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Making Sense in Isolation: From Wonderland to Gormenghast

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Introduction

This paper rests on a comparison between two major diptychs of British literature: *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll[1] on the one hand, and *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* by Mervyn Peake[2] on the other. For the sake of concision, I shall refer to them respectively as "The Alice Books" and "The Titus Books," after the names of their main protagonists.

Such a comparison might appear perilous at first. Admittedly, the two works are quite different, in terms of length (Peake's is a sprawling epic spanning more than a thousand pages, while Carroll's is closer to a novella) as well as in terms of tone (for one is a sunny and ultimately harmless adventure, while the other abounds in grim images and violent deaths). These differences reflect discrepancies in terms of dates and contexts of creation: Charles Dodgson–Carroll's real name–was a Victorian gentleman, deeply religious, who loved to tell stories to children. According to legend, he spun the first version of his tale during a boat trip with three little girls whom he sought to entertain; conversely, *Titus Groan* was written intermittently during Peake's involvement in the Second World War, while *Gormenghast* followed his discovery of the concentration camps as a war artist. Even the personalities of the authors seem to be at odds, for Dodgson is described by his relatives as a quaint mathematics teacher who never married and rarely left Oxfordshire, while Peake was a painter by trade, who was born in a missionary enclave in China and adopted a bohemian lifestyle with his wife Maeve Gilmore and their several children.[3]

Beyond these differences, however, there are also many similarities to be found between the two works. Both belong to the realm of fantasy, and resort to nonsense in order to create a deeply idiosyncratic universe which possesses its own logic and consistency even though it does

[1] All references in this article are to *The Annotated Alice,* the authoritative collection edited by Martin Gardner.
[2] There is a third book featuring the character of Titus Groan, entitled *Titus Alone*. However, the three books can hardly be regarded as a trilogy insofar as they do not correspond to Peake's initial plan. His intention was to write a tetralogy, with the first two books (*Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*) taking place within the castle, and the rest dealing with Titus' subsequent wanderings. Peake, however, was diagnosed with early Parkinson's disease, and was unable to complete the second diptych. *Titus Alone* was released after his death, based on heavily edited drafts.
[3] For a more detailed account of Dodgson's life, see Lennon, *The Life of Lewis Carroll*, and Collingwood, *The Life and Letters of Lewis Carroll*. For Peake, see Watney, *Mervyn Peake*, as well as Gilmore and Peake, *Two Lives*.

not abide by the laws of the "real" world (which Tolkien, perhaps more appropriately, terms the "Primary World" throughout his essay "On Fairy Stories"). Gormenghast is a massive, stranded, maze-like castle, home to the family of Groan. The life of its quirky inhabitants is governed by strange rules whose meaning is long forgotten, and the narrative is centered on the heir to the earldom, Titus Groan, as he discovers the world around him. Similarly, the Alice books abound in odd creatures, and Wonderland itself seems to be built on a reversal of common-sense rules; Alice, an outsider to this world, serves as a focalizer for most of the narrative, so that the reader often shares her astonishment.

There is evidence that Peake knew and loved Carroll's stories, which may have served as inspiration for the Titus books. Peake, who was a draughtsman by trade and termed himself "a painter first and foremost" (quoted in Moore 49), was commissioned after the Second World War to illustrate *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* for a Swedish publisher, Zephyr. Both this book and *Titus Groan* were published in 1946, suggesting that Peake must have been drawing the illustrations while finishing his manuscript, thus supporting the possible influence of one upon the other. On that topic, one critic testifies that "with the Lewis Carroll [...] texts Peake [as illustrator] was familiar and happy" (Batchelor 32). Finally, Peake wrote a piece in praise of Alice and Carroll's mastery of nonsense for the *Mervyn Peake Review:*

> In Alice there is no horror. There is only a certain kind of madness, or nonsense–a very different thing. Madness can be lovely when it's the madness of the imagination and not the madness of psychology. [...] Hundreds of books are published year after year. Good sense in many of them: bad sense in many more–but non-sense, oh no, that's rarity, a revelation and an art worth all the rest. ("Alice and Tenniel" 22)

Despite these hints, Peake never explicitly discussed Carroll's influence on his writings, which is perhaps why very few critics, to this day, have engaged in comparative analysis of the two authors. One notable exception would be Edmund Little, who devotes a chapter to each writer in his book *The Fantasts*, where he focuses on the different ways that an author can build an imaginary world, and provide it with self-consistency within its own boundaries. Little analyses the books as narratives whose structure rests on their isolation from the outside world; therefore, even though he never uses the word, he views Wonderland and Gormenghast as fictional enclaves.

In this paper, I shall elaborate on the importance of insularity and of the enclave as an organizing structure for the narrative. I shall begin by dealing with the worlds themselves, insofar as they are depicted as airtight spaces, and explicitly isolated from the "outside" (the upper, "real" world in Alice's case, and the world beyond the Mud Dwellings in Titus's). Then I shall move to the isolation of the individual; indeed, the people of these enclaves seem to lack the ability to relate to each other in a positive manner, and in this sense they are emotionally

and psychologically stranded. Finally, I shall discuss the possibility of going beyond these different forms of imprisonment by leaving the enclave.

A picturesque, idiosyncratic world

Wonderland and Gormenghast are not mere settings for the action to unravel; as places, their importance is assessed in the very titles of the works, and they are just as prominent and distinctive as the characters who inhabit them. What sets these locations apart is their own particular set of rules; upon entering them, the reader has to put aside her knowledge of the real world and accept that these places function differently. Here we find the trace of the "suspension of disbelief" which Tolkien (borrowing, of course, from Coleridge), considers as the root of fantasy. Interestingly, Tolkien explicitly excludes stories which use "the machinery of dream" (Tolkien 45): for him, the Alice books would not qualify as fantasy, while Peake's work would probably seem too inconsistent, since, as Broghan puts it, "Middle Earth was created to assist philology; Gormenghast to help an artist" (Broghan 11).

This begs the question of generic categorization, which has been amply debated regarding each of the books under study. As for Peake's work, Alice Mills is quite comprehensive in her statement that "Much critical ingenuity has been devoted to classifying *Titus Groan* (along with its sequel, *Gormenghast*) within one genre or several: the postmodern, the Bildungsroman, tragedy, romance, fantasy, the Romantic, allegory, the Gothic, the post-colonial, and more" (Mills 4). Conversely, the generic hybridity of the Alice books has been analysed by Henkle: "Critics in nineteenth-century England had a special term for fiction like Lewis Carroll's Alice books that did not fit into the customary formal definitions of the novel. They were 'sports'–that is, oddities, or hybrids of accepted generic formulas" (Henkle 89). Both books therefore, share a sense of generic confusion which accentuates their kinship.

This hybridity is reinforced in the very form of the works by the addition of images to the main texts. Both Peake and Carroll felt the need to complement their manuscripts with illustrations, which bore a sort of documentary value. Peake thus wrote to his publisher:

> I have thought of it all along as illustrated–in fact I have left out descriptions which I would otherwise have inserted had I not decided I could be more graphic with a drawing. I plan a portrait gallery of the main characters at the beginning of the book giving front face & profile, so that the reader can refer back. Maps, diagrams & drawing of the action etc. (quoted in Winnington 36)

Sadly, Peake's publisher thought illustrations would be detrimental to sales, and vetoed the suggestion. But although Peake was never able to produce the systematic set of illustrations he had intended, most modern editions of his work feature sketches from his manuscript. Peake's

drawings set off the eccentric and almost grotesque appearance of most of the cast, and it is easy to draw a parallel between these illustrations and the ones he made to accompany Carroll's narrative. The character of Fuchsia, in particular, has been thought by some to resemble Peake's depiction of Alice, and Brian Sibley, for example, suggests a likeness between the two girls: for him, the Alice of Peake's illustrations "has, like Lady Fuchsia, the haunted air of a primitive adventuress in search of the forbidden fruit of logical illogicalities" (Sibley 25).

Carroll, whose draughtsmanship was nowhere as developed as Peake's, nonetheless illustrated the handwritten book entitled *Alice's Adventures Underground*, which constitutes a preliminary version of the text of *Alice in Wonderland*. This book was crafted as a gift to Alice Liddell, the child friend who inspired her fictional counterpart. However, when Carroll decided to publish the book under a new title, he entrusted Sir John Tenniel (and the Dalziel brothers) to produce new illustrations. Carroll was very involved in the process, and the artists worked under his close supervision; this sets off the importance of the illustrations as part and parcel of the work. Once again, images in *Alice* take on a mock-documentary value, especially since the text directly mentions the visual support: "If you don't know what a gryphon is, look at the picture." (*Annotated Alice* 124) Therefore, I would argue that the addition of drawings to text creates an effect of reality which sets off the consistency of these worlds, in spite of their oddity.

At first sight, the rules that govern them may appear random and dreamlike. Of course, Wonderland is explicitly reassessed as a dreamscape at the end of the narrative, when Alice wakes up. But even before that, the narrative feels like a dream; in other words, "the technical triumph of the two books consists in having made what is finally declared to be a dream actually and always *seem* to be a dream" (De La Mare 63). Things are in a state of constant flux, and causality no longer determines events. For example, solutions to inextricable problems tend to appear magically, as is the case for the bottle labelled "Drink me", "which certainly wasn't there before" (*Annotated Alice* 30). By contrast, Gormenghast is not explicitly framed as a dream; still, many unexpected events occasionally give a surreal feeling to the narrative. For instance, when Titus escapes the castle, the intensity of his freedom is made manifest through the fact that he becomes light as air and flies (*Gormenghast* 131). Because of internal focalisation, it is not entirely clear whether this event is actually taking place or whether Titus is hallucinating, and the reader is left to wonder about the status of the narrative.

Titus is not an isolated case: in Gormenghast, many characters seem to drift off into their inner worlds, so that the reality of the world around them becomes questionable: "Perhaps *the whole thing was a dream*" (*Titus Groan* 339); "Flay began to lose contact with the reality of what he saw and *his brain to drift into a dream*" (*Titus Groan* 210); "Perhaps, thought Keda, this is reality and *my past life has been a meaningless dream"* (*Titus Groan* 235, my italics in all three cases). Because of this eerie atmosphere, the blurb of the first edition devised by Peake

read: “The life of Titus Groan. It is, and it is not, a dream” (quoted in Bellotte 23). Both narratives, therefore, have the consistency of dream logic; nothing is surprising as long as one remains in the dream.

Both enclaves are further characterized by their inability to progress in time. In Gormenghast, all characters must abide by the rules of the Ritual, an endless collection of mysterious ceremonies during which members of the family of Groan perform symbolic gestures. The meaning of those gestures, however, has been forgotten since time immemorial; consequently, the Ritual is a detaining force which binds people while failing to provide them with a sense of purpose. Celebrations are repeated over and over without any sense of progress. In Wonderland, time is *literally* frozen since an altercation between the March Hare and Time itself; “It's always six o'clock now” (*Annotated Alice* 99).

Interestingly, both books feature some characters for whom time is not unidirectional. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, the memories of Queens “works both ways” (*Annotated Alice* 247), so that they can remember events which have not happened yet. Similarly, in the Titus books, the narrator wonders: “who can tell in which direction the minds of phantoms move?” (*Gormenghast* 10). In both books, therefore, the past does exist; but time remains circular nonetheless. Only the intrusion of the child into the world can trigger linear time, setting events into motion by virtue of his or her otherness.

If the rules governing time are different within the enclaves of Wonderland and Gormenghast, space is also substantially altered. Geography is abolished: the reader is left with a series of carefully framed scenes or *tableaux vivants*, as Gattégno terms them (212), and very little sense of the connections between places. Finding one's bearings becomes a vital issue, for Alice is lost during most of her journey, and tries desperately to reach the Garden of Live Flowers. In *Through the Looking-Glass*, she can become Queen once she understands how the chessboard works; making sense of this dreamlike environment is the key to mastering it. Similarly, Steerpike, the villain of the Titus books, builds his power through a cunning use of space: he knows the castle better than anyone, and turns a number of forgotten rooms into hiding places from which he can plot and spy on others. Titus, on the contrary, has to explore the castle quite thoroughly before he can hope to make sense out of it.

The inability to find one's way through a hostile environment results in a feeling of alienation on the part of the characters. Alice often voices her loneliness: “I am so *very* tired of being all alone here!” (*Annotated Alice* 39). When with others, she is repeatedly treated as a misfit or a potential threat–she is mistaken for a serpent by the Pigeon, who is convinced that she is going to eat its eggs (*Annotated Alice* 76), and explicitly called a monster by the Unicorn (*Annotated Alice* 287). Furthermore, the narrative contains a number of grim jokes at the expense of Alice

which reinforce the underlying hostility of Wonderland. The first of them occurs during Alice's fall: "'After such a fall as this, I shall think nothing of tumbling down stairs! … Why, I wouldn't say anything about it, even if I fell off the top of the house!' (which was very likely true.)" (*Annotated Alice* 27, ellipsis in original). The narrator's parenthesis emphasizes the deadly threat of which Alice is unaware. In Gormenghast, Titus's environment is just as emotionally adverse: he is a neglected child brought up away from his parents. His mother sees him once a year, while his father is "too proud and too melancholy to unbend and be the father of the boy in anything but fact" (*Titus Groan* 230). Over the course of the narrative, Titus does manage to develop different types of love–for his mentor Flay, his sister Fuchsia, or his lover the Thing–but all the objects of his love are successively taken from him by murder or accident, leaving him emotionally stranded.

Individual isolation, madness, and nonsense

At first sight, it seems that the only way one can belong in this hostile environment is by forsaking one's individuality. Indeed, one of the very few creatures who behave in an unambiguously friendly manner towards Alice[4] is the Fawn from the Wood where Things have no names (*Annotated Alice* 227). As soon as she leaves the Wood, however, the Fawn realizes that she is human and thus flees in terror. In other words, the only way Alice can interact with others at this point is by forsaking her identity. The same goes for Fuchsia, Titus's older sister, a moody and creative adolescent who resents the traditions of Gormenghast at first, but eventually embraces her lineage after a series of misfortunes. As she finally accepts her place into this world, she is "no longer free, no longer Fuchsia, but of the blood" (*Titus Groan* 459). This passage resonates strongly with a poem written earlier by the young girl, which stated "I am Fuchsia. I must always be. I am me. Don't be frightened. Wait and see" (*Titus Groan* 147). For Fuchsia, the only way to belong in Gormenghast is to forsake her identity and submit to its law. In the narrative, her individual trajectory serves as a tragic foil for Titus' own decisions, prompting him to act on his longing for freedom.

Because identity is questioned, the boundaries of humanity become unclear, and inanimate objects take on certain traits that are typical of humanity. In Carroll's work, humanization is literal: many objects are endowed with life, like the Deck of Cards, the Chess Pieces, or even the Pudding. The same goes for animals, who display many human traits, while Alice seems to be in doubt as to who or what she really is; to the Pigeon, she answers "rather doubtfully" that she is a human child (*Annotated Alice* 76). This echoes an earlier statement of hers: "I can't explain myself, I'm afraid, Sir [...] because I'm not myself, you see" (*Annotated Alice* 67). In

[4] The other friendly character is of course the old and eccentric White Knight, a thinly-veiled projection of Carroll himself who helps Alice out in *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Peake's work, the boundaries between the animate and the inanimate are equally problematic, even though the text often resorts to metaphor and comparison rather than literal assimilation. For example, Titus's feckless aunts stare at people "more in the manner of a wall staring at a man than a man staring at a wall" (*Titus Groan* 216), while each tree has "a personality in its own right" (*Titus Groan* 99). This blurring of humanity resonates with the loss of interpersonal relations. The servant of the Groan Family, after he has been banished, feels "the isolation of a severed hand" (*Titus Groan* 414), and dismemberment or mutilation becomes a recurrent motif as well as a constant threat. In Wonderland, beheading is of course a favourite ("Off with her head," the Queen repeats), signifying the absolute impossibility to relate to others.

The grim threat of dismemberment and the loss of logical bearings even lead to the suspicion of madness, in the sense that "madness" commonly refers to a lack of correspondence between the self and the external environment, or to a split in personality. As is well known, the Hatter and the March Hare are both named after expressions denoting lunacy; hatters were though to go mad because of the mercury they employed in their trade, while hares usually jump about crazily at the start of their breeding season, in March. In the Titus Books, various psychiatric illnesses are featured, from severe depression (Fuchsia) to dissociative disorder (Titus' father, who responds to a traumatic event by thinking he is an owl), which of course makes for a much more subtle painting of mental disorder than the feisty creatures of Wonderland. Because of this, both books have been interpreted as pathologically deviant. As regards *Alice in Wonderland*, Martin Grotjahn, for example, writes that "what begins as a rediscovery of an old childhood enjoyment [...] becomes later a world of its own... The process resembles a psychotic break" (251).

What is regarded as madness by some would be mere eccentricity to others. Peake himself argues that refusing to abide by the norm is on the contrary an efficient way to fend off insanity. He quotes the example of the Countess of Groan, a larger-than-life character who does not care for social conventions, talks to animals and is constantly followed around by fifty snow-white cats: "If she hadn't allowed herself to have all these cats, she would become neurotic [...] That's why people are neurotic, 'cos they're frightened of going down the street with fifty cats following them" (Peake, "The Reader Takes Over" 12). Indeed, the Countess is the one character who eventually rises up to oversee the manhunt against Steerpike, the villain of the story, thus proving her extreme efficiency.

Carroll similarly defended himself by explaining that what is interpreted as "madness" is in fact a stylistic device consistent with the dream-frame of the narrative: "When we are dreaming

and, as so often happens, have a dim consciousness of the fact and try to wake, do we not say and do things which in waking life would be insane?" (quoted in Little 39).

Eccentricity thus becomes a poetic principle, and what is at stake is less the madness of the authors than the specific brand of literary eccentricity called nonsense. Here, it is necessary to quote from Elizabeth Sewell's seminal analysis of nonsense. She gives the following definition: "Nonsense is not merely the denial of sense [...] but is on the contrary a carefully limited world, controlled and directed by reason, a construction subject to its own laws." (Sewell 5) In other words, nonsense depends on the careful delineation of an enclosed space within which words become playthings. To do so, nonsense evacuates polysemy and abstraction. It creates an area of absolute control, where only the logical structure remains. A very telling example would be Carroll's famous nonsense poem "Jabberwocky," which appears in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*:

> Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
> Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
> All mimsy were the borogoves,
> And the mome raths outgrabe. (191)

If we focus only on the grammatical aspects of this first stanza, the English used seems perfectly correct: even though the words are empty of meaning, their nature and function remain unequivocal. "Slithy" and "mimsy," for example, can be interpreted as adjectives because of the -y ending (after "slimy", "flimsy" etc.) and because they are associated with nouns–and we know that "toves" and "borogoves" are nouns thanks to the final -s which indicates plural forms. This -s cannot be a verbal third person because there is already a verb in each expression ("gyre and gimble," whose verbal nature is made explicit by the expletive use of "did," and "were," which attributes the adjective "mimsy" to the noun "borogoves"). The logical structure of language is therefore intact, and the fun comes from the invention that is made possible within that structure. The same strategy goes for parodies of nursery rhymes like "Twinkle Twinkle little Bat / How I wonder what you're at!" (*Annotated Alice* 98): the important thing is that the rhyme and rhythm of the poem are preserved. The semantic value of "bat" and "you're at" is not important in itself. This is why Sewell claims that "nonsense verse is too precise to be akin to poetry" (Sewell 23); it is actually closer to mathematics. It manipulates elements according to a number of set parameters rather than according to (necessarily subjective and unfixed) meaning.

Here is a serious difference between our two authors. Indeed, Peake does use nonsense, but he emphasizes its creative side rather than its strictly logical aspect. In the Titus books, we do find a number of expressions that are reminiscent of Carrollian techniques: For example, Peake sometimes uses the literal meaning of a metaphor, as in: "His depression did not lift; it only

moved a little to one side" (*Titus Groan* 206). This points towards similar processes in the Alice books, as when the Red Queen uses the literal meaning of the expression "to lose one's temper" and applies it to a mathematical operation, which is again symptomatic of Carroll's taste for logic: "Try another Subtraction sum. Take a bone from a dog: what remains? [...] The dog would lose its temper, wouldn't it? [...] Then if the dog went away, its temper would remain!" (*Annotated Alice* 321).

However, contrary to Carroll's, Peake's deconstruction of metaphor is far from systematic; his writing still brims with vivid images and outlandish comparisons. In other words, he enjoys the inventiveness that comes with nonsense, rather than its more systematic and restrictive aspects. He does include nonsensical poems, like "The Osseous 'Orse" (*Gormenghast* 33-34) or "The Frivolous Cake" (*Titus Groan* 84-85), but these texts are merely markers of the textual hybridity that characterizes Peake's writings. Crucially, they are not parodies of an original, contrary to nonsense poems featured in Carroll's books.

To summarize, it is true that both writers give a major importance to language itself: in Alice, "one of the most important and powerful characters is not a person but the English language" (Auden 53), while Peake himself writes that "Here there was no play of language, no play of thought, but language playing on its own." (*Gormenghast* 226). In both cases, playing with language means isolating it, creating an enclave where words reign supreme. But if we look more closely, we discover that Peake and Carroll play very different games.

The Bildungsroman and the implosion of the enclave

An analogy with the world of childhood, and its different brands of play, is indeed useful to shed light on these differences.[5] Peake's games are like children's play: the rules exist, but they are likely to change as soon as the game becomes boring. Their extension is not predetermined in spatial or temporal terms–there is no definite end. Carroll's writing, on the other hand, can be compared to chess playing; it has strict rules, with mechanisms and movements that nonetheless allow for a quasi-infinite array of possibilities. But it also relies on a perception of the world (with no abstract meanings, no real sense of causality) which resembles that of a child. Indeed, according to psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim, children are essentially animistic: "to the child, there is no clear line separating objects from living things; and whatever has life

[5] I am, of course, inspired by Wittgenstein's insights on the topic in his *Philosophical Enquiries*.

has life very much like our own" (46). This should help us view the live flowers and talking puddings as the playful indicators of childlike logic, rather than as signs of authorial madness.

The Alice and Titus books are often classified as children's literature because they seek to reproduce certain processes that are characteristic of a child's mind. As seen above, Carroll uses the peculiar perception of the young child in order to break down the boundaries between the living and the inanimate. Similarly, for Peake, critics have commented that "*Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast* sprang from a child-like impulse and remain classics of childhood literature, intense with the self-absorbed quality of childhood imagining" (Gilbert 13). In other words, the Titus books borrow from childhood's unrestrained (and sometimes inconsistent) imagination, while Carroll favours its logical side.

However, the two narratives are also associated with childhood through the themes they tackle. Indeed, both narratives can be read as *bildungsroman,* since they trace the formation of a child as he or she matures and progressively masters the rules of the enclave in order to escape it. Peake's narrative begins precisely on the day of Titus's birth, and after a long ellipsis between the two books, *Gormenghast* features important scenes of his childhood and teenage years, until he is ready to depart from his homeland. Admittedly, this process remains symbolic in Alice's case (she is seven and a half years old in *Alice in Wonderland*, and only slightly older in *Through the Looking-Glass*). The only mention of Alice as a "grown woman" is part of her sister's musings, at the end of the first book, and we are told "how she would gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of Wonderland of long ago" (*Annotated Alice* 164, emphasis in original).

But although she does not age, Alice undergoes physical growth in a number of occasions, particularly in the white rabbit's house, where she becomes so large as to be unable to move (*Annotated Alice* 57). This episode has a metaphorical equivalent in the character of Fuchsia, Titus' sister, who wonders whether she has progressively "outgrown her attic" (*Titus Groan* 270), the attic being the room where she used to play and write when she was a child in her early teenage years. Another such comparison is raised by critic John Batchelor, who sees a parallel between Alice's peering through the little door into the garden of live flowers (*Annotated Alice* 30), and Steerpike peeping through the keyhole of the Octagonal Room on the day of Titus's birth (*Titus Groan* 31). Both scenes can be read as symbols of birth. For Alice, it resonates with the fall through the rabbit hole and the amniotic Pool of Tears, which are both frequently read as potent images of pregnancy–even though Carroll did not necessarily write them as such–and set off the importance, and difficulty, of growing in such a static world. In Steerpike's case, the scene is a first glance into the aristocratic life of the Groans, which the young man will try to integrate, thus moving into a more elevated social status. These parallels underline the importance of birth and growth symbols throughout the narratives. In the Titus

books, these motifs apply not only to Titus but to various young individuals, including Fuchsia, Steerpike, and the Thing, Titus' lover. However, Titus is the only one who survives his coming of age: in other words, he is the only character who completes his initiation and leaves the enclave.

Titus and Alice are further linked by their position as outsiders. Although he is the sole heir to the Earldom, Titus is suspected of treason in many instances because he will not abide by the arbitrary rules of the Ritual, which he finds stifling and absurd. After many hardships, he eventually discovers that Steerpike, the family's archenemy, has been plotting their downfall. It is through the slaying of his foe that he finally asserts his birthright and is recognized as the legitimate heir. Therefore, a period of distrust and suspicion of the child precedes his eventual acceptance into the world. A similar pattern applies to Alice: as discussed above, she is repeatedly scorned and misunderstood by the creatures of Wonderland, until she finds the courage to stand up to them. Furthermore, these creatures' strategies are very often childlike (Empson 212): they demand prizes from her, as in the caucus race, or give arbitrary meanings to words, as Humpty Dumpty does (*Annotated Alice* 269). In other words, opposing these creatures is a way of keeping her own childishness at bay, and putting herself into a position of authority. Since adults were left behind when she plunged underground, Alice must now take their place if the enclave is to remain at all intelligible; but growing up is exactly what will allow her to leave it. Her travels represent an emotional and psychological growth which parallels that of Titus, and will enable her to assert her own willpower against her childlike opponents.

In the last chapter of *Alice in Wonderland*, "Alice's Evidence," Alice stands against the absurdity of the trial, proving her own existence, her "evidence." It is the first time the Wonderland creatures call her by her first name, thus acknowledging the identity which he had previously been denied. And when Alice screams "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"[6] (*Annotated Alice* 161) the dream comes undone; she masters Wonderland by exposing its absurdity, integrates the reality principle, and returns to rationality and reason.

Thus, there is both *integration* to the imaginary realm (Alice becomes queen) and *rebellion* against it. Titus carries out similar world-shattering rebellion; after a metaphorical slaying of the dragon, he is allowed into the adult world; but this legitimation is equated with a loss of freedom, because he can no longer escape the ritual. The same structure applies to Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass*, this time, she finds out that she can become a Queen, that is, free to assert her own will, if she plays the game of nonsense. But she gains this new status only to realize that she is now stuck in a world of polite Puddings and supportive Queens. She has

[6] To be precise, what triggers the destruction of Wonderland is not so much the statement itself as the tone with which it is delivered. Indeed, Alice has already remarked on the characters being a pack of cards on page 108.

become the centre of her world, and lost what little freedom she enjoyed in the margins, when she was merely "the underdog speaking up for itself" (Empson 121). Both children are trapped in their new legitimacy, and thus they choose to leave, to move out of their world and into adulthood.

The enclave and its stifling rules has taught them all they needed to know, and it is bound to die with their departure, since Wonderland will become a dream without a dreamer, and Gormenghast an earldom without an earl. This final destructive gesture stands against the isolation of the world. When Titus announces his decision to depart, his mother warns him: "You will only tread a circle, Titus Groan. For everything comes to Gormenghast" (*Gormenghast* 510). However, the very last scene of the narrative is one of liberation; "Titus rode out of his world" (*Gormenghast* 511). The narrative voice therefore seems to validate the possibility of leaving Gormenghast, despite the Countess's omen.

At this point, the narratives cease for good. This is in part because, symbolically, they are airtight, like bubbles; when Alice or Titus leave, they breach the perimeter of the enclave, and so the bubble bursts. But more convincingly, one could argue that the enclave is also a metaphor of the story itself. Gormenghast and Wonderland, as we have seen, are dream-like locations; their fictionality is foregrounded, so that the diegetic "dream" mirrors the extradiegetic "narrative." In plainer words, leaving the world means leaving the story-space.

Conclusion

As I hope to have shown, the many parallels that exist between the Alice books and Mervyn Peake's Titus books make for a stimulating comparison. In both cases, the enclave can be used as a conceptual lens through which to view the works of the two authors. Their fantasy worlds, but also their inhabitants' inner and outer lives are a study in isolation—and it is precisely this isolation which forces the titular characters to "make sense," to forge meaning and shape their own identity against unsympathetic Others, so that they can become masters of themselves before setting out to discover the wide world. Therefore, the enclave and its eventual implosion also partake in a formation narrative for the younger readers to whom these texts are (partially) addressed.

Nonetheless, there remain important differences between the two books. Carroll's rests on mathematical logic and order, in terms of style—nonsense—as well as in terms of morals, because Alice ultimately accepts the adult world and seeks to restore common sense. Conversely, Peake advocates freedom, both through his sprawling, adorned writing and through the constant struggle of his characters for personal freedom and creativity. Hence,

Titus, instead of returning to a *status quo*, plunges deeper into an unknown, unbound world.

Finally, these differences raise the old issue of the link between authorial biography and literary production: if Carroll's production is characterized by its mathematical precision, and Peake's by an all-encompassing quest for artistic freedom, it is tempting to see a glimpse of truth in Peake's assertion that "we do not see with our eyes, but with our trades" (Peake, "Artist's World" 3). Although they both use nonsense, the painter and the mathematician's worlds are forever apart.

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