards of the previous Gormenghast novels (which aren't exactly models of straightforward narrative), *Titus Alone* stands —well, it stands alone" (v).

And yet, the fact that the third novel deals with the travels of Titus provides a certain structured composition for the plot. His whole journey constitutes a complication of the traditional folklore structure: as the defeat of the villain has not solved every misfortune, the hero must embark on yet another quest. The goal of ending the hero's lack provides a frame for the plot, initiated by a departure —in which Titus sets out searching for freedom—; and a corresponding return that closes the narrative —Titus coming back with a greater wisdom than when he left. His tribulations during these travels can be regarded as a series of tests, which Titus, as a hero, must overcome in order to solve his misfortune and come back home.

We may consider the opening sequences for this quest to be placed within the first two books of the series. Titus Groan, the hero, is regarded as the future of his realm —the initial situation (α). His parents are both absent from his life —his mother too self-centered, his father already dead (β). An interdiction is repeatedly addressed to the hero —not to leave the castle, not to instigate change (γ). However, Titus repeatedly violates this interdiction (δ) by leaving the castle to observe the Thing. His fascination with the Thing will eventually inspire in him the desire for freedom, the lack in his life (a). After killing Steerpike, Titus himself decides upon counteraction: he warns his mother that he is leaving the castle (C), and departs (\uparrow).

From that point in the narrative, certain episodes in the plot may be identified with folktale functions that come after the defeat of the villain. The application of Propp's model to *Titus Alone* would result in the following outline:

\uparrow) Departure: the hero leaves home. At the end of the second novel, Titus leaves Gormenghast.

Pr, Rs) Pursuit: the hero is pursued; Rescue: the hero is rescued from pursuit.⁶

The first instance of the pursuit appears in the opening chapters of *Titus Alone*,

⁶ These functions are usually preceded by the function of the 'Return' (\uparrow) of the hero. As Propp explains, "A return often has the character of a flight from someone or something" (30): the pursuit is meant to difficult the journey back home, while the rescue facilitates it. In principle, the function of 'Return' takes place at the end of *Titus Alone* —however, Titus' whole transit through unknown lands may also be

where we meet the two silent, helmeted policemen that will follow Titus everywhere he goes. When an unconscious Titus is about to be captured, a man named Muzzlehatch comes to his aid and takes him away in his car —rescuing Titus for the first time. Soon afterwards, Titus arrives at a party where he is identified as an outsider and pursued. Again, it is Muzzlehatch who hides him from the two guardsmen (a suspicious Titus remarks then that Muzzlehatch is "a shadow-man: a creature who plucks me out of danger" [*Titus Alone* 41]). This chase continues until the end of the novel, when the policemen catch up with Titus at the Farewell party. They will then murder Muzzlehatch —but three beggars that previously pledged their service to Titus kill the helmeted guardsmen, liberating Titus of the pursuit.

D, E, F) The hero is tested in preparation for receiving a magical agent or helper; the hero reacts to the actions of the future Donor; the hero receives a magical aid. After the Pursuit and Rescue of the hero, Propp's model allows for the possibility to replicate the sequence of the testing of the hero and his preparation to obtain a magical agent. With this in mind, all the events that take place at the Under-River could be considered a new battery of tests that prepare Titus for future aid. When the scientists attack Muzzlehatch's zoo —where Titus hides—, Muzzlehatch and Titus escape to the secret passages beneath the river. Down there Titus finds Black Rose, a woman who is held prisoner by a criminal called Veil. Black Rose asks Titus to liberate her, and Titus, with Muzzlehatch's aid, kills Veil and rescues Black Rose —an action which replicates the folktale motif of the hero saving a princess from peril. From this test that Titus overcomes, he obtains the promise of future help. Three beggars —Crackbell, Crabcalf and Slingshot— that have witnessed the fight follow Titus out of the Under-River and swear loyalty to him. This action will provide Titus assistance during his final task.

O) The hero, unrecognized, arrives at another country. Titus wanders through several unnamed cities where nobody has ever heard of Gormenghast: in fact, it is doubted that such a place actually exists. Accordingly, Titus' identity as an Earl of

conceived as part of the process of return, as Titus continuously searches for the way back to Gormenghast. Such an understanding of Titus' journey may serve to explain why the pursuit is not a solitary occurrence, but appears as a long chase that drags on throughout the whole novel.

Gormenghast is continuously questioned, as "That sort of title belongs to another age" (TA 66).⁷

L) A false hero presents unfounded claims. Although there is not a false hero that attempts to usurp Titus' place, the question of impersonation is essential in the Farewell party that Cheeta —Titus' vengeful ex-lover— organizes. With the aid of her scientist father, Cheeta builds a Black House that is a sinister imitation of Gormenghast castle, where several actors pose as Titus' family. It should be noted that, from this point onwards, events that may be identified with particular folktale functions —the task, the recognition of the hero, the exposure and punishment of the villain— are similarly centered around the Farewell party. Therefore these functions do not appear in the form of a chronological sequence, but take place roughly simultaneously. This does not contradict, in principle, Propp's model, as he also provides examples of folktales where several functions may appear conjoined.⁸

M) A difficult task is proposed to the hero. Cheeta, who resents Titus and seeks revenge, asks him not to leave her until a Farewell party is celebrated in his honor. But the event is a trap designed to drive Titus insane, in which actors that impersonate his family repudiate Titus or attempt to convince him that he is already dead. Cheeta's plan is to "bring on the phantoms, and by so doing, derange once and for all the boy's bewildered mind" (TA 186). The task, therefore, takes the form of this Farewell party that Titus must endure.

N) The task is accomplished. Titus manages to overcome the task with the aid of the three vagrants he previously met. While Titus is overwhelmed by the apparition of his family, the beggars whistle on three occasions. The third whistle pulls Titus out of his horrified trance, and when he looks around, he spots the three beggars — which helps Titus regain lucidity. "Their bizarre, outlandish faces fought for his sanity as a doctor fights for the life of his patient. [...] Now he had allies" (TA 192).

Q) The hero is recognized. A minor recognition of sorts takes place during the Farewell party —one that agrees with its corresponding function of 'Branding', as the hero is usually recognized due to a characteristic mark. A frenzied, disoriented Muzzlehatch tells Titus: "You remind me of a friend I used to know. His name was

⁷ Quotations from *Titus Alone* will from now on be indicated as "TA".

⁸ See Propp 65-66.

Titus. [...] He had a scar across his cheekbones" (TA 195). But this function is not completely fulfilled, as Muzzlehatch does not fully recognize Titus until the end of the task, when he declares: "I am suddenly remembering you" (TA 204).

U) The villain is punished. An explosion is heard. Muzzlehatch reveals that he and the three beggars placed explosives in the factory of Cheeta's father, destroying his life's work. Cheeta, on the other hand, finds that she has been humiliated by the failure of her plan, "her dignity departed forever" (TA 203). Both Cheeta and her father flee.

↓) The hero returns. Titus leaves the friends he has made during his journey. After travelling for months, he finds the way back to Gormenghast.

Thus concludes one possible analysis of the folklore structure of the Gormenghast trilogy.

Once again, it is necessary to note that this folktale pattern leaves out significant passages of *Titus Alone*. Some of these omissions can be explained by the same reason why the Prunesquallor's ball is excluded from a folktale composition: which is to say, they mainly concern secondary characters. The folktale, which revolves around the hero, does not account for storylines about other minor figures. As a consequence, subplots such as Muzzlehatch's tribulations —the attack and destruction of his zoo by the scientists, the suicide of his strangely sentient car and his monkey, his death— are not covered by folktale functions. In a similar manner, most of Titus' unconventional encounters with the inhabitants of the foreign lands can be assumed not to fit the folktale pattern. Although these characters provide a remarkable contrast between the unfamiliar new world and the realm of Gormenghast, ultimately they do not affect Titus' journey in any crucial manner. A figure, on the other hand, that could have had a greater presence in the folktale structure is Juno, one of Titus' lovers. In principle, their affair suggests the final function of the 'Wedding' (W): the hero's marriage with a princess of the foreign lands, which would bring the folktale to its conclusion. But at the end of the novel, Titus abandons Juno in order to keep searching for a way back to Gormenghast. Thus, Juno's role as the hero's betrothed cannot be fulfilled, and she is also left out of the folktale pattern.

But all things considered, it can be concluded that *Titus Alone* also displays a folktale composition. Even taking into account its irregular narration, most key episodes

of Titus' journey may be interpreted as folktale functions. At this point in the narrative, thus, a happy ending should be expected. After all, the hero Titus—who could not find satisfaction in the defeat of the villain—departed from home in order to solve his misfortune through another quest. Once Titus decides not to stay in the foreign country, the story must unfold in some way that ensures the uplifting turn that is characteristic of folktales: for instance, with the hero's triumphant return to his homeland, wiser with the knowledge he has acquired during his travels. It is in this context where the unconventional ending of *Titus Alone* must be examined—an ending that Sutton qualifies as "the great exception [...] to the folklore-based pattern" (11).

In the last chapters of the novel, Titus leaves his friends behind and travels alone for several months. One day, he comes across a characteristic boulder he can recognize. Titus remembers the boulder from his childhoods escapades, which makes him realize that he has arrived at Gormenghast grounds. As the existence of Gormenghast has been frequently questioned during his journey—to the point that Titus himself became uncertain—he celebrates the discovery as a testimony of the soundness of his mind:

He knew for very proof that he was in his own domains once more. He was standing on Gormenghast Mountain. [...]

There it lay behind the boulder; the immemorial ritual of his home. [...] There burned the ritual; all he had lost; all he had searched for. The concrete fact of it. The proof of his own sanity and love.

'O God! It's true! It's true! I am not mad! I am not mad!' he cried. (TA 212)

But the boulder that Titus spotted first conceals the sight of the castle. Titus only has to advance a few steps in order to lay his eyes on his ancestral home—to obtain concrete evidence that Gormenghast does not only exist in his imagination. But for no clear reason, he finds himself reluctant to move. In a sudden revelation, Titus decides he does not need to see Gormenghast:

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

There he stood: Titus Groan, and he turned upon his heel so that the great boulder was never seen by him ever again. Nor was the cave: nor was the castle that lay beyond. [...]

With every pace he drew away from Gormenghast Mountain, and from everything that belonged to his home. (TA 212-213)

The closing paragraphs of *Titus Alone* are cause for surprise in multiple reviews. In one textual analysis of the work, Winnington reproduces a letter from Peake's editor Maurice Temple Smith, who writes that the end of the novel is "wholly unexpected" ("On the Editing of *Titus Alone*" 22). Manlove asks wonderingly, "What can this extraordinary conclusion mean?" (255), while Sutton calls it a "heterodox ending" (9). And yet, the definite severance from his ancestral home was always the purpose of Titus' journey. He left Gormenghast with the intention of liberating himself from the ruler role imposed upon him; a goal that he achieves when he outgrows his family's expectations. Why, then, does Titus' independence come across as an unpredicted event?

According to Sutton, the reason why this ending is considered so remarkable is precisely that it subverts the folktale structure that has been followed up until this point. Throughout his travels, Titus was not able to solve the personal misfortune that initiated his quest: that is to say, he could not escape Gormenghast's influence. Until the last stage of his journey, Titus is depicted as someone who misses the home he left behind. Even just before abandoning Juno, Titus still cries in desperation, "O Gormenghast! [...] Don't you see it is the grey towers that I want?" (TA 210). The folktale pattern, which inevitably ends with the resolution of all conflicts, leads readers to expect a satisfactory closure for the story: therefore Titus, who has been unable to find happiness in foreign lands, should come back to Gormenghast so he can find fulfillment there. But this uplifting turn that the folktale narration promises ultimately does not take place. Titus voluntarily refuses to return, and thus, the ending that the folklore structure promises is not fulfilled. As Sutton says,

Titus conforms to the folklore-based pattern by returning to Gormenghast, but then denies our expectations by turning away and rejecting his birthright. We feel here that Peake is self-consciously putting a spoke in the wheel, and diverting the "natural" course of the plot. (11)

In more general terms, the unexpected ending does not only affect the folktale structure, but may also entail significant consequences for the narrative of the whole series. Titus' rejection of one last glance to his ancestral home leaves open the possibility that has been continuously suggested throughout the third book: that Titus

was insane all along, and Gormenghast only existed in his imagination. We must remember that, since Titus first stepped out of the castle, the presence of Gormenghast started to be questioned: it became "no more than a memory now; a slur of the tide, a reverie [...] Something half real, something half dream" (TA 1). Titus may decide that he no longer needs Gormenghast for his development—but he is also refusing to confirm his lifetime memories, the existence of his home and his family, and ultimately, his own personal sanity.

Manlove summarizes the dilemma quite accurately when he talks about the effect that such an ending causes—an ending that he considers "unacceptable, a complete and opaque denial of all that has gone before" (256):

How can we accept this account as one of a final farewell? Titus has doubted Gormenghast once; what stands against his doubting it again? We cannot feel that anything has happened to him that will stop him having to come back repeatedly for the rest of his life. The larger absurdity of the passage still looms. (256)

Indeed, Manlove's analysis brings forth the consequences that the final passage of the book has for the reader. In an unexpected turn, Titus achieves some kind of closure that the reader, who has followed him in all his doubts and hesitations, cannot comprehend. Nothing in the ending of *Titus Alone* encourages us to believe in a place that Titus himself has brought into question. How, then, does the invalidating ending of the third book relate to the previous two, which took place in Gormenghast? What are the consequences that this ultimate negation of the castle has for the fantastic construction of the series?

These are the questions that will be tackled in the last section of our analysis: the reader.

4.3 The Reader and Gormenghast

In previous sections, the Titus books have been analyzed in relation to two of the characteristics that, according to Attebery, are essential for the 'fuzzy set' of the fantasy genre. The examination of these features —'impossible' elements and a folktale structure— has demonstrated that, although their presence in the trilogy can be ascertained, they also subvert the parameters that Attebery established.

It is foreseeable that such a construction of the fantastic, which diverges from what Attebery regards as the defining traits of the fantasy genre, will also have significant consequences on the reader's perception of the ontology created. For we must remember that Attebery's third feature of the fantastic is focused on the reader. Attebery claims that fantasy generates an effect of 'wonder' —a renovated admiration for our reality thanks to the estrangement (or defamiliarization) that fiction provides. However, as has already been argued, the concept of 'wonder' constitutes an end result, an outcome that a fantasy work hopes to instigate. In this work, I am equally interested in exploring the means through which this effect may be caused. For this purpose, Mendlesohn's analysis of the fantastic proves to be a useful starting point. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn argues that a key feature for the construction of the fantastic is how the reader is introduced to the 'impossible' features of a fantasy work. As a result, her work does not only examine how the choice of language affects the construction of the fantastic, but also the degree to which readers participate in the ontology of the world created. In this last section of my study, I will use both theories to analyse the impact that the 'impossible' elements in *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* have on the reader —as well as what the consequences are for the relationship between these two novels and *Titus Alone*.

A recapitulation of the construction of the fantastic in the Titus books would be convenient at this point. In section 3.1 *The Impossible*, I analyzed how, in the case of the Gormenghast trilogy, 'impossible' features —what Mendlesohn denominated *the fantastic*— appear in the form of a heightened symbolism. Through the persistent use of figurative rhetoric, we are encouraged to search for 'something more' beyond the literal meaning of the text. This, in turn, raises our suspicion of a transgression against reality: the metaphorical language makes inanimate elements or characters appear to surpass the boundaries of normalcy. Gormenghast does not feel 'realistic', and thus, the readers are instigated to believe in its fantastic nature.

However, it is necessary to emphasize that, although the presence of 'impossible' features is continuously insinuated, there is no way to confirm whether these elements infringe the ground-rules of our reality or not. And without textual confirmation, any element that seems fantastic before our eyes could have a rational explanation. For instance, there is a persistent insinuation of the consciousness of the castle—but as no character ever acknowledges it, we cannot verify its awareness. Countess Gertrude appears to possess a preternatural command of cats and birds—but we ignore whether they are simply trained. We readers can only assume that Gormenghast's peculiarities must have a fantastic source, but we do not possess enough evidence to prove it.

The ambiguous state of 'impossible' features in Gormenghast comes close to Tzvetan Todorov's understanding of the fantastic as *hesitation*. Todorov argues that the fantastic (*fantastique* in the original French version) is characterized by uncertainty. According to Todorov, fantastic texts feature an apparently supernatural or magical event, but neither the fictional protagonist nor the reader can ascertain whether it is indeed caused by preternatural forces or whether there is a logical, rational explanation that justifies the strange happenings. The *fantastique* consists in the uncertainty that stems from the impossibility of choosing one of these interpretations. If the text finally provides a logical explanation for what appeared to be an impossible event, the work is categorized as what Todorov designated as Uncanny. If, on the contrary, there are in fact magical or supernatural forces acting, the text falls into the realm of the Marvellous. The work can only be described as *fantastique* when both options are maintained and the uncertainty of which one is the correct is never resolved.

But Todorov's definition, in its strictest sense, could not be applied to the fantastic featured in the first two Titus books. The mere presence of Gormenghast castle—the bizarre titanic, self-contained realm—situates the events of *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* in a world apart from the reader's reality. In this fictional universe, we are no longer able to assume that the ground-rules of what we consider natural still apply. As Mendlesohn remarks, in Peake's novels—and works with a similar construction of the fantastic—: "magic, or at least the possibility of magic, is part of the consensus reality; a position rather different from, but not in conflict with, Todorov's more specific interests" (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* xxiii). Therefore, it is not a case of whether Gormenghast is fantastic or not—but *to what extent* it is fantastic.

And yet, Mendlesohn argues that Gormenghast's construction of the fantastic shares with Todorov's concept of hesitation significant defining traits. In Mendlesohn's

view, both depend on what she humorously denominates the *knowingness* —or the dialogue between author and reader (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* 183). As in Todorov's hesitation, the dubious fantastic essence of Gormenghast is maintained on the amount of information that the reader is given. We are not able to determine the presence of 'impossible' elements in Gormenghast due to the fact that we lack the context necessary to confirm —or deny— their existence.

The idea of the *knowingness* —or the context we are provided with about the fictional realm of Gormenghast— gains even more importance when considering the relationship that the first two novels have with the third book. When Titus abandons his ancestral home, the readers are subjected to the collision between two worlds that exist in complete independence of each other. It quickly becomes apparent that the reason why we cannot bridge the two realities presented is that we lack the context necessary to unite them. When foreigners vocalize their complete skepticism that a place such as Gormenghast can exist, they raise a series of questions that we are incapable of answering (Where exactly is Gormenghast castle? Why has nobody ever heard of it?) In *Titus Alone*, the limited information that we possess does not only affect our understanding about the nature of Gormenghast —it concerns its very existence.

Titus is the only connection with Gormenghast that we have left —but he soon becomes an unreliable source even for himself. After losing the stone he carried from the Tower of Flints, Titus begins to question not only the existence of the castle to the same extent as we do, but his own sanity as well. "I have nothing else to prove where I come from, or that I ever had a native land", he says to Muzzlehatch. "I have nothing to hold in my hand. Nothing to convince myself that it is not a dream" (TA 82). Without the reassurance that Titus provided, the reader loses the only actual evidence of Gormenghast's reality that the third book featured.

The controversial contraposition of these two realms is best summarized in Grzegorz Buczyński's analysis of what he regards as a "problem of inconsistency" in the Titus books: "The existence of the world in *Titus Alone* contradicts the existence of the world of the first two books", he writes.

One of the two worlds is either a vision of a dreamer/madman [...] (and therefore having no 'real' existence) or [a world] not existing in the same spacetime continuum or plane of reality as the other one, but equally 'real.' What the two possibilities have in common is that the worlds in question are effectively separated. (129)

The ontological nature of the confrontation described by Buczyński brings me to suggest that the relationship between these two worlds may be better understood through a postmodernist analysis. Although I am aware of the multiple ramifications of the term 'Postmodernism', in this work I am strictly referring to the definition that Brian McHale employs in his work *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), for it is relevant in the discussion about the destabilization of fictional worlds. McHale produces his own construction of the term 'Postmodernism', which consists in the shift from a Modernist epistemological dominant in favour of an ontological one. Thus, McHale argues that Postmodernist fiction is concerned, first and foremost, with ontological queries such as "What is a world? What kinds of world are there? [...] What happens when different kinds of world are placed in confrontation, or when boundaries between worlds are violated?" (10). One may see how these questions become pertinent when compared to the ones that Titus poses when he first glimpses the industrialized city of glass, so different from the ancestral castle of his Earldom, and wonders about the line of demarcations that this new reality may share with Gormenghast:

Were they coeval; were they simultaneous? These worlds; these realms - could they *both* be true? Were there no bridges? Was there no common land? [...] Where lay the long horizons? Where throbbed the frontiers? (TA 21)

McHale himself draws a parallel between postmodernist fiction and the fantasy genre when he states that both share an ontological dominant (74). He then proceeds to analyze several Postmodernist strategies that, in the context of a fantasy work, may give cause to question the foundations of the world presented —several of which may be found in the construction of the fantastic of the Titus books.

For instance, the ambiguity of the 'impossible' elements of Gormenghast may be identified with what McHale calls the *displaced fantastic*, which takes place when a text vacillates between an allegorical and a literal interpretation. According to McHale, a text can be the source of ontological scandal when it hints at a figurative interpretation that is not resolved, as it "hesitate[s] between the representation of a world and the anti-representational foregrounding of language *for its own sake*" (82-83). One may be reminded of Mills' argument of the "untenable allegorical rendering" (63) of the Titus books, that maintained a metaphorical promise that was not fulfilled.

Similarly, McHale observes the importance of what he calls the *banality* of the fantastic—in the sense that characters may approach evidently preternatural elements with an unconcerned attitude, which provokes the reader's surprise. This is also one approach to the fantastic that has been related to the Gormenghast trilogy before: Mendlesohn remarks that, in the Titus books, readers are intended to be amazed by the characters' acceptance of what we consider anomalous features. "The lives of the castles' inhabitants are fabulous in our eyes but not theirs", she says (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* 190). The purpose of this banality is, as McHale argues, to emphasize "the confrontation between the normal and paranormal" (77)—but it also leads to another postmodernist strategy called *resistance*. Readers, says McHale, are meant to feel an inherent opposition against the characters' nonchalant attitude about what we perceive unnatural. Which may remind us of Manlove's reticence toward certain indications of elements that transgressed normalcy—such as the sudden rainbow which he qualified of "too much to take"; or an infant Titus exhibiting a perceptiveness that "the reader simply cannot accept" (235).

The Postmodernist techniques outlined are, of course, not enough to fully destabilize the ontology of Gormenghast throughout the first and second novels. On the contrary, during *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, the solidity of the fictional universe cannot be doubted. The claustrophobic setting completely engulfs the characters—and, by extension, the readers—to the point that it becomes difficult to conceive that anything can exist outside the castle: as Countess Gertrude affirms, "There is nowhere else [...] For everything comes to Gormenghast" (G 409). But the Postmodernist strategies do become a crucial element for the concept of the 'knowingness'—that is to say, in the conversation between reader and author. They mean to incite the confrontation between the ontological world and the reader, so the reader never completely accepts the fictional world created. As we are not given the keys to understand the realm of Gormenghast, we are prevented from fully comprehending its ontology

This result is, to some extent, something that has been pointed out by Mendlesohn when she analyzes the means by which the reader is ushered into the fantastic. She also remarks the importance of McHale's notion of the banality, as it is necessary for establishing a "form of fantasy which estranges the reader from the fantastic" (*Rhetorics of Fantasy* 184). But at least one of the intentions of this analysis is to emphasize that, in a work such as the Gormenghast trilogy, the estrangement of the reader can—and in

fact does— lead to a certain level of ontological hesitation. Once Titus abandons his Earldom, our knowledge of Gormenghast cannot depend on the textual information we were given, because the context intended for us to be left out of the ontology. We were never meant to fully comprehend the world of Gormenghast, and as a consequence, a certain level of doubt is always present in our understanding of its ontology. That is why, in *Titus Alone*, the reader cannot but be caught up in the foreigners' mistrust and put into question the existence of Titus' realm. If we could never fully comprehend the nature of Gormenghast, we wonder, how much more do we ignore? Was the castle part of a lie, a dream, a separate fairy-tale world all along? Is Titus a madman, or did he imagine his whole past? Thus the third book deconstructs the reality that the previous two novels presented, making us question the ontology of the fictional world created.

This ontological hesitation also emphasizes the importance that the subversive ending of *Titus Alone* has for readers. As we are meant to doubt the textual evidence provided, we can only depend on *metafictional* information—which is to say, our knowledge about the folktale structure. Our expectations about the folktale pattern that has been fulfilled to this point make us assume that Titus will inevitably come back to Gormenghast. Titus' return, in this case, acquires a greater significance, as it does not only constitute the confirmation of his sanity or the end of his personal quest: it will bring to an end the ontological destabilization that pervades the third novel. However, Titus does not come back. In yet another gesture that estranges the reader, Titus finds a personal fulfillment that the reader cannot share nor comprehend.

One last question remains to be answered, which is whether the trilogy fulfills Attebery's last feature: to produce wonder on the reader. It could be argued that the subversive ending of the third novel thwarts, to a certain point, this effect. The resolution of all conflicts was not delivered, and thus, the reader could not achieve the satisfaction that 'eucatastrophe' brings. But, on the other hand, we may take into account Young's final view on the fantastic categorization of the trilogy, as he defends their potential to renovate, through the distance that fiction provides, our interest in our reality. "The Titus books [...] tell [a story] of an imaginary place that works on motivating principles fundamentally different from those of our world and, when viewed by a pair of normal relatable human beings, highlights a penetrating critique of reality", he says. "This is precisely what Tolkien argues that fantasy does" (59). In the end, the Titus books give us, through the subversion of our expectations, a new

approach not only to recognizable patterns, but to fiction itself. And that, I would say, can indeed incite our sense of wonder for our own reality.

5. CONCLUSION

This study began by posing a single question: can the Gormenghast trilogy be considered part of the fantasy genre? The answer, it seems, may not only concern the trilogy analyzed in this study, but also the fantasy genre—and our conception of it.

The characteristics I chose for my methodology are the result of several works that recognized the value of regarding the fantasy genre as a 'fuzzy set'. The features central to the 'fuzzy set'—the 'impossible', the structure and the reader—, though having been proposed almost twenty years ago, have been proven to be still relevant for our modern conception of the fantasy genre, as they are still discussed and used in recent criticism. But when these three characteristics are applied to a work such as the Titus books—which precede the conventions that originated the genre as we know it—, we find that, although they can be found present to a certain extent, they also constitute a subversion of the parameters that this study originally proposed.

The traits I have analyzed in the Titus books diverge quite significantly from the characteristics that Attebery deemed essential for a work to belong to the fantasy genre. The 'impossible' is not clearly established, the folktale structure is compromised; as a result, the reader is moved to question the ontology presented. The simple answer to the original question, thus, would be to conclude that the work can be considered fantasy *only* to a certain point. The Gormenghast trilogy does not fit the criteria of what Attebery regarded as the center of the 'fuzzy set' of fantasy, so it can only be present in its margins—and from then on, its categorization depends "on one's interests" (*Strategies of Fantasy* 12). It becomes a case of personal opinion, where we may consider Gormenghast fantastic enough depending on our particular purposes.

But perhaps a better conclusion for this analysis would be the recommendation not to become fixated on whether a work fits the modern definition of fantasy or not. As a relatively young genre, the definition of fantasy is still subject to debate. The analysis of the fantastic elements in a work such as the Titus books, widely considered an early fantastic work, prompts an exploration of the boundaries of the fantasy genre itself. Starting from what we now consider general characteristics of the fantastic, we are more able to determine the areas that are not covered by them. Fantasy may deal, first and foremost, with the 'impossible'—but the 'impossible', rather than a thin line to cross, may be considered an ever-expanding threshold. Fantasy may inherit from folktales a particular structure—but this composition may be twisted to the point that it becomes

more recognizable due to its subversion. And most importantly, fantasy may seek to inspire a renovated sense of wonder through the fixed patterns that we recognize. But ultimately fantasy, as a deeply self-conscious genre, may play with our expectations so even fixed patterns may surprise us.

Attebery is right when he talks about the fantasy tradition that we have inherited from Tolkien. But Tolkien's work does not constitute the only method to create fantasy—only, perhaps, the better-known formula. As Mendlesohn writes, "we have [...] to consider the heart of the "fuzzy set" as not where the *ultimate* in fantasy resides, but where our recognition of the fantastic begins" ("Peake and the Fuzzy Set of Fantasy" 1). Fantasy may encompass more than what Tolkien established; and the persistent categorization of the Titus books as fantasy demonstrates that, even when the formula changes, we are still able to identify their fantastic component. This study, then, becomes an additional piece of evidence to explore the boundaries of our conception of the fantasy genre and contribute to its expansion and evolution, so that we do not need to make explicit the presence of the fantastic to recognize it as such. So that we do not need to see the castle breathing to know that, as Titus before us, we have abandoned our world.

When he came to the Tower of Flints his mare was waiting. He mounted, shook the reins,
and moved away at once through the inky shadows that lay beneath the walls.

After a long while he came out into the brilliant light of the hunter's moon and sometime later he realized that unless he turned about in his saddle there was no cause for him to see his home again. At his back the castle climbed into the night. Before him there was spread a great terrain.

He brushed a few strands of hair away from his eyes, and jogged the grey mare to a trot and
then into a canter, and finally with a moonlit wilderness before him, to a gallop.

And so, exulting as the moonlit rocks fled by him, exulting as the tears streamed over his face -
with his eyes fixed excitedly upon the blurred horizon and the battering of the hoof-beats loud,
Titus rode out of his world.

(*Gormenghast* 409)

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