Building Worlds, Creating Atmospheres
Postcritique, Worldbuilding, and the Properties of Speculative Fiction

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Abstract

This dissertation presents a postcritical analysis of four works of speculative fiction and fantasy. The objective is to explore new ways of understanding the affective dimension of literature, and to analyze how the interplay between literary atmospheres and fictional worldbuilding contributes to the immersive potential of speculative fiction. Employing theories from both the postcritique school of thought and from contemporary work on possible worlds and worldbuilding, the dissertation offers new ways of understanding fiction and the importance and significance of the storyworld. The following four novels serve as the foundation for the dissertation, and though they are different in style, content, and (sub)genres, they are similar in the way they employ worldbuilding to enhance aspects of storytelling, worldbuilding, emotional connections, and immersion.

Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* saga represents conventional fantasy; Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*, with particular focus on the first novel, *Titus Groan*, shows how atmosphere is evoked through worldbuilding; Haruki Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* exists on the fringes of speculative fiction and makes use of a dual narrative and dual worldbuilding; and lastly, China Miéville's *The City & The City* showcases how contemporary New Weird literature takes worldbuilding to new and strange heights while treating its own impossibility with great seriousness. Through readings of these four storyworlds, the dissertation offers new ways of thinking about storyworlds, worldbuilding, and immersion, and it aligns itself firmly with postcritical thought in its attempt to expand on the currently available analytical and methodological repertoire available in literary studies.

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Introduction

New storyworlds in speculative fiction and fantasy are continuously emerging. These fictional realms are a central component in many types of narratives[1], and their influence on a reading experience and immersion is significant. No longer simply the background tapestry against which the plot is set and the characters act, storyworlds are now often the principal element that readers may become attuned and attached to[2]. While more and more research in literary studies is shedding light on the building blocks of fictional worlds[3], there is still much left to discover. What emotions do these storyworlds evoke, and which aspects and situations produce expressive moments of profound atmosphere? Why do certain storyworlds inspire strong emotional connections, even if the characters and the plot itself are generic? The role and construction of these fictional worlds is intricate and fascinating, but few projects tackle the affective questions linked to storyworlds and attempt to pinpoint what makes storyworlds in speculative fiction evocative, atmospheric, and immersive. This dissertation is an attempt to remedy that shortcoming.

This dissertation examines the construction of fictional worlds in speculative fiction and fantasy literature, and focuses particularly on the atmospheres that these storyworlds evoke. In order to do this, I explore what I consider to be a rewarding alliance between postcriticm, literary atmospheres, and fictional worldbuilding[4]. Fictional worlds are an integral part of literature and storytelling, and this is particularly evident in genres that rely on establishing storyworlds which differ from the real world. Speculative fiction, which in this context includes a wide range of (sub)genres, such as science fiction, fantasy, horror, and New Weird[5], has a rich history of building detailed storyworlds. These storyworlds influence reading experiences significantly, and understanding both how these storyworlds are constructed and which role(s) they play is a key topic in this dissertation. Furthermore, the dissertation

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1 See for example *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology,* ed. By Marie-Laure Ryan, Jan-Noël Thon, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014.
2 Compare M. Angeles Martínez, „Storyworld Possible Selves and the Phenomenon of Narrative Immersion: Testing a New Theoretical Construct“, *Narrative*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2014), pp. 110-131.
3 See for instance D. Weisberg, How Fictional Worlds Are Created: Creating Fictional Worlds *Philosophy Compass* 11(8), 2016, 462-470
4 Compare Wolf, Mark J.P. (2017). "World Design". *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*. London m Taylor & Francis. 2017, p. 110.
5 See: Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, “The New Weird,” *New Directions in Popular Fiction: Genre, Distribution, Reproduction*, ed. Ken Gelder, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 177-199.

will show not only that all fictional worlds create distinct atmospheres through their worldbuilding, but also that these atmospheres are vital for immersion and the aesthetic component of a text. The degree to which this atmosphere is central differs from text to text; some storyworlds deliberately strive for a certain feel in the storyworld while others inadvertently create atmospheres which remain in a secondary position. This speaks to the singular nature of each narrative and each storyworld, and therefore individual storyworlds must be considered on their own terms.

The four novels selected for the analysis span several genres and worldbuilding strategies. A shared common feature is precisely the fact that they all rely heavily on a fictional world and construct detailed storyworlds that may be as important for immersion as the narrative itself. The goal in choosing four speculative fiction novels is centered around covering as much ground as possible; showing multiple differing worldbuilding approaches and exploring how atmospheres are created in diverse contexts. While I do not argue that these novels are representative of specific trends within particular (sub)genres, they are nevertheless relevant examples of illustrative speculative fiction that, when juxtaposed, highlight the differentiated and multifaceted potential of speculative fiction and fictional worlds. While it was indeed an option to go in-depth with one author — which would have been easily possible with any of the four authors I have chosen — I wanted to deliberately increase the scope of this dissertation by tackling different authors and different novels. This, I hope, will make the dissertation relevant for a larger number of readers by showing that the issues I am concerned with do not exist in a vacuum. In the following, I will briefly introduce the four novels I have selected and outline my purposes for doing so. While different in content, style, and form, they are all examples of speculative fiction and fantasy literature and create imaginative fictional worlds with distinct atmospheres.

Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* saga (1968-2001) exemplifies conventional fantasy worldbuilding. It provides necessary context and a point of comparison for the more experimental nature of the other chapters in this dissertation. Le Guin is famous both for her fantasy and science fiction, and while *Earthsea* is partly included here because of its position as a classic fantasy narrative, the complexity and depth of Le Guin's worldbuilding will play an important role in showing how varied strategies of

storyworld design may be.[6] Initially thinly veiled as a conventional *Bildungsroman*, the *Earthsea* novels quickly morph into an expansive, emotionally rich, and engaging storyworld focusing on introspection and personal quests, which sets *Earthsea*'s archipelago aside from other fantasy storyworlds. Even in the many years following the publication of the first Earthsea book, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), few fantasy novels share the unique characteristics of Le Guin's highly influential novels. The analysis of *Earthsea* will identify the underlying building blocks of Le Guin's storyworld and highlight key moments that produce its distinct and evocative atmosphere. My goal is not to separate the character-driven events from the world in which the characters exist; instead, I want to specify that these complex characters move and act in an intricate storyworld that for readers offers immersive potential experiences and emotional connections. Importantly, this chapter also showcases the idea behind potential experiences with a text. For example, a topic I tackle at some length concerns Taoism[7], a branch of Eastern philosophy which inspired Le Guin[8]. In this dissertation, Taoism is only relevant for *Earthsea*; none of the other books directly or indirectly engage with it. As such, engagement with Taoism constitutes one potential experience when reading *Earthsea* and this, then, becomes a central aspect of reader engagement. Topics such as worldbuilding and atmosphere are relevant to the dissertation as a whole, while specific elements, such as Taoism, pertain only to individual novels. I will highlight aspects particularly relevant to the individual novels that influence critical areas of the fictional worlds.

Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* trilogy (1946-1959), with particular focus on the first novel, *Titus Groan* (1946), presents a comparatively small storyworld that beautifully showcases strong production of — and reliance on — atmosphere in its worldbuilding. Peake's work is a challenging but important part of the fantasy tradition because his worldbuilding strategies are singular. The plot is minimal, and the main character is an infant. As mentioned above, the storyworld, in terms of its size, is relatively small but its aesthetic dimension and the acute depth of the scenes and characters Peake presents creates an amalgamation of grotesque, weird, gothic fantasy with an original and unsettling atmosphere that permeates the entire work. There are few commonalities between *Gormenghast* and generic fantasy texts; it is a complex book, but precisely its enigmatic difficulty makes it a worthy inclusion

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6 See also: Robinson, Christopher L., Sarah Bouttier, and Pierre-Louis Patoine, eds. *The Legacies of Ursula K. Le Guin: Science, Fiction, Ethics*. Palgrave Studies in Science and Popular Culture. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
7 Kaltenmark, Max. *Lao Tzu and Taoism.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1969.
8 See: Huang, Yini, and Hongbin Dai. 2021. "A Taoist Study of Magic in *The Earthsea Cycle*" *Religions* 12, no. 3: 144

here, partly because *Gormenghast* beautifully puts postcritical theories and conceptualizations to the test. In my reading of Peake's work, I highlight the worldbuilding strategies used to create potent scenes in which the events themselves may seem quaint but the atmosphere surrounding the scenes is intense and heartfelt. This is complemented by what I call the *spiderweb narrative*; an intricate web of narrative elements that together form a complete whole, but with single (narrative) strands that stand out.

Haruki Murakami's dual-narrative and dual-world *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985) presents a fringe text from a non-Anglo part of the world. The work accentuates how aspects from hard-boiled fiction, cyberpunk, and fantasy may fuse to form a complicated new narrative entity[9]. Murakami's work is included in this dissertation because his approach to fictional worlds is tangibly different from much Anglophone literature. The contrast this offers will highlight the uniqueness of Murakami's storyworld and provide perspective on the other novels. The fact that *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* mixes elements from several genres makes it particularly interesting in the context of worldbuilding. How is a storyworld that juxtaposes two fictional worlds made possible, and what is the relationship between these two worlds? Naturally, it is not unique to Murakami to create a dual-storyworld, but it is rather the peculiar atmospheres connected with each of the two storyworlds he builds that become a driving force in the narrative. His ability to combine the seemingly mundane with aspects of magical realism and, in the case of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, several other genres, creates an end result that is an intriguing example of complex worldbuilding.

China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) covers the New Weird. This fascinating literary trend deliberately seeks to go beyond the borders of known genres to create new and weird storyworlds[10], and make these possible and believable. Miéville's novel is the only one of the four pieces of primary literature I have chosen that does not create an entirely foreign fictional storyworld but rather one that adds fictional elements to the real world. The two cities that the novel focuses on, Besźel and Ul Qoma, are fictional, but readers can reasonably deduce that they exist somewhere in probably-but-not-definitely Eastern Europe. The fact that the cities exist in the same geographical space as well as the

9 See also: Shin, Haerin. 'Unlocking the Mindware'. *Positions: Asia Critique* 26, no. 4 (1 November 2018): 749–80.
10 Brown, S.D. "The functions of the embassy in the world-making experiments of China Miéville". *NatureCulture* (5), pp. 95-116. 2019

fact that the novel takes place in the real world creates specific parameters that influence its worldbuilding significantly. Miéville is famously a political writer, but I specifically want to analyze this work from a postcritical standpoint that instead underscores the weird atmosphere and logical impossibilities that are presented. The task of making the weird seem plausible and real is not simple. As the genre, the New Weird, which remains notoriously difficult to define, deliberately strives to push boundaries and create new literary frontiers in the context of fiction. This, in part, is why it is important to include at least one New Weird text; the genre exists as a new development in speculative fiction and fantasy and is an exciting and important inclusion in this dissertation[11].

Regarding contemporary scholarly engagement with fictional worlds, a guiding question concerns how new research interests modify our understanding of speculative fiction. Storyworlds have long been acknowledged, but studying these as unique entities and establishing critical theories and a critical vocabulary for this purpose is a recent phenomenon. As I will show, most interest in fictional worlds, or possible worlds, has been primarily philosophical in nature. It has not delved into the singular qualities of individual texts to a high degree. In the context of scholarship within the realm of fantasy literature, for example, there has historically been an interest in broad topics such as genre and typologies. While still relying on the idea of genres to a certain degree, my dissertation does not argue for shared properties between novels — even ones that belong in the same genre. Rather, I specifically argue that individual novels are unique and singular entities that must be understood on their own terms. What the dissertation offers, then, is a new perspective and new analytical and theoretical starting points, which will hopefully result in differentiated and varied readings. Delving into the finer points of each novel while highlighting the singular nature of their atmospheres and the properties of their storyworlds underscores how certain texts and their storyworlds break new ground and offer immersive potential experiences and complex storyworlds. These fictional worlds both enable and require emotional connections and critical engagement with the text.

The chief challenge connected with this endeavor is establishing a theoretical framework. There are three primary theoretical and conceptual pillars on which this dissertation rests. The first pillar

[11] See also: Cave, Terence. 'Weird Collocations: Language as Infrastructure in the Storyworlds of China Miéville'. In *Planned Violence*, edited by Elleke Boehmer and Dominic Davies, 289–304. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018.

concerns postcritique (see in particular Anker and Felski 2018; Felski 2008; Felski 2015), which is deliberate in its attempts at moving away from purely ideological or political readings that seek to unmask texts in order to look beneath the surface to find out what a text is *really* saying. Postcritique is a relatively recent conceptual and theoretical framework and a new mode of thinking which seeks to broaden the available analytical repertoire in literary studies by more seriously considering intangible topics such as affect, atmosphere, and emotions. Postcritique as a concept is still being developed and, consequently, no concrete framework for a postcritical analysis exists yet. This dissertation, and its underlying assumptions and approaches, is one attempt at a strictly postcritical endeavor.

The second pillar concerns contemporary worldbuilding theory. While historically there has been scholarly interest in the so-called possible worlds theory[12], this branch is highly abstract and theoretical. As we understand it now, worldbuilding has evolved and is more focused on the individual building blocks of narratives. In an analysis of fictional worlds, it is important to understand and pinpoint the foundational structures which constitute a storyworld as this will provide a starting point for further analysis. This is closely connected to the third conceptual pillar: atmosphere. All storyworlds create certain atmospheres, and speculative fiction and fantasy automatically and inadvertently create atmospheres through worldbuilding. How these atmospheres manifest, and where and how they are felt and encountered most vividly, depends on the qualities and construction of each individual text. Atmospheres are an abstract and intangible but important aspect of reading experiences and I see atmosphere as a logical extension of worldbuilding despite the fact that much worldbuilding theory does not account for the atmospheres that are produced through worldbuilding. Storyworlds produce atmospheres that are present in a specific way, but pinpointing this atmosphere and describing it is not an easy task. However, it is an important task since atmosphere is central in reading experiences and an evocative part of a text's aesthetic dimension[13]. My endeavor, then, concerns directly combining postcritique, worldbuilding, and atmosphere to contribute to the advancement of these theories and provide analysis of speculative fiction and fantasy texts. To achieve this, I employ a postcritical approach that focuses on worldbuilding in order to pinpoint its function for storyworlds and the reader's affective engagement. In this context, the atmospheres of a given storyworld play a vital

[12] See Marie-Laure Ryan, "Possible Worlds in Recent Literary Theory", *Style*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Bibliographical Essays (Winter 1992), pp. 528-553
[13] Böhme, Gernot. *Aesthetics of Atmospheres.* Taylor and Francis, 2016.

role for both the storyworld itself as well as the immersive potential of a text. There is a surprising lack of in-depth analysis of texts in this genre, even though they are prime examples of evocative and atmospheric narratives, which build worlds and produce atmospheres that can be advantageously explored using a postcritical lens.

Long understood as merely the backdrop for expansive plots, readers and scholars now recognize fictional worlds as complicated and immersive entities that can drive a reading experience[14]. Storyworlds and the worldbuilding that constructs them matter, as verisimilitude is central for narratives striving to establish plausible tales in speculative fiction and fantasy. Engaging with these storyworlds and figuring out their inner workings and potential is one way reading becomes an interactive process with immersive and affective potential; the storyworld is analyzed and understood as readers engage with it. The storyworld, furthermore, is almost always explored via characters and the plot. However, it exists as a unique entity in the narrative and must be analyzed within a different theoretical framework than the ones typically used to analyze narratives. Mark J. P. Wolf has been at the forefront of creating accessible worldbuilding terminology, describing and analyzing the construction and function of fictional worlds. In the introduction to *Building Imaginary Worlds*, Wolf makes a clear distinction between the storyworld and the characters and plotlines therein: "[I]maginary worlds invite audience participation in the form of speculation and fantasies, which depend more on the fullness and richness of the world itself than on any particular storyline or character within it" (Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, 13). This particular observation captures the point well since Wolf here highlights precisely why storyworlds are crucial. It is clear that characters and plots still play important roles — even in stories that focus more on ideas[15] or worldbuilding. Nevertheless, current scholarly interest in worldbuilding as a practice and fictional worlds as singular entities marks a turning point in understanding speculative fiction and fantasy. Thus, one answer to why storyworlds matter: they create and encourage engagement. This, of course, is not the only reason. The affective dimension is central as well (more on this later), but the observation that storyworlds must be understood on their own terms and recognized as unique entities within a narrative remains a key conceptual starting point. As

14 Bell, Alice, and Marie-Laure Ryan, eds. *Possible Worlds Theory and Contemporary Narratology*. Frontiers of Narrative. Lincoln ; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2019.

15 The so-called Golden Age of Science Fiction is one illustrative example of a period in time in which a genre, in this case science fiction, focused more on ideas than characters. Famous examples include Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* (1951) and Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959). Later developments in science fiction expanded the genre significantly and many science fiction texts are now character-driven.

mentioned previously, the way storyworlds encourage participation and result in immersion varies greatly from text to text. Equally, two separate texts in the same genre may create wildly different storyworlds that rely on differing strategies, produce unusual atmospheres, and are divergent in terms of scope, expansiveness, and worldbuilding goals. Encounters with fictional worlds may become an integral part of a reading experience, and it is important to acknowledge the strong immersive potential of storyworlds. A close relationship between narratives and storyworld will always exist, but the narrative itself is no longer necessarily the primary objective of literary scholarship.

> Recognizing that the experience of a *world* is different and distinct from that of merely a *narrative* is crucial to seeing how worlds function apart from the narratives set within them, even though the narratives have much to do with the worlds in which they occur, and are usually the means by which the worlds are experienced. (*Building Imaginary Worlds*, 11, emphasis original)

This quote sums up the analytical starting point that drives large parts of my dissertation. The idea that storyworlds need to be explored via the narrative is central, and as such, it is difficult (and generally unnecessary) to entirely divorce the storyworld from the narrative. However, since the objective at hand is working critically with storyworlds and their atmospheres, it becomes necessary to separate narrative and storyworld to some degree. For example, my readings of *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and *The City & The City* describe and acknowledge the plot, but my main focus remains on the storyworld. Throughout my analysis, I will pay close attention to (parts of) the narrative. However, I will only highlight segments and smaller sections relevant for my points concerning the storyworld and its atmosphere. While storyworlds are part of the larger narrative, they must also be *felt* and *experienced*. The emotional component cannot and must not fall by the wayside since reading fiction, and becoming immersed, enchanted, enthralled, and enraptured by it, is fundamentally an emotional affair. Here I expand on the ideas put forth by Wolf. There is a strong relationship between the postcritical preoccupation with affect/emotions and worldbuilding, but Wolf does not explicitly engage with this aspect. There is significant potential to expand the way we understand worldbuilding and analyze fictional worlds by incorporating a postcritical research angle.

Although numerous important precursors exist[16], literary fantasy worldbuilding, as we understand it today, in many ways started with J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-earth and in particular *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55). This work sparked an interest in fictional worlds for other authors but also caused a

16 See for example *Tales Before Tolkien: The Roots of Modern Fantasy* (2003) by Douglas A. Anderson

shift in how fantasy literature was perceived and understood by critics and scholars. Authors such as George MacDonald, C. S. Lewis, and Dorothy L. Sayers were also interested in worldbuilding, but it is undeniable that Tolkien's influence has been profound, and he remains a towering presence in the realm of fantasy literature. The popularity and depth of Tolkien's work cannot be explained easily, but it can be argued that a significant part of its timelessness is connected to the storyworld as much as to plot and characters. An untold number of narratives were inspired by Tolkien directly or motivated by the dominance of what we now recognize as high fantasy, which seeks to create something explicitly different from the Tolkienian tradition. A cursory look at famous fantasy texts from the decades after Tolkien's work became popular quickly reveals his influence. Stephen R. Donaldson's *Lord Foul's Bane* (1977), Patricia A. McKillip's *Riddle-Master* (1976), Terry Brook's *The Sword of Shannara* (1977), Terry Pratchett's *The Color of Magic* (1983), David Eddings' *The Belgariad* (1982), and many others. These stories, and numerous like them, not only have epic quests but also, importantly, storyworlds that are expansive, immersive, and ready to explore. All this goes to show that elaborate and detailed storyworlds have been enjoyed for a long time. Further research into how these storyworlds work and how they produce vivid atmospheres is essential to figure out their immersive potential and the underlying narrative structures that make them function.

Chapter Structure

The dissertation is split into five major chapters. Choosing four entirely different speculative fiction texts has presented numerous advantages and certain challenges in structuring the dissertation. In terms of what links the four analytical chapters, the theory chapter will provide both a conceptual and a theoretical starting point, highlighting my approaches and foundational ideas that drive the analysis. In chapter 1, titled "The Case for Postcriticism", I venture into the murky waters of theory and postcriticism. This section outlines how I understand analysis and literature and will delve into central terminology. I detail the work of scholars such as Rita Felski, Elizabeth S. Anker, and Eve Sedgewick. Among others, they are at the forefront of the postcriticism debate and have contributed significant work that has influenced and inspired this dissertation.

Chapter 1 also includes an introduction to the idea of atmospheres. While postcriticism does not explicitly deal with literary atmosphere, I see it as an alliance between atmosphere and the general postcritical line of thinking. As a critical term, atmosphere attempts to explain and pinpoint how texts become present, which evocative aspects exist, and how a text evokes certain atmospheres based on numerous factors, including character actions, environments, naming conventions, dialogue, and worldbuilding. These atmospheres become a vital component of immersion. I argue it is possible to become immersed in, and enchanted by, fictional worlds and their atmospheres as quickly as in a plot. H. P. Lovecraft wrote about this as early as 1927 in his famous critical essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature", and recently scholars have become interested in the phenomenon. Particularly Gernot Böhme in *The Aesthetics of Atmosphere* (2017) and Ulrich Gumbrecht in *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* (2012) argue for the strong potential of atmospheres to influence reading experiences. These ideas develop continuously to explain and showcase the potential for atmosphere in critical readings. I consciously place atmosphere at the forefront of my readings since the fictional worlds I am interested in all evoke unique and powerful atmospheres.

Finally, chapter 1 also establishes a strong connection between atmosphere and contemporary work on worldbuilding. I spend considerable time on the issue of worldbuilding, and I employ primarily the work of Mark J. P. Wolf who, particularly in *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2012), creates both an overview and specific terminology for the analysis of fictional worlds and their building blocks. Wolf

has been highly influential in how the concept of worldbuilding has been developed and understood by contemporary scholars. However, he has shown relatively little interest in the affective dimension of fictional worlds. I see an extremely fruitful marriage between worldbuilding and atmosphere and, by extension, postcriticism. While it is worthwhile to consider the formal structure of fictional worlds, as Wolf has done, it is significant, I argue, to also include considerations on the affective and emotional dimension of these fictional worlds, and this is where postcriticism provides a supportive framework. Overall, the theory chapter introduces relevant terminology from postcriticism, atmosphere, and worldbuilding, and argues that combining these will result in a framework that enables readings of speculative fiction that focuses on ideas and concepts not touched upon by previous scholarship to an adequate degree.

Chapter 2 delves into Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* storyworld, and I focus on her worldbuilding and the unique elements that influenced Le Guin, including Taoist philosophy and Jungian psychology. *Earthsea* presents numerous moments and locations that produce powerful atmospheres. While I primarily draw on examples from *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) to illustrate my point about worldbuilding and the resulting atmospheres, all the *Earthsea* novels feature in the analysis.

Chapter 3 focuses on Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* trilogy (1946-1959), with particular focus on the first novel, *Titus Groan* (1946). In this chapter, I introduce my idea of the spiderweb narrative and elaborate on my argument concerning atmosphere as aesthetic experience. Peake's work relies on atmospheres in its worldbuilding to a very high degree which makes *Gormenghast* stand out as a particularly effective example of the topics that concern this dissertation. The worldbuilding of *Titus Groan* is complex and offers a rewarding opportunity to explore the inner workings of a storyworld that in terms of scope is comparatively small, but in nevertheless creates an evocative and atmospheric fictional world; one that is must clearly understood by considering the aesthetic and emotional realms of the novel.

Chapter 4 deals with Haruki Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985), which constructs a fascinating dual-world and dual-narrative storyworld. This complex Japanese novel, which uses alternating chapters to construct two very different storyworlds, is an intricate example of a narrative in which figuring out the relationship between two storyworlds is part of both the enjoyment

and the challenge in the reading experience. In creating two distinct but interwoven storyworlds, this novel also creates two unique but complementary atmospheres.

Chapter 5 tackles China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009). This novel is part of the New Weird literary genre, and I spend time clarifying what the New Weird entails and what recent scholarship has focused on. Miéville has created a fascinating storyworld where the murder mystery plot almost seems secondary to the intricate logical impossibility inherent in the worldbuilding; two cities exist in the same geographical space, and this has wide-ranging political and cultural implications. *The City & The City* is a remarkable object of study in the context of atmospheres and worldbuilding since the novel deliberately combines elements from existing genres to create a new whole while veiling it in the New Weird aesthetic and its eerie atmospheres.

These main chapters are the heart and soul of the dissertation. Each chapter delves into the wider context of each particular novel and as such presents as full a picture as possible of both recent scholarship and my readings. The chapters are connected by my postcritical theoretical starting point and my focus on worldbuilding and atmospheres. The fact that the analysis is split up into four distinct chapters means that each chapter can be read as a stand-alone text and still provide comprehensive insight into my arguments concerning the novel and the, as I see them, most important areas concerning atmospheres and worldbuilding. My findings are synthesized in the conclusion in which I highlight the influence atmospheres have on worldbuilding and on both our understanding and analysis of fictional worlds. Furthermore, I develop the idea of postcriticism and argue for its usefulness in the context of speculative fiction and fantasy since these genres have not been explored in contemporary scholarship on postcriticism. There is significant potential for expanding the postcritical school of thought and for analyzing fictional worlds in new and rewarding ways by combining existing work on worldbuilding with the experimental nature of postcriticism and atmospheres. Moreover, I draw attention to a (tentative) typology that may assist future research by scholars interested in speculative fiction and fantasy and the inner workings and potential experiences connected with these types of texts.

Possible Worlds, Possible Problems, Possible Solutions

In the following, I will present an overview of possible worlds theory and explain its origins and (some of) its developments. There is a direct link between possible worlds theory and contemporary analytical focus on worldbuilding, although the former focuses on philosophy and abstraction, while the latter is primarily concerned with specific structures and strategies of narrative construction. Possible worlds theory is a helpful starting point because critical ideas on fictional worlds started within this school of thought and contemporary ideas on atmospheres exist as part of the potential of possible worlds.

Possible worlds theory made its way into literary theory in the mid-1970s, and eventually evolved into a focus on storyworlds and their worldbuilding. Before that point, ideas about 'possible worlds' can be found as far back as the 18th century. It was deeply connected to philosophy and semantics. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz argued that a 'multitude' of possible worlds exist in God's mind; since God is omnipotent and a force for good, and because *this* particular world is the one chosen out of all the possible options (even if this world contains evil), the necessary conclusion was that this must be the best of all the possible worlds.[17] (See Ryan 1991, 16). As Roine notes in her dissertation on the same possible worlds topic, David Lewis and Jaakko Hintikka 'remodeled' the possible worlds concept and made it workable as a theoretical tool usable for modal logic (Roine, 40). Modal logic is primarily concerned with necessity and possibility as well as the relationship between two (or more) elements and the truth-value therein. A typical strategy involves deduction from 'it is necessary that' and 'it is possible that'. Modal logic in itself does not seem particularly applicable or easily usable in the context of storyworlds and worldbuilding, although scholars such as Thomas Pavel (1986), Lubomír Doležel (1998) and Marie-Laure Ryan (e.g., 1991, 2001) developed their ideas largely from modal logic and made significant contributions to the field of narrative theory. It now seems inevitable that modal logic was left behind in favor of systems of analysis that more readily provide tools for understanding storyworlds.

Possible worlds theory made a leap from abstract logic-systems to language and literary theory. Ryan observes that "literary studies were almost completely dominated by the concept of language" and

[17] Similar ideas about one world were put forth by Gottlob Grege, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Willard Van Orman Quine.

draws on Hintikka, who described language as "the universal medium" (Ryan, 2019, 1). As the argument goes, language is used to interpret, communicate, and understand our world. Consequently we cannot talk about other possible worlds in a meaningful way. Fredric Jameson refers to 'the prison house of language' (1975), underscoring a point about the 'limited' scope of language and its function in the context of articulating and understanding both our world and fictional storyworlds[18]. Hintikka proposed an alternative to this view of language and argued for a change in focus; rather than viewing language as a universal medium, he proposed thinking of language as calculus. In this sense:

> you can so to speak stop your language and step off. In less metaphoric terms, you can discuss the semantics of your language and even vary systematically its interpretation. The term 'language as calculus' is not calculated to indicate that in this view language would be a meaningless *jeu de caractères* - this is not the idea at all. Rather, the operative word highlights the thesis that language is freely re-interpretable like calculus. (Hintikka, 1988, 54)

Ryan further develops this idea and argues that it becomes possible to look at language from the outside and "analyze it through a metalanguage" (2019, 2). This shift in the understanding of language and its function (language-as-universal-medium or language-as-calculus) opened up new avenues in literary studies because it became possible to scrutinize fiction and fictional worlds with new perspectives that place great(er) focus on fiction. In essence, the question of 'truth' in the context of fiction becomes central; it is necessary to consider fictional worlds as 'true' or meaningful if any analysis is to move beyond a restricted view of what is possible in literary studies.

The core idea in possible worlds theory is the assertion that "things could be different from what they are". We often see a distinction between the Actual World (AW) and the many Possible Worlds (PWs). The possible worlds contain elements that differentiate them from the actual world, and this is what possible worlds theory and, more specifically, worldbuilding explores. Possible worlds theory is firmly rooted in philosophy. It has a complex developmental history, while worldbuilding, as we shall see, is overtly linked to fictional worlds and takes for granted that these are true and contain analytical depth worth exploring. In other words, possible worlds theory spent considerable time framing its purpose and justifying the existence of possible worlds. In several of her books and articles, Ryan uses modal logic and links its methods to possible worlds. While in theory her approach is valid, and the points she makes concerning the relationship between the actual world and possible worlds are convincing, I find

[18] Consider Wittgenstein's famous "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" from his 1921 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. A somewhat literal interpretation/application, perhaps, but nevertheless interesting.

the general method behind modal logic to be too abstract and convoluted which ultimately renders it somewhat less useful as an analytical or even theoretical tool. Ryan herself acknowledges that many developments in possible worlds theory and modal logic (e.g. Divers 2002; Nolan 2002), "have been extremely technical contributions to modal logic, and they are not particularly useful for literary and narrative theory, because logic interprets language on the level of sentences and propositions, while literary and narrative theories do so on the level of texts" (Ryan, 8). Naturally, it will depend on the focus of a given scholarly work, whether a technical contribution is a goal or not. However, in my view — in the context of literary studies — a theory must be assessed based on its applicability in an analysis. Even if an idea is abstract or somewhat intangible (as we shall see in the context of literary atmosphere), there must still be a clear relationship between theory and text. The philosophical starting point of possible worlds theory is not entirely divorced from the textual level. Nevertheless, I find Ryan's observation pertinent given the somewhat abstract and intangible nature of its origins.

Possible worlds theory, then, is an appropriate starting point for an in-depth look at possible worlds and worldbuilding. Literary scholarship has discussed authors and the 'worlds' they create textually. Although somewhat vague, this implies that a given storyworld exists as a separate entity from the actual world, even before possible worlds and worldbuilding became 'accepted' areas of scholarship. We can discuss the textual realm as its own entity with its own particular knowledge and insight. As Ryan points out, though, "[t]he notion of 'storyworld' that is currently gaining traction in narratology can be analyzed in terms of PW, but it remains operative without this connection" (Ryan, 8). There is no unbreakable link between possible worlds theory and narratology, but it remains a solid starting point for further analysis and provides a baseline understanding and vocabulary.

In the following paragraphs, I will delve deeper into the history and development of possible worlds theory and its role in what we now recognize as literary worldbuilding. Understanding the precursors remains crucial in order to understand how the field now functions and what the relationship between philosophy and literary studies has meant. Thomas Pavel was the first literary scholar to apply the ideas behind possible worlds theory to literary studies; his 1975 article "Possible Worlds in Literary Semantics" was later developed into his 1986 book *Fictional Worlds* in which he argues that fictional worlds defines a new so-called 'horizon of possibility' (a term especially popular and relevant for science fiction texts). According to Pavel, fictional worlds create and impose their own laws which

necessitates a shift in ontological perspective on part of the reader. A particularly important argument brought forth by Pavel, and one I consider to still be entirely relevant in the context of worldbuilding and fictional worlds, concerns the integrationist perspective. In a segregationist view of fictional worlds, statements in the fictional world are either true or false according to the AW (actual world) — this puts the actual world in focus even if this might not be beneficial. Pavel instead argued that the point of reference should be the fictional world instead of the actual world which in turn enables the text to provide existential, ethical, and political value on its own terms and within its own context. As we will see later, there will always be a relationship between the actual world and possible worlds, but the way in which this relationship manifests and the way we think about it has changed in important ways. "We are trying to capture the entwining of characters in a system of values and norms, to experience their desires in a homeopathic way, and to foresee what they plan to do" (2010, 312)[19] — in other words, to focus on characters and their very human desires. Structuralism would relegate characters to semantemes but Pavel instead wanted to consider characters as 'real' beings who simply happen to reside in a textual universe — an idea I support since it seems a prerequisite for discussing phenomenological and affective elements in narratives. Because characters are the vehicle through which storyworlds are explored, they also become the vehicle through which atmospheres are (partly) experienced and understood.

Following Pavel's work comes David Lewis and particularly his 1978 article titled "Truth in Fiction", which concerns the issue of 'pretense'. Pretense a relevant topic in the context of possible worlds: "The storyteller purports to be talking about characters who are known to him, and whom he refers to, typically, by means of ordinary proper names. But his story is fiction, he is not really doing these things" (1978, 40) — and so, one might ask (as Ryan has done), what is he doing? Lewis continues thus: "Here at our world we have a fiction *f*, told in an act *a* of storytelling; at some other world we have an act *a'* of telling the truth about known matters of fact; the stories told in *a* and *a'* match word for word, and the words have the same meaning" (40). Ryan problematizes this and identifies that Lewis does not specify who does the two acts of storytelling, "but narratology has an easy answer: *a* is the act of the author, *a'* the act of a narrator" (Ryan, 2019, 10). Consequently, we can see how narratology plays an important role in understanding fiction and the relationship between author and

[19] This has been translated by Ryan and Bell. See: 2019, 9.

narrator, who have different functions in establishing a fictional story and a fictional world. It may seem counterintuitive, but an author does not necessarily have (or need!) all the information about a fictional world. However, he must have established enough to ensure coherence; a narrator, then, must present what exists in a manner that enables exploration and immersion into the fictional realm by the reader. Lewis's work was a stepping-stone, of course, and the subsequent 'installment' comes from a scholar whose work is still entirely significant and one who has made numerous contributions to the study of fictional worlds: Lubomír Doležel.

Doležel's seminal contribution is his 1998 book *Heterocosmica*, which began as a series of articles beginning in 1976. Doležel was interested in the degree to which fictional worlds are (and can be) *complete*, and the role information plays. A lot of information is presented directly; some is inferred, and many areas in a narrative are left blank - often intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. As I will return to later, Mark J. P. Wolf has made effective use of Doležel's ideas in his own work, which is not surprising. The idea that it is impossible to create a fully complete fictional world is an important element in worldbuilding. Furthermore, Doležel argued for four different types of plots in narratives. The first is the alethic plot, which includes fairy-tales and other fantastic stories, with characters' abilities in focus. The next is the deontic plot that revolves around obligations, violations, and permissions. One example of this is the tragedy. The third plot, Doležel argued, is the epistemic plot, which centers on acquiring knowledge (mystery novels), and, finally, the axiological plot. Here, the acquisition of important objects (often affectionately called MacGuffins) is a driving factor, such as is the case with quest narratives. In addition to this, *Heterocosmica* proposes three types of textual modes to distinguish between different types of narrative structures: expansion (new stories set in the same world), displacement (reinventing stories in what he called the 'protoworld'), and transposition (new historical or spatial setting). It seems easy to identify how Doležel's ideas may have been influential. He points to structures within fictional worlds that distinguish them, and his terminology provided a starting-point for critically assessing various types of fictional worlds and their underlying structure. For example, the axiological plot (acquisition of object) is readily identifiable in much conventional fantasy. However, the more commonly used term 'quest narrative', which covers the same ground, is less convoluted. Based on all of this, we cannot ignore Doležel's contributions in any review that considers the development of scholarly work on fictional worlds.

Umberto Eco has also written about possible worlds, and in *The Role of the Reader* (1984), Eco talks specifically about textual universes as possible worlds. He states that texts are "*a machine for producing possible worlds* (of the *fabula*, of the characters within the *fabula*, and of the reader outside the *fabula*)" (246, emphasis original). Ryan puts this into context and explains that Eco, "distinguishes the world imagined by the author, which corresponds to all the states of the *fabula*; the worlds imagined, believed, wished, and so on by the characters; and the possible worlds imagined, believed, or wished by the so-called Model Reader" (Ryan, 2019, 12). As such, there is a particular type of relationship between reader and character(s), and both establish their own versions of the fictional world, and naturally both parties have their own understanding of the world.

Developing a genre theory for possible worlds theory was inevitable, and *Literature and Possible Worlds* (1983) by Doreen Maître is a major contribution that Marie-Laure Ryan draws heavily on in much of her work, including the influential 1991 book *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory*. In this work we find the much-quoted 'principle of minimal departure' which considers ontology and the relative 'distance' between a fictional world and our actual world. Higher degrees of fictionality results in a larger 'distance' to our world which increases the need for exposition. That is why Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* (and similar stories) starts with an extensive introduction to hobbits, whereas fictional stories (even magical ones) set in the actual world require less upfront explanation[20]. Other books in the category that consider the theory of possible worlds include *Possible Worlds of the Fantastic: The Rise of the Paranormal in Fiction* (1996) by Nancy Traill; *Language and World Creation in Poems and Other Texts* (1997) by Elena Semino; *The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction* (2010) by Alice Bell; and *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History* (2010) by Lubomír Doležel. A general theme concerns the relationship between the fictional world and the actual world, and for good reason - the two will always be intertwined. There are aspects of fictional worlds, however, that employ possible worlds theory as a starting point but still benefit from further examination. The areas I am concerned with in this dissertation, particularly worldbuilding and literary atmosphere, are two such areas and scholarly work on possible worlds has rarely paid attention to the aesthetic realm of a text.

[20] Exposition is not always crucial, as I will show in my analysis of *Titus Groan*, but this is simply a generic and illustrative example.

In Bohumil Fôrt's *An Introduction to Fictional Worlds Theory* (2015) we find another helpful overview that focuses primarily on the philosophical angle, but the debates publicized in the book also highlight the contentious nature of the field of possible worlds theory. The book covers impossible worlds, completeness, narrative modalities, minimal departure, accessibility relations, and possible world approaches to fiction. There is no strong focus on the cultural dimension that significantly influences fictional worlds and their popularity, but this area is significantly connected to possible words. See, for example, Michael Saler's *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (2011) that considers fictional worlds and (present) cultural milieus as intertwined and deeply connected. Mark J. P. Wolf also has a prominent cultural angle in his *Building Imaginary Worlds* (2012).

For the purposes of this dissertation, which argues for a connection between culture and possible worlds, it is also necessary to consider the reader and how fictional worlds and characters are made real in the minds of readers since it has significant implications for immersion and the making-real of storyworlds. On a basic level, it is a requirement for immersion (the ultimate goal of worldbuilding) that fictional elements in a story are considered 'real' while readers are engaged; this connects naturally to willing suspension of disbelief, but it goes deeper than that. Saler (e.g., 2011) talks about a 'double-consciousness' that enables readers to acknowledge the fictional nature of what they are reading while simultaneously accepting the fictional elements as 'real'. Samuel Coleridge's willing suspension of disbelief necessitates a more considerable distance to the fictional world since (as the argument goes) we *start* with disbelief, which is then *willingly* suspended. The ironic imagination and double-consciousness make a more powerful emotional immersion possible since the critical distance is less severe. Ryan's idea of 'recentering' (e.g., 1991; 16) concerns much the same issue: "The idea of recentering into fictional worlds explains why readers, spectators, or players can regard fictional characters as (fictionally) real people and why they can experience emotions toward these characters, rather than regarding them as purely textual constructs." (Ryan, 2019, 16). If characters were indeed 'purely textual constructs', then readers would only be able to rationally recognize and understand the emotions evoked by the characters but would not *feel* these emotions (particularly strongly) themselves. With such a recentering readers become attuned to not only the emotional realm of the fictional world and its characters, but they can also become moved by the aesthetic dimension of the text. This

aesthetic dimension, I argue, is deeply linked to affective reading experiences and an integral part of the strength and allure of fictional worlds.

It is impossible to offer even a cursory glance at the history and development of possible worlds in fiction without including the Bulgarian-French structuralist Tzvetan Todorov. Todorov's *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970) was a significant contribution to fantasy studies especially and offered possible (albeit narrow) definitions that later research on fantasy still draws on — or seeks to refute. In his work, particularly *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1975), Todorov argues that the fantastic is an event in our world that appears to be supernatural and is further characterized by a 'hesitation' by both readers and characters. He identifies uncanny fantasy, closely related to gothic fiction – within which the supernatural has a rational explanation – and marvelous fantasy, which does not. Todorov was an early theorist to include the reader's perspective in his genre theory on the fantastic. While several aspects of Todorov's conceptualizations are too limiting, his argument includes immersion and supports the idea that an important relationship exists between immersion and specific textual elements.

In *Literature and the Brain* (2009), which seeks to identify the link between stories and the pleasure we feel when engaging with them, Norman Holland outlines findings from psychologists John Tooby and Leda Cosmides. They identified five main categories that illustrate the potential for worldbuilding as a human activity to have real-life (although occasionally abstract) applications. Holland's summary is as follows:

1. The ability to "simulate" situations (to imagine them without acting on them) has great value for humans both in survival and reproduction. This ability to stimulate seems to occur innately in the human species. We evolved the "association cortices" in our large frontal lobes for just this purpose.
2. All cultures create fictional, imagined worlds. We humans find these imagined worlds intrinsically interesting.
3. Responding to imaginary worlds, we engage emotion systems while disengaging action systems.
4. Humans have *evolved special cognitive systems that enable us to participate in these fictional worlds. We can, in short, pretend and deceive and imagine, having mental states about mental states*.

5. We can separate these fictional worlds from our real-life experiences. We can, in a key word, *decouple* them. (Holland, 327-328)[21]

As these points illustrate, there is more to fictional worlds and human imagination than merely making up stories for their own sake. In this dissertation, especially the third point is relevant; the emotional component of reading is extraordinarily important but often downplayed or ignored in much traditional literary scholarship. I want to highlight the emotional component of reading; part of this is my argument that both reading and critical interpretation are fundamentally *creative* endeavors. This line of thinking informs my argument concerning fictional worlds. Furthermore, Holland's summary is useful because it provides a brief but convincing overview of the role and potential of fictional worlds. It is interesting, cf. the second point, that an intrinsic fascination exists with imagined worlds. Looking more closely at how this fascination manifests is worthwhile. We may get closer to understanding the allure of speculative fiction and fantasy through such an undertaking. The quest is not a simple one, however, as the issues I am concerned with in this dissertation are abstract and intangible. Suffice it to say for now, then, that fictional worlds play an important role in human consciousness and human development, and the reasons we find fictional worlds and worldbuilding interesting go beyond mere entertainment. By taking a closer look at different fictional worlds, I will pinpoint aspects from these worlds that may offer potential experiences and aesthetic connections, which are a powerful driving force in the immersion and attachment to literature.

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21 Wolf uses the same summary in *Building Imaginary Worlds* p. 4. The sources themselves are: Norman Holland, *Literature and the Brain*, Gainsville, Florida: The PsyArt Foundation, 2009. pp. 327-328. Leda Cosmides & John Tooby, "Consider the Source: The Evolution of Adaptations for Decoupling and Metarepresentation" in *Metarepresentations: A Multidisciplinary Perspective, Vancouver Studies in Cognitive Science*, Dan Sperber, editor, New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 54-116; and John Tooby & Leda Cosmides, "Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds? Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Aesthetics, Fiction, and the Arts", in *SubStance* 94/95, Special Issue, H. Porter Abbott, editor, 2001, pp. 6-27.

1. The Case for Postcriticism

Literary theory is expanding its repertoire. I am deliberately employing the word ‘expanding’ here since there is somewhat of a contentious relationship between traditional criticism, critical theory, ideological criticism, and the postcriticism tendency that is my focus. I see no reason why it has to be a case of *either/or*; rather, I argue that literary studies will benefit from more tools in the arsenal. Postcritical does not equal uncritical. It is, instead, a term that encompasses the potential of emerging ideas, and the ‘critical’ part underscores the close relationship to prior modes of thought and scholarship. The ‘post’ is not a replacement of critique, a moving beyond, but a promotion of the idea that literary analysis can be a composition and consist of multiple elements that are not mutually exclusive and do not discount the importance of affective engagement. This is particularly useful in the context of speculative fiction because analysis starts from a position of curiosity and inquiry that asks, “What does the text make possible? What is created here, what is it trying to do, and how?”. Postcriticism, or postcritique, is gaining momentum as a movement. Scholars such as Rita Felski, Elizabeth S. Anker, Toril Moi, and Eve Sedgewick are, in various ways, engaged in challenging the status quo in literary scholarship. This dissertation contributes to the case for postcriticism by conducting a postcritical analysis, and I see strong potential in postcriticism to explore new ways of thinking critically about literature and speculative fiction in particular.

The postcritical movement places focus more on affect and less on ideology. This burgeoning area of literary theory identifies a strong connection between readers’ relationship to a text and the text itself. This manner of understanding literature runs somewhat counter to traditional ideological readings, which value the critic’s ability to unmask perfidious truths that seemingly hide beneath the surface of a text and must be uncovered. While many types of texts undoubtedly are unlocked in interesting ways through traditional methods of literary analysis, I am instead interested in the potential for postcriticism to explain new and emerging elements of fiction. More specifically, postcriticism provides both a vocabulary and a mode of thinking about textual analysis that enables new forms of analysis that tackle difficult questions concerning immersion, textual atmospheres, and the role of worldbuilding. It is true that incorporating emotions and affect in an analysis is difficult, but these aspects remain a vital component of reading and must be taken into account. There is strong potential for worldbuilding and

atmosphere in fiction to create emotional attachment. Postcriticism allows for an exploration of such ideas. In their detailed Introduction to *Critique and Postcritique* (2017), Elizabeth S. Anker and Rita Felski clarify the history and role of postcritique and justify postcritique as an alternative to the suspicious critical readings, which have historically sought primarily to demystify and unmask texts:

> We can no longer assume that a stance of negativity and opposition is sufficient to justify the aesthetic or social importance of literature or our practice as critics. Rather, we are in urgent need of more powerful and persuasive justifications for our commitments and endeavors. The current moment in literary and cultural studies […] involves a broad interest in exploring new models and practices of reading that are less beholden to suspicion and skepticism, more willing to avow the creative, innovative, world-making aspects of literature and criticism. (20)

The aesthetic importance of texts seems to have fallen somewhat out of favor. Nevertheless, aesthetic engagement and readerly attachment to aesthetic objects are so crucial to reading experiences as to be inseparable from it. Postcritique offers ways of exploring this aesthetic importance and the social importance of literature. In the context of this dissertation, it is done through a closer look at the pervasive atmosphere texts rely on and the various roles worldbuilding can play in speculative fiction and fantasy. As we shall see, it is neither necessary nor always advisable to divorce politics from interpretation. My postcritical perspective is that new ways of thinking about interpretation and reading offer new insight, attitudes, and contexts. This is supposed to *add* to how critics might work with texts, especially since some types of texts do not easily yield to conventional scholarly critical readings. The danger of suspicious readings and political interpretations is encapsulated well in Lawrance Grossberg's objection that it might 'read the world in a grain of sand' – or, put differently, attribute too much power to the political and transformative power of all literature.

The four novels I analyze in this dissertation are usefully understood via postcriticism since it enables individual entities to be related in disparate ways without having a specific set of characteristics or features in common. While the differences between the four novels are apparent, their 'family resemblances' make them a representative and quite interesting part of speculative fiction and fantasy narratives, genres that by definition are fluid, ever-changing, and anything but homogenous. My dissertation focuses on atmospheres in worldbuilding in the four particular novels mentioned previously. Other novels could have been chosen and shown other relationships, connections, atmospheres, and strategies of worldbuilding. It would be a stretch to argue that the novels are representative of all speculative fiction and fantasy, but that has never been the point. Rather, I want to

present postcritical readings of precisely *these* novels to show alternative ways of reading that can be used in analyses of other novels. Although postcriticism is relatively adventurous in its daring counter to established modes of analysis, the movement shares similarities with Formalism and New Criticism since these, too, have an interest in close readings and the singularity of each work. Structuralism or ideological hermeneutics, conversely, inevitably generalize in their attempts at finding patterns. It is worth noting at this junction that the strategies within the postcriticism camp vary. For example, Felski does not venture into close readings but uses relatively minor examples to illustrate her points. Scholars such as Gumbrecht, on the other hand, engage deeply with close readings of individual works, highlighting their unique qualities and the singular quality of *that* particular work. The postcritical framework, supported by worldbuilding theory and the connection to literary atmosphere, will hopefully encourage similar explorations of other postcritical analyses.

Lastly, I want to stress that I am interested in the reading experience of these works and their particular aesthetic dimensions. My hope is that this can contribute meaningfully to an understanding of literature that is more grounded in our *potential experiences* with the text rather than the *ideology* behind (or within) the text. The emotional component is a crucial part of the experience with a given artwork. This also distinguishes my approach somewhat from conventional reader-response theory which is interested in *actualized* or *realized* experiences. I cannot speak to these, as I remain unconvinced that such proclamations are truly possible.

Any method of textual analysis that centers on affect and other intangible elements will necessarily be somewhat experimental in nature. My project is no exception. While traditional critical readings and critiques have offered — and continue to offer — valuable insight into texts, this project instead wants to break the mold somewhat and consider both well-known and newer narratives in a new light. Generally speaking, my approach to postcriticism is marked by positive language and conceptualizations which argue that literature, and fiction in particular, is able to produce feelings, reflections, and other emotions that cannot reasonably be divorced from a passionate and immersive reading experience. I consider both the act of reading and scholarly interpretation as fundamentally *creative* undertakings, and this necessitates a language framework and a theoretical framework which supports such a line of thinking. This, then, is one of the many aspects of postcriticism and one whose advantages are many. With postcritique, however, one does venture into an intellectual battlefield and

positioning my project and my line of argumentation is made complicated by the nature of postcriticism and its still-developing mode. There exists a complex relationship between critique and postcrique; the 'post-' prefix concerns its preoccupation with finding new ways of working critically with texts; it is not a matter of replacing critique but rather to expand the realm of interpretive options and angles.

As I will argue at some length, a vital component of literature and reading concerns the affective and emotional dimensions. What captivates readers is not necessarily rational or indicative of grand ideological truths or maneuverings. Sometimes, of course, texts are *precisely* concerned with such truths and maneuverings (unconsciously or not), but postcritique simply posits that other ways of thinking about art exist and that these are worth exploring, not least since each individual encounter with a text carries a wide range of *potential* experiences. Postcritique is chiefly concerned with testing new possibilities and interpretive alternatives to well-established and almost taken-for-granted approaches to literary analysis. It is not a uniform school of thought but rather a malleable and diverse shift in thinking about theory and critical engagement with texts, and primarily one which places greater focus on aesthetics, attachment, experience, and emotions. Discussing the current 'method wars' in literary and cultural studies, Anker and Felski identify a part of the critique and its shortcomings. Critique, they argue, implies a specific methodology and leaves little room for other modes of interpretation. There is a "[…] persistent concern with drawing out shadowy, concealed, or counterintuitive meanings [which] can lead to a neglect of the formal qualities of art and the sensual dimensions of aesthetic experience" (*Critique and Postcritique*, 16). This is where postcriticism can offer alternative ways of interpreting and working critically with texts. However, the less formalized nature of postcriticism makes the endeavor less than straightforward. Christopher Castiglia argues in the same vein in the article "Hope for Critique?" where he describes the role of critics thus far in no uncertain terms and makes it clear that postcritique might offer both a welcome but also necessary breath of fresh air.

> As the "post-" suggests, the term has mostly, to this point, been defined oppositionally, a repudiating break with what Paul Ricoeur called the hermeneutics of suspicion, what Eve Sedgwick called paranoid reading, or what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus more recently have called symptomatic reading: the assumption that texts conceal beneath their surface an abstract agency, sinister and ubiquitous, to be unearthed by astute and usually indignant critics whose empirical location of that agency "in the text" safeguards their own unimplicated status. Through suspicion, critics become truth-tellers or, more

> accurately, naysayers, imagining themselves among the so-called radicals who, according to Rebecca Solnit, have poisoned the Left "with the sense of personal superiority that comes from pleasure denied". (Castiglia, 218)

The labels that Castiglia summarizes, such as paranoid reading and symptomatic reading, stand at the center of conventional critique and are by necessity referenced when describing the role and ambition of postcritique. I see postcritique as an attempt to identify and clarify the emotional relationship between texts and readers. The question of how texts produce an emotional connection then becomes an important starting point.

In the following pages, I will account for the parts of postcriticism that have inspired this dissertation and conceptually and theoretically are most relevant to my analysis of fictional worlds and their atmospheres. Several of the sections to come are primarily based on Rita Felski's work, but it is important to stress that Felski is but one vigilant member of the postcritical camp. As we shall see, a few problems crop up when applying postcritical terminology in an analysis, but that is inevitable when developing new modes of literary analysis that seek to broaden the theoretical horizon and explore new possibilities. Numerous scholars are directly or indirectly interested in postcriticism, and several of these have inspired or influenced Felski's work. As I will show in a later section, Paul Ricoeur's work, especially his coinage of the term *hermeneutics of suspicion*, plays a central role in the conceptualization of postcritique and its application. Bruno Latour has also been influential in his criticism of critique and his contribution concerning Actor Network Theory (ANT). For example, his "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam?" (2004)[22] has inspired several of the arguments put forth in the aforementioned *Critique and Postcritique*. Other scholars and their work include Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus in "Surface Reading: An Introduction" (2009)[23]; Adam Frank and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins" (1995)[24] as well as Sedgwick's "Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity" (2003)[25]. Nikolas Kompridis argues for receptivity in "Recognition and Receptivity: Forms of Normative Response in the Lives of the Animals

[22] Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," Critical Inquiry 30, no. 2 (winter 2004): 225–48
[23] Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," Representations 108, no. 1 (fall 2009): 1–21
[24] Adam Frank and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," Critical Inquiry 21, no. 2 (winter 1995): 496–522
[25] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

We Are" (2013)[26], which allows readers to become 'open' to texts and be inspired and affected by their content. This type of language concerned with 'opening' texts is indicative of a shift in thinking, and one that deliberately dispenses with (or at least challenges) the pseudo-objectivity of conventional critique. In *The Limits of Critique* (2015), Felski puts forth similar arguments and highlights the potential for postcriticism to add new aspects rather than taking away anything from traditional critique. "*Interpretation becomes a coproduction between actors that brings new things to light rather than an endless rumination on a text's hidden meanings or representational failures*" (174, emphasis original). Additional relevant work includes Michael D. Snediker's *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (2009)[27]; Doris Sommer's *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities* (2014)[28]; James O. Pawelski and D. J. Moores (eds.) *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Studies* (2012)[29]; Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* (2001)[30]; Alexander Nehamas' *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (2010)[31]; and texts from the New Aestheticism camp, which talk about both postcriticism and post-theory in literary studies, such as John J. Joughin & Simon Malpas' (eds.) *The New Aestheticism* (2004)[32]. Bringing in these scholars is meant to highlight that postcriticism has caused quite a stir, and exciting work is produced, which challenges previous notions about literary studies and how we think about analysis. This should also illustrate that although the following sections focus quite heavily on Felski, her work does not exist in a vacuum. Felski's contributions must be understood in the broader context of postcriticism.

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26 Nikolas Kompridis, "Recognition and Receptivity: Forms of Normative Response in the Lives of the Animals We Are,", *New Literary History* 44, no. 1 (2013): 1-24.
27 Michael D. Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009)
28 Doris Sommer, *The Work of Art in the World: Civic Agency and Public Humanities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014)
29 James O. Pawelski and D. J. Moores, eds., *The Eudaimonic Turn: Well-Being in Literary Studies* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012)
30 Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001)
31 Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010)
32 John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas, eds., *The New Aestheticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004)

Postcritique, Affect, & Fictional Worlds

Similar to fictional storyworlds, literary theory is evolving. The following theoretical chapter contains numerous challenging elements since I am interested in combining several ideas that provide a starting point for my interpretation of (the state of) literature, literary theory, and literary analysis. One particular area of difficulty arises in light of two major components important for this dissertation: the emotional and affective realm connected to literature and the role and importance of worldbuilding and fictional worlds. This chapter will focus on these two areas, and I will attempt to shed light on the current debates concerning readerly attachment to literature before delving into narratology and worldbuilding. Narratology and worldbuilding are linked in an arguably seamless or logical way, while current debates concerning the emotional realm of reading are somewhat less tangible. For this reason, I will start this chapter with an introduction to the concepts and elements, which I have found relevant in a critical context and also particularly inspiring. In traditional literary scholarship, areas such as atmosphere, empathy, affective responses, and suspense have been either overlooked or entirely ignored, presumably because of the difficulty that arises in any attempt at creating precise overviews and tools for analysis. In recent years and recent scholarship, however, there has been a return to, or a reemergence of, the affective turn. Several scholars now attempt to describe, analyze, or contextualize the less tangible but profoundly important emotional dimension that literature houses. This chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, is a contribution to this ongoing discussion. I focus mainly on the intricate relationship between atmospheres and worldbuilding. This connection has not been explored in-depth before, but it is a central part of immersion and the potential experiences with literature and the fictional worlds therein.

The starting point for discussing the affective quality of literature is Rita Felski's work and particularly her influential book *Uses of Literature* from 2008. In this manifesto, Felski argues for the positive potential of engaging with texts and delineates four possible (though there are many more) uses of literature and art: recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock. Felski's approach in this book and her other works, including *The Limits of Critique* (2015) and most recently *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020), has inspired this dissertation and its conceptual backbone. As I will show, Felski's research positions itself within a movement or tendency; one which considers literature in a new light

and views texts as sources of particular kinds of knowledge and capable of producing emotions that are an inseparable part of many reading experiences. Importantly, Felski's work cannot reasonably be considered part of any established theoretical school. It leans toward the postcritical with scholars such as Toril Moi and Amanda Anderson. A focal point in this dissertation relates to Felski's conceptualizations and problematizations and how they are relevant for fantastic literature and speculative fiction. Although there is impressive breadth to her work, Felski does not engage to a substantial degree with the types of texts relevant to my interests. While that is regrettable, it leaves room for me to contribute meaningfully to the discussion in the dissertation's four analysis chapters. First, however, I will elucidate precisely what Felski's approach entails and why I consider it both an innovative and essential part of the tendencies within contemporary literary theory.

Either implicitly or explicitly, Felski engages with the problem of *why* we read, or why we engage with art generally. There are the commonly accepted adages, which proclaim that we read either for pleasure or knowledge. While it would be difficult to disagree with this observation, it does not explore particulars. What does reading do, and what role does critical scholarship play? In her Introduction to *Uses of Literature*, Felski sets the stage for such discussion and ends a paragraph with a powerful question:

> Problematizing, interrogating, and subverting are the default options, the deeply grooved patterns of contemporary thought. "Critical reading" is the holy grail of literary studies, endlessly invoked in mission statements, graduation speeches, and conversations with deans, a slogan that peremptorily assigns all value to the act of reading and none to the objects read. Are these objects really inert and indifferent, supine and submissive, entirely at the mercy of our critical maneuvers? Do we gain nothing in particular from what we read? (*Uses*, 3)

Problematizing, interrogating, and critical reading have all yielded worthwhile results, but these are not the *only* possible avenues. In the spirit of Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (ANT) which Felski employs, we might consider which other actors exist in this network. It is fascinating to tackle the question of what we gain from reading, but also unsurprisingly quite difficult. Felski provides conceptualizations and considerations that are inspiring and backed by convincing argumentation but while her terminology is useful for *understanding* literature, things turn problematic once the goal becomes *analyzing* literature. That is why I combine Felski's concepts and approaches with especially worldbuilding theory since this alliance permits considerations of both the construction of fictional worlds, their potential, and, perhaps daringly, their value. This is deeply connected with a question

raised in *Hooked: Art and Attachment* where Felski reflects on why some artworks have a profound effect on one person but leaves another indifferent: "Why, for example, are we drawn to a painting or a piece of music in ways we struggle to explain while being left cold by others whose merits we duly acknowledge?" (*Hooked,* xiii) — This is a central concern, and one I implicitly tackle in chapter 3 which focuses on Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan*. We return to the question of what we gain from reading, and what precisely we gain connects intimately to the object itself. Texts and other artforms are sources of knowledge, but their content varies, and not every artform and text can house every type of knowledge. Furthermore, the type of knowledge that literature produces is not a homogenous entity but greatly depends on individual texts and their epistemological focus. It might be tempting to consider much of the knowledge that postcriticm is interested in as primarily *subjective* knowledge since not every reader will respond to the same text in the same way. Subjective knowledge, however, may by some not count as true knowledge which immediately opens up a difficult but rewarding discussion. Can literature be interpreted objectively? Is only objective and factual knowledge worthwhile, or do other types of readings matter as well? One article that argues for various types of knowledge is "How Does Literature Know? Archive- Medium - Speech Act" by Jens Lohfert Jørgensen[33]. In his article, Jørgensen argues for three types of knowledge positions that literature may take: it can appropriate knowledge, articulate knowledge, or generate knowledge. Appropriating knowledge concerns literature as an archive which may retroactively be accessed; articulating knowledge concerns literature as a *medium* and argues that "knowledge articulated by the work is embedded in contemporary thought collectives" (227); and lastly, generating knowledge, which considers literature as a speech act. What I am interested in, and what fits well with postcriticism, is *potential knowledge*. It allows for a wide range of options and outcomes only realized in subjective encounters with a text. Interpretation thus stays an integral part of the reading experience, but the interpretation may focus on different areas, which all offer various forms of knowledge — some factual, some experimental, some affective.

We often interpret a text in a manner consistent with what we are taught directly or indirectly, but I argue different texts offer different experiences and types of knowledge. *Titus Groan* is one enigmatic but beautiful example of this. The difficulty in studying and reading *Titus Groan* relates to its refusal to

[33] Jørgensen, J. L. (2014). Hvordan ved litteratur? Arkiv – Medium – Talehandling. K&K: Kultur og Klasse, 43(118), 227-244. I have in my text translated the Danish title into English.

be conventional. Questions of genre hardly apply; the textual detective work often employed in literary criticism is not convincingly viable. Moreover, any literary precursors barely exist, and yet, mysteriously, the novel has qualities that have enchanted a subset of readers since it was released. Reflecting on how precisely this happens is a worthwhile but challenging endeavor since one answer might satisfy one enthusiastic reader but not another.

Next, I briefly want to clarify the precarious role of ideology in Felski's work and this dissertation. Certain schools of thought within literary studies have focused (and still do) on ideological readings. Referencing, among others, Eve Sedgwick, Felski discusses Paul Ricoeur and the so-called *hermeneutics of suspicion* that engages with literature from a point of critical and detached distance. Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud stand at the forefront of the hermeneutics of suspicion. According to Ricoeur, it seeks to draw out "the lies and illusions of consciousness" (Ricoeur, 356)[34]. It is a style of reading and interpreting that seems to assume that texts exist on two levels: a surface level, which we read, and a level beneath the surface that houses uncomfortable or unflattering truths that can be (must be) uncovered and decoded: "Eve Sedgwick observes that the hermeneutics of suspicion is now virtually de rigueur in literary theory, rather than one option among others. As a quintessentially paranoid style of critical engagement, it calls for constant vigilance, reading against the grain, assuming the worst-case scenario and then rediscovering its own gloomy prognosis in every text" (Felski, *Uses*, 3). The point is not to discount or discredit the immense influence of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Instead, the goal is to think of less suspicious ways to engage with literature and understand and analyze it from a starting point that is not suspicious, passionlessly distanced, and pseudo-objectively critical. Our engagement with texts is complex and differentiated, and the tendency promoted by Felski is less interested in diagnosing texts and more interested in hearing them and learning what they have to say::

> Whatever definition of ideology is being deployed (and I am aware that the term has undergone a labyrinthine history of twists and turns), its use implies that a text is being diagnosed rather than heard, relegated to the status of a symptom of social structures or political causes. (Felski, *Uses*, 6)

I find this manner of thinking to have great potential. It is not meant to replace conventional forms of critical engagement but to add to the available repertoire and allow us to view and appreciate art from new angles. This is important, as it might counter some of the preconceived notions that certain types

[34] Ricoeur, Paul. *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1970.

of suspicious readings bring to texts. Rather than let texts function as sources of knowledge, suspicious and political readings often impose pre-packaged meanings onto a text: "To define literature as ideology is to have decided ahead of time that literary works can be objects of knowledge but never sources of knowledge" (*Uses*, 7). Some texts are naturally objects of knowledge, and some lend themselves particularly well to specific ideological readings. A nonpolitical reading of Orwell's *Animal Farm*, for instance, is hard to imagine, but the trouble with art and theory is that no size fits all. Felski develops this line of thinking in *The Limits of Critique* and stresses an important point: "[W]orks of art cannot help being social, sociable, connected, worldly, immanent — and yet they can also be felt, without contradiction, to be incandescent, extraordinary, sublime, utterly special" (*Limits*, 11). This inclusive approach is appealing because it places both the reader and the critical scholar in a position of greater potential and possibility. The default position is not to try to unmask the insidious text that *must* be hiding its "real" truths behind a veil: "Rather than looking behind the text — for its hidden causes, determining conditions, and noxious motives — we might place ourselves in front of the text, reflecting on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible" (*Limits*, 12)[35].

The humanities, thankfully, is indeed full of passion and wonder, and, ultimately, texts are inspiring and thought-provoking. Much critical attention rightfully focuses on texts that deserve a suspicious treatment, but, as Helen Small argues, there are more readerly-layers within the humanities than simply the critical: "[T]he work of the humanities is frequently descriptive, or appreciative, or imaginative, or provocative, or speculative, more than it is critical" (Small, 23)[36]. Here I turn to Felski and her proposed terminology in *Uses of Literature*. Her four areas of engagement, which are not mutually exclusive in any sense, enable new approaches to fantastic literature and fictional worlds when coupled with contemporary worldbuilding theory. The terms can function as a foundation for discussion on their own, but they seem to need the support of other concepts as analytical terms. This will become evident in my treatment of the four narratives I analyze since the presence of Felski in the analysis is sometimes more implicit than explicit; some texts lend themselves better to the treatment she proposes. What follows now is a bit more insight into what exactly Felski's recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock entails.

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35 See also: Janice Radway. *A Feeling for Books: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Taste, and Middle-Class Desire* (chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press) 1999

36 Helen Small. *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2013, p. 23)

Recognition concerns the idea that it is possible to recognize (or even discover) ourselves in a narrative, and moreover, what effect it has on the reader. This goes beyond mere character identification and links to fiction's ability to "trigger fervent self-scrutiny" (*Uses*, 24). While the joy of recognizing oneself, or aspects of oneself, in a novel is undoubtedly part of it, recognition goes beyond that to include moments that make us doubt the type of self-knowledge triggered. It is an important and complex area, but, as will become evident, recognition is often a crucial and surprising dimension of art.

> Simultaneously reassuring and unnerving, it [recognition] brings together likeness and difference in one fell swoop. When we recognize something, we literally "know it again"; we make sense of what is unfamiliar by fitting it into an existing scheme, linking it to what we already know. [...] Recognition is not repetition; it denotes not just the previously known, but the becoming known. Something that may have been sensed in a vague, diffuse, or semi-conscious way now takes on a distinct shape, is amplified, heightened, or made newly visible. (*Uses*, 25)

It is a gaining of (new) perspectives, and this vocabulary is appropriate, as it is often used in the context of fiction and fictional worlds. There are several important facets to what Felski talks about, including sexuality and identity, which showcase the various meanings that a term like *recognition* might encompass. Put differently, what one person recognizes and considers important in a piece of art may differ wildly from what another person recognizes in the same artwork. As I will show in my analysis of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* saga, introspection and personal quests may be of great importance in a novel because through such elements, there may be significant moments of recognition for readers as well. "Depicting characters engaged in introspection and soul-searching, it encourages its readers to engage in similar acts of self-scrutiny. It speaks to a distinctly modern sense of individuality [...]" (*Uses*, 25). I find this argumentation entirely relevant to speculative fiction. Often readers of this genre are plunged into a world of unknown scope and potential, in which the search for recognition may be subconscious but still present. Reading Jane Austen will encourage a different, and perhaps more literal, sense of recognition since readers are encouraged to share the feelings and perspectives of Elizabeth Bennet or Cathrine Morland. This potential is expanded within fictional worlds as readers search for familiar and recognizable elements. Le Guin again proves thought-provoking in this context. She built convincing fictional worlds but also explored complex issues of identity. Famously, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) features one of the most well-known instances of androgyny in science-fiction. In Earthsea, we eventually learn that Ged is not white, which upsets (old) de facto assumptions

about fantasy protagonists in Western literature, such as age, gender, and character traits. Such aspects are a crucial part of literature and the type of recognition Felski is interested in: "[...] women and minorities found literature an especially pertinent medium for parsing the complexities of personhood" (*Uses*, 26). While identity issues are not at the forefront of this dissertation, it is important to appreciate this central feature because of the role it undoubtedly plays for many readers.

Matters become more complex when we take into account the truism that people are different and have different frames of reference. It follows, then, that what (and how) people recognize will differ, which impacts any reading, interpretation, and connection to a fictional landscape or character. Felski touches on this point:

> This is not at all to deny that art can be a source of surprise and wonder, but to restate the rudimentary point that otherness and sameness are interfused aspects of aesthetic response, not alternate buttons one can push. Innovation and familiarity are, as Ricoeur points out, inextricably intertwined; the perception of certain phenomena as other, new, or strange depends on, and is shaped by, a prior conception of what is already known. (*Uses*, 38)

We see two things here – first, the point I already made concerning readers' frame of reference. Few readers will have precisely the same reaction to a text or piece of art. Next, we see here an instance of the difficulty in analyzing texts using *only* Felski's terminology. Perhaps they were never meant as tools for analysis, but it bears mentioning that while fruitful discussions can be had based on her arguments, it seems tremendously difficult to structure a sound analysis of a text around her conceptualization of recognition. Felski references Hilary Mantel's *An Experiment in Love* (1995), which caused intense recognition, or what Felski calls *self-intensification* (39). It is "triggered by a skillful rendition of the densely packed minutiae of daily life [...]" (ibid), highlighting the deeply personal nature of recognition. Recognition may also take another form: *self-extension*, i.e. "coming to see aspects of oneself in what seems distant or strange" (ibid). Both are easily possible even in the most creative speculative fiction. For example, if we consider the writings of Kazuo Ishiguro, it would be plausible to argue for moments of significant self-intensification in both *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and his most recent novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021). Both have strong science-fiction elements, however both narratives are made vivid, impactful, and emotional exactly through Ishiguro's beautiful rendition of seemingly mundane or insignificant situations that occur as part of the novels' worldbuilding. The

form that minutiae of daily life may take thus becomes a crucial part of worldbuilding, effectively linking the notion of recognition with the potential of worldbuilding.

Felski's second form of engagement, **enchantment**, brings us to a concept that has been especially relevant in the context of fantasy literature. In order to fully understand enchantment, however, it is necessary to take a step back and understand the equally important disenchantment. Max Weber's well-known discussion about the "disenchantment of the world" – from a 1917 lecture – is often invoked in discussions about fiction and fantasy literature in particular[37]. The starting point for Weber was not literature but sociology. He was interested in the general loss of "the overarching meanings, animistic connections, magical orientations, and spiritual explanations that had characterized the traditional world as a result of the ongoing 'modern' process of rationalization, secularization, and bureaucratization." (Saler, 8). In essence, the world and people's consciousness contained a greater degree of attunement to non-rational phenomena. This was largely destroyed during the Enlightenment due to the focus on science and rationality. In the context of fantasy literature, then, arguments concerning its power to re-enchant started to emerge, and the alluring power of the genre was explained in part via its capacity to evoke a sense of wonder and adventure. In a disenchanted world everything can be understood, explained, and categorized via calculations[38]. Enchantment, then, speaks to both our capacity for, but also our somewhat irrational *need* for, wonder. While I imagine all textual genres, and indeed all art, is able to produce enchantment it does seem that speculative fiction, if it manages to be convincing and to hold readers spellbound, is unique in its ability to produce enchantment. In the context of speculative fiction, I argue that a major reason for enchantment potentially not occuring is tied quite closely to worldbuilding and its perceived success. If a fictional world is well-realized then immersion and enchantment become possible.

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37 See Max Weber. "Science as a Vocation", in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, eds. (London: Routledge), 1998. For more insight on the same topic, see: Ronald M. Glassman & Vatro Muvar, eds. *Max Weber's Political Sociology: A Pessimistic Vision of a Rationalized World* (Westpor, Greenwood Press) 1984. & Stephen Kalberg, "Max Weber's Types of Rationality", in American Journal of Sociology 85:5, March 1980: 1145-79. & Edward Shils. "Max Weber and the World Since 1920" in *Max Weber and his Contemporaries* ed. WolfgangMommsen & Jurgen Osterhammel (London: HarperCollins) 1987.& Lawrance A. Scaff. *Fleeing the Iron Cage: Culture, Politics, and Modernity in the Thought of Max Weber* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 1989.

38 For a detailed account of this topic, see the Introduction in Michael Saler. *As If. Modern Enchantment and the Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford University Press) 2012

Felski's development of the term is naturally not divorced from its history, and she expands the term and argues for all kinds of different texts to be able to produce enchantment. Being enchanted is not limited to anything that we might label high- or low brow, but it describes a feeling of passionate immersion: "Enchantment is characterized by a state of intense involvement, a sense of being entirely caught up in an aesthetic object that nothing else seems to matter" (*Uses*, 54). Before I offer an example, I will again stress that Felski's four notions are not mutually exclusive. A text may evoke any number of reactions, which we might describe using Felski's vocabulary. That being said, enchantment is useful because it lets us capture a *potential* experience of even irrational involvement. In my chapter on *Titus Groan*, I rely on the enchantment-related terminology much more than I do when analyzing texts that more readily conform to recognizable patterns of narrative construction, such as Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985), which employs a dual-world structure with alternating chapters focusing on one of the two worlds. Certain narratives seem to rely on an analytical state of mind while reading, while others — if we allow ourselves — almost seem to disable our critical minds, or at least severely negate the need for our critical mind to act:

> Enchantment is soaked through with an unusual intensity of perception and affect; it is often compared to the condition of being intoxicated, drugged, or dreaming. Colors seem brighter, perceptions are heightened, details stand out with a hallucinatory sharpness. The effect can be uniquely exhilarating, because of the sheer intensity of the pleasure being offered, but also unnerving, in sapping a sense of autonomy and self-control. The analytical part of your mind recedes into the background; your inner censor and critic are nowhere to be found. Instead of examining a text with a sober and clinical eye, you are pulled irresistibly into its orbit. (*Uses*, 55)

There is a danger here of it seeming 'unacademic' (whatever this might mean), but the idea is captivating because it acknowledges that there is a strong emotional component to reading. Whether a feeling of enchantment is evoked through *Finnegans Wake* or *The Hobbit*, both remain valid objects of aesthetic experience. Taste and proclivities are subject to change, naturally, and enchantment helps explain how various texts and pieces of art encountered or revisited at differing stages of our lives may enrapture. Navigating between enchantment as a valid scholarly term and the word, which can seem to cover any type of engagement with any sort of text is not easy, and, predictably, enchantment has historically received criticism: "We need only think of a history of feminist critiques of visual pleasure and the male gaze, Marxist analyses of aesthetic ideology and commodity fetishism, the poststructuralist idiom of suspicion and interrogation, New Historicist indictments of power and

containment" (ibid, 56). All this harken back to an earlier point made concerning the critic's position as an unveiler of insidious truths about a text. Several schools of academic thought would seek to position the critic as an aloof being viewing a text with objectivity, but is this truly the case? Is there not surprisingly often an emotional investment, which causes or inspires interpretation? Jane Bennett puts forth the same ideas in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* (2001), in which she works with notions such as wonder, affective attachment, and surprise. She argues for a change of mindset that actively focuses on the positive experiences of enchantment.

The enchantment-issue begs the question: can we identify specific textual elements that promote or produce enchantment? A central point in this dissertation is the idea that immersion into storyworlds is as possible as immersion into a story, and that storyworlds are unique entities with their own functions and qualities. As such, while a fantasy narrative may well be enchanting, so, too, may the world itself. It is possible to feel no great sense of attachment or identification with major characters in a story but remain entirely captivated by the storyworld, in which the characters exist. Felski briefly touches on the same, although not with a storyworld focus: "And yet, readers testify to being entranced by a motley array of genres and forms, from lyric poetry to realist novels to postmodern fiction. Moreover, while critics often assume that absorption is tied to the experience of identifying with fictional characters, the catalysts for such involvement turn out to be less predictable" (*Uses*, 62). One of the catalysts referenced here may well be fictional worlds, and their relevance and potential in the context of speculative fiction underscore this point. There are several influential areas regarding the aesthetic experience, including style, prose, genre, events, and so on — enchantment is not limited but may occur even in unexpected situations.

What fiction – and storyworlds – is able to do, then, is to *re*-enchant and offer a type of rational magic (a strange but fitting oxymoron), through which readers willfully immerse themselves in impossible landscapes and worlds. "Novels give us the magic, as well as the mundanity, of the everyday; they infuse things with wonder, enliven the inanimate world, invite ordinary and often overlooked phenomena to shimmer forth as bearers of aesthetic, affective, even metaphysical meanings" (*Uses*, 70). I will again foreshadow the analysis of *Titus Groan.* It fits the bill well: its aesthetic realm is boundless; although very little happens in terms of the story. There is a particular type of magic at play, and without an appropriate scholarly vocabulary to tackle such a novel, it is hard to describe what

precisely it does. This might be part of the reason the *Gormenghast* novels have not been studied nearly as much as other fantasy stories. Furthermore, these types of stories require a double-consciousness[39], which connects to the willful immersion I mentioned above. In such cases, readers are immersed in, perhaps enchanted by, a text but know rationally that it is taking place. This is possible due to a double-consciousness, an idea Michael Saler developed further. In *As If* (2011), he argues that it is possible to live in multiple worlds at the same time, willingly believing in them while at the same time being aware of their fictionality. He calls this the ironic imagination (Saler, 13 & 30). This concept is important because it helps explain the processes that happen during reading, and enables discussions of what enchantment is and does.

Previous arguments against fantastic literature have focused on its inherent dishonesty; stories, characters, and plots made invalid by their unrealistic setting, and reliance on (at best) suspension of disbelief and (at worst) an entirely uncritical mind. Readers of fantasy, or a society reading fantasy, might be delighted without being deluded. For example, a reader is positively influenced when immersed in a secondary world with its own history and culture. Karin Littau's *Theories of Reading* (2006) examines passions when reading, and Jane Thrailkill's *Affecting Fictions: Mind, Body, and Emotion in American Literary Realism* (2007) expands the scope to include literary fiction and popular fiction. A reaction in mind, body, and emotion is not exclusive to literary fiction, and it warrants research into its effect upon the reader.-Both Littau and Thraikill provide ideas about how literature produces knowledge, thus complementing Felski's approach. Anti-enchantment arguments exist and have historically centered on the belief that the idea of enchantment in literature is disingenuous, deluding, and disabling. It is possible to be 'delighted without being deluded' (Saler, 12). How is this argument relevant to reading fantasy and speculative fiction? The point of reading such stories is not to be deluded but to engage intellectually and emotionally with other worlds which, ideally, immerse the reader to a degree where they can look back and wonder at the enchantment that took place: "Enchantment matters because one reason that people turn to works of art is to be taken out of themselves, to be pulled into an altered state of consciousness" (*Uses*, 76). It is ultimately worthwhile to take a closer look at how certain works of art pull us into this altered state of being.

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39 See Edgar Morin. *The Cinema, or, The Imaginary Man* (1956) p. 225

The next area of engagement from Felski's terminology concerns **knowledge** and the question of what literature *knows* and is able to communicate. This is a complicated area since the scholarly debate about knowledge and the role of literature is extensive and intricate. The core argument centers around the claim that literature is a potential source of unique knowledge and that it 'knows what it knows' — this stands in opposition to ideological readings, which see literature not as sources of actual knowledge but rather as unwitting containers of ideology lurking beneath the surface of the text, which can be (or *must* be!) unmasked by critical reading.

> The question of literature's relationship to knowledge remains open; much will depend, of course, on how we define the act of knowing. [...] I now turn to what literature discloses about the world beyond the self, to what it reveals about people and things, mores and manners, symbolic meanings and social stratification. [...] But one motive for reading is the hope of gaining a deeper sense of the everyday experience and the shape of social life. Literature's relationship to worldly knowledge is not only negative or adversarial; it can also expand, enlarge, or reorder our sense of how things are. (*Uses*, 83)

We see in this passage an impassioned defense of literature's capacity for rendering the world and its ability to provide a 'deeper sense' of the everyday experience. The exact form this takes will vary from text to text, but it does show an interesting deviation from the typical critical position that focuses on ideology and hidden truths. In order to strengthen the argument, Felski relies on Ricoeur and the arguments surrounding the issue of mimesis.

> Mimesis, in the manner I define it here, is by no means limited to realism but extends to instances of modernism, poetry, and postmodern prose. Once we relinquish the false picture of a reality 'out there' waiting to be found, we can think of literary conventions as devices for articulating truth rather than as obstacles to its discovery. (*Uses*, *84*)

It is noteworthy that Felski does not mention speculative fiction and fantasy literature in this context. These genres overtly dispense with an 'out there' reality and thus fit well with the general argumentation that Felski puts forth in *Uses of Literature* as well as within the postcriticism movement. One scholar who explicitly engages with precisely this topic, and did so as early as 1984, is Kathryn Humes in *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984).Humes argues how fantasy is connected to reality and thus produces relevant epistemological knowledge. This potential knowledge is only enhanced through the fantastic literary mode, which, she argues, is just as able to 'articulate truth' as are other types of texts. Additionally, it may raise issues and present alternative values, with which readers can engage. Felski's argumentation in the above quote focuses on the potential for literature and art to 'articulate truth'. This opens up a realm of greater interpretative potential and discovery since texts can be approached from a

less suspicious angle. Felski wants to rethink mimesis as 'redescription' rather than 'reflection' of reality (84), and in this endeavor, she draws on Ricoeur's explanation of our world experience through three stages. In the first stage, our experience is *pre-figured*, "embedded in a plentitude of symbolic practices, social competences, and discursive repertories" (ibid). The existing world is already influenced (pre-figured) by discourse and a number of factors that influence our perception of it and against which we measure literary texts. Do they confirm or reject our preconceived notions and knowledge of the world? The material is then *configured*, i.e., literature may engage in this discourse and shape it. If this process is successful, the text might *transfigure* the reader in the final stage, as the reader's knowledge has expanded or changed. Transfiguration describes "the work's impact upon the reader" (87), and this impact may take various forms. For example, one type of impact concerns phenomenological knowledge and literature's unique ability to evoke emotions through storytelling and affective attachment. Consider a novel such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), which lets readers gain insight into the lives and realities of soldiers during the Great War. The experience of reading such a novel, and the knowledge gained, is entirely different from a factual history book about the same war. This can in large part be explained through obtaining epistemological knowledge and the importance of emotional attachment. Felski touches on this when she writes about novels:

> [...] the novel is distinguished at the level of discourse in various ways, including, most notably, its ability to read minds. Third person fiction allows the narrator an epistemological privilege that accrues neither to real life nor to the writing of history: unrestricted access to the inner life of other persons. [...] Fiction is the only medium in which the interiority of persons is promiscuously plumbed, where narrators routinely know more about the minds of characters than they know themselves. (*Uses*, 89)

The impact of a novel like *All Quiet on the Western Front* is felt precisely because of the 'unrestricted access to the inner life' of characters. The same principle can be applied to all manner of narratives, which contributes to answering why fiction can be important and evocative despite its inherent fictitious nature. Although the protagonist in the novel, Paul Bäumer, was not a real figure, he is, nevertheless, an essential part of conveying the experience of the Great War. A historical account of the war's body count conveys facts but not the type of knowledge, which (in Ricoeur's words) transfigures and provides affective and epistemological perspectives.

Felski outlines two other relevant sources of knowledge that literature may produce: deep intersubjectivity and ventriloquism. Each category creates likelihood (or "vraisemblance"). Deep intersubjectivity refers to literature's ability to depict people as "embedded and embodied agents" (91). This connects directly to the everyday knowledge that art may convey and provides a unique inside view. Ventriloquism is similar, although, as the name suggests, it primarily concerns imitation. Felski argues that literature, "demand[s] that we adapt our minds to multiple lexicons and modes of expression that encompass alternative ways of making sense of experience." (94). I find this particularly true for speculative fiction, since engaging with it means that our minds must adapt to both changed circumstances via worldbuilding and often also non-human (or post-human, trans-human) perspectives. Systems of thought are easily changed in speculative fiction, and it requires an adaptation of our way of thinking to fully appreciate the textual landscape and what it tries to achieve. Stanisław Lem's *Solaris* (1961) is one book that forces new perspectives and highlights our potential lack of understanding of extraterrestrial life. Likewise, in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000), the garuda have a different moral outlook and legal system than we know. The way they express empathy is markedly different from humans, which forces a different interpretive stance. This becomes a crucial concern surrounding one of the major characters, Yagharek, and his crime relating to 'choice theft'[40]. The points made here are relevant also to my reading of Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* since how both reader and main character(s) make sense of the world are central themes of this novel. There are elements of both deep intersubjectivity (especially in the relationships between the main character(s) and assisting characters) and ventriloquism.

The fourth and final major area Felski details in *Uses of Literature* concerns literature's ability to **shock**. There is both a literal and a metaphorical dimension to this idea of shock, and its use and potential depends on which type of text we are focusing on and which type of shock we are interested in. At first, Felski seeks to go back to basics and do away with confused notions that have a (perhaps too) strong history in academia and literary theory, including transgression, trauma, defamiliarisation, dislocation, self-shattering, and the sublime (105). While I do argue that some of these terms still have value on their own, especially in the context of speculative fiction (such as defamiliarisation which is often evoked in discussions on fantasy), the idea behind keeping the terminology simple and describing

[40] I elaborate on this idea in: "Friedrichsen, Dennis: Evoking Empathy in China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station*" (2018) Komparatistik p. 195-216

literature's capacity for shock in a more simple manner is attractive. As Felski argues, "a word drawn from our everyday usage can clear away some of our calcified, often under-justified conviction about the import and impact of literary works" (105).There is something to be said for a plain term, especially since that word adequately covers the experience of being shocked; additionally, it is often a tremendously exciting outcome of reading and may cause heated and passionate debates. Felski rightly calls the literal aspect of shock a "slap in the face," which is an "exhilarating assault equal parts intellectual and visceral" (106). Next, her focus is on violence and brutality. This type of shock is not directly relevant to this dissertation. Relatively little fantasy and speculative fiction include colorful descriptions of senseless violence[41]. Nevertheless, it remains an interesting topic because related types of shock exist, which speaks to the varied nature of possible affective responses and potential experiences. The most effective example, Felski uses, is the Greek tragedy *The Bacchae* (405 BC). It features "incest, suicide, adultery, parricide, matricide, mass slaughter, and unspeakable atrocities of various kinds" (110-111). While these topics are violent individually, their potential for shock is the degree to which the narrative revels in the depictions and the importance of the violence. Consider also the parricide in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879) or the murders in his *Crime and Punishment* (1866). The true focus in these novels is not on the violent acts themselves but on the events leading up to the violence and its rippling after-effects, which influence the main characters and their lives. This stands in stark contrast to the brutality in *The Bacchae*. There is, of course, the difference in genre to consider, but that alone is not enough to explain why Dostoevsky's violence is not shocking in the same manner as *The Bacchae*. There is the added complication of foreknowledge in the context of familiar texts. When familiar or well-known texts contain shocking elements, the *anticipation* of the shock amplifies, or at least significantly influences, the shock. Both Dostoevsky texts mentioned are suitable examples of this: the murder in *Crime and Punishment* is extremely well-known, and there is a degree of grim anticipation and satisfaction waiting for the climax. This foreknowledge produces one type of shock, while surprise carries a different kind. The popular series by George R. R. Martin *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996—present) has numerous moments of shock; some of these moments counter popular genre conventions, and others are shocking in their violence. Ned Stark's beheading at the end of the first book, *A Game of Thrones*, encompasses both; it is violent,

[41] Even the popular subgenre of grimdark fantasy often seems mostly predictable and toothless in its shock value and violence.

and Ned is a main character, whose death is entirely unexpected. This is an apt example of what Tolkien in *On Fairy-stories* (1947) called the dyscatastrophe — an unexpected and grim turn of events (which stands in opposition to the eucatastrophe) (*On Fairy-stories,* 153). Felski suggests that the psychoanalytic term *Nachträglichkeit*, or 'afterwardness', may be useful in describing the effects of these types of shocks since it aims to capture the essence of a shock that is "diffused across a temporal continuum" (119). There is both the shocking moment when the violent material is being consumed, and the after effects and later realizations that the shock might cause. Shock, then, can be valuable in terms of texts being memorable, even if the reason why they are memorable is because of violence or other shocking elements.

For the sake of perspective, we might consider texts that shock for different reasons. Charles Bukowski's *Women* (1978) is profound in its lackadaisical sexism and unapologetic style. The intensity of the novel may well cause an acute and disturbing shock if the novel's direction does not align with the reader's morals. Felski references *Pornografia* by Witold Gombrowicz (1960) to illustrate a similar point, noting that the novel caused her "distinct sensations of queasiness" (108). One can quickly discern the differences between these types of shock, but they all remain valid and potentially significant, depending on the type of narrative under analysis. Felski has been careful to point out that her four terms (recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock) are not mutually exclusive. One text may evoke several of these 'uses', and many more exist. Shock, it seems, is an excellent example of this since novels that carry an element of shock also produce other reactions — including fierce immersion. One might even go out on a limb and argue that shocking experiences that remain in the reader's consciousness and cause reflections are, in fact, immersive and, thus, a kind of negative-emotion-inspired enchantment.

Drastic changes in narrative structure and unpredicted changes in approach to genre conventions may also be shocking, although in a less visceral and bodily sense. As I will argue in my chapter on Le Guin's *Earthsea*, such changes produce a shocking effect because expectations have been upset. It goes beyond surprising twists and turns in the narrative; it speaks to sudden upheavals in the foundations of a reading experience. This is where I want to expand on Felski's ideas of shock. I find this area of engagement to have potential, and it may help explain why the drastic shift between, for example, each of the *Earthsea* novels is significant. There is a great degree of uniformity in the books that make up

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. In contrast, *Earthsea* and even *Gormenghast* break with their own established approaches (here, I am primarily thinking of the shift that occurs regarding third *Gormenghast* novel, *Titus Alone*). This shock is not automatically negative, but it is hard to ignore. Other types of shock exist, and it may be helpful to think of shock as existing on a spectrum. The types of shock that occur in the fantasy narratives I just mentioned are markedly different from the shock produced by novels such as Charles Bukowski's *Women* (1978), in which strong descriptions of sex, relationships, and alcohol could cause a shock reaction in some readers. The casualness with which Bukowski narrates intimate details of the main character's life (or his own life, as it were – the novel has been called semi-autobiographical) is quite forceful and part of the novel's blunt power and capacity for shock. Felski attempts to describe why certain shocking pieces of art can be so alluring and tempting:

> But the attraction of shock is also attributed to a blanketing sense of boredom, whether the grinding monotony of the production line or the studied melancholy of a quasi-metaphysical malady. A felt dullness and deadening of emotion, along with the anesthetic, soul-destroying effects of modern routines, triggers a desire for extreme sensations and an addiction to the adrenalin rush of intense emotion. The sharp stab of pain, the electrifying jolt of disgust, offers a welcome release from the numbness of not being able to feel. (*Uses,* 121)

This line of thinking can explain numerous forms of art, including music[42] and TV shows/films[43]. It is also connected to the idea of experimental epistemological knowledge. It relates to adapting the point of view of characters that we normally would not sympathize with, such as Humbert Humbert in Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) or the 'righteous' vigilante killer in the TV show *Dexter* (2006-2021) to experiment with a range of emotions. Different types of art, then, may produce shock, and it may manifest in different ways. The shock will typically result in a bodily reaction and be readily noticeable.

Some of these aspects may seem somewhat vague and heavily dependent on which precise text is being analyzed but this is, in fact, part of the point and of their usefulness. Felski hopes that her terminology, "allows for individualized, fine-tuned descriptions of aspects of reading that have suffered the repeated ignominy of cursory or cavalier treatment" (*Uses,* 132). This, I argue, permits engagement with, and analysis of, literature from a starting point that acknowledges critical reading and interpretation as a

[42] Genres such as extreme metal come to mind which combine particularly "violent" music with graphic lyrics.
[43] Few will have missed the popularity of violent crime shows (and the so-called true crime genre), and the popularity of horror can in small part be explained via this notion of shock.

fundamentally creative act. There are few fixed answers in literary studies, and expanding the way we think about literary analysis provides a better arsenal for adequately describing how certain types of texts function and how their content may be meaningful. This, implicitly, is also what Felski argues and consequently why I find her work a suitable starting point. The argumentation that she started in *Uses of Literature* continued in both *The Limits of Critique* and *Hooked: Art and Attachment*; for example, in *Limits* there remains a strong epistemological angle where affect and knowledge are linked: "A work of art is a potential source of knowledge rather than just an object of knowledge — one whose cognitive impact and implications are tied up with its affective reach" (*Limits*, 84). What form this knowledge takes may vary, but meaningful works of art do contain knowledge that makes them worth exploring. Within literary studies, there are several trends that continue to vie for attention and acknowledgement. Certain types of critical readings might find Felski's terminology vague and unhelpful, and indeed an analysis based purely on her notions from *Uses of Literature* alone would be difficult to realize. However, the fundamental question of why we read, or why we engage with art generally, cannot easily be answered by theories and readings which ultimately simply elaborate on what is said in a text instead of figuring out what is *unsaid* and what we gain from this encounter with the unsaid. I return to this problem when I delve into the idea of atmospheres in storyworlds. In her introduction to *Hooked*, Felski continues to wrestle with tendencies within literary studies and poses some vital open-ended questions:

> Literary studies, for example, zigzags between historicism and formalism (the stocks of formalism are currently on the rise), but neither approach can shed much light on some fundamental questions. Why do people seek out works of art? What are their differing motives, interests, concerns? What are these encounters with artworks *like*? (*Hooked*, viii, emphasis original)

As will become clear during my analytical chapters, these questions remain a motivating driving force; the aesthetic dimension (which to me is the main aspect of these 'encounters with artworks') is central to readings of different types of texts and, as we shall see, worldbuilding in speculative fiction is absolutely crucial in terms of any aesthetic dimension and immersion. All this being said, however, Felski operates at a very high level of abstraction and her terminology alone would for my purposes not be sufficient. Enchantment, for example, cannot by itself adequately function as the theoretical foundation for an analysis and this is why I find the combination of Felski with atmosphere and worldbuilding theory so fruitful. Overall, Felski's work contributes significantly to my driving hypothesis, namely that immersion into fictional worlds is possible even if engagement with plot and

character(s) become secondary aspects of the reading experience. Understanding worldbuilding theory and narratology in light of Felski's argumentations and the tendency she is part of enables analysis of fictional worlds that considers both the worldbuilding-structural elements as well as the intangible affective dimensions.

Attachment

It is possible to feel a strong sense of attachment to a work of art. This attachment may take various forms, but at the most basic level this attachment is the result of positive engagement and connotations. The affective and subjective importance of attachment seems clear, but as a critical term in a scholarly context things become slightly more muddied due to the fact that any attachment to any piece of art is a profoundly personal and subjective experience. This does not mean, however, that attachment is unimportant or that scholars should abandon attempts at explaining and understanding the role attachment plays. In the context of postcriticism, attachment is a promising term that houses potential for (in part) justifying why some novels and artworks cause passionate responses in some people while others remain indifferent or even averse to the same object. A central question in this dissertation concerns what novels do and how they engage us; this, in turn, is closely connected with attachment because whatever it is they do will, in the best-case scenarios, result in a form of attachment and positive involvement. These issues are handled head-on in Felski's *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020) which in many ways builds upon the work she did in *Uses of Literature* and *The Limits of Critique*, as well as her other books and articles. It may be difficult to move conversations about attachment and positive engagement beyond Kantian disinterestedness or conversations about transgression, but it is important to do so since involvement with novels and art is more complex and may take many forms. The form attachment takes is simpler than what some scholars might find appropriate, but that does not render the experience any less forceful or the attachment any less potent for the individual involved: "[A]ttachments involve thought as well as feeling, values and judgments as well as gut response. And they are, of course, often ambivalent, fraught, or vexed" (*Hooked,* ix). Both thought and feeling are indeed important, but making this confusing mess clear will take effort and continued work by scholars who insist that passionless detachment does not automatically grant validity to interpretations or readings precisely because passionless detachment is incompatible with a genuine reading experience.

It is also important to note that attachment is not a fixed state; it is fluid, constantly changing and evolving; what at one point causes strong feelings of attachment and enchantment may be outgrown or simply changed given enough time. What a reader enjoys at age 13 is probably different from what elicits a reaction from an older reader and both experiences are valid – attachment can, to some degree, explain what occurs. The term is a natural development within the postcritical camp. There can be no attachment without affect and speculative fiction is no exception. The ways in which readers may become attached to works of speculative fiction and their storyworlds vary, but the very existence of elaborate storyworlds provides ample opportunity for forming a strong emotional connection to a storyworld. Consider, for example, the observation that serial narratives used to center around individual characters such as Sherlock Holmes and Mary Poppins, but we are now experiencing a preponderance of storyworlds over characters. Several storyworlds are expanded to include several (even disconnected) narratives; these storyworlds may from the outset be designed with numerous divergent narratives in mind, or they may be expanded since fans continuously want to return to a familiar setting. Middle-earth, Westeros, the Harry Potter universe, the superhero worlds by Marvel and DC Comics, and many more. Readers and fans become not only familiar with the storyworlds they engage with, but they also form strong attachments to them. A part of this concerns the narrative and the characters themselves, but a significant aspect concerns the storyworld which may easily be expanded beyond the adventures of an original main character.

Several scholars have dealt with this problem from various angles, but the situation is difficult to explain. How precisely are attachments formed and why should it matter in the context of literary scholarship? Harold Bloom's *How to Read and Why* from 2001 implicitly deals with this topic, and so too does Michael Warner in "Uncritical Reading" (2004). Eve Sedgewick, an important figure in Felski's work and within postcriticism, writes about the hermeneutics of suspicious and its limits in "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading: or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is About You" (1997); and Mark Edmundson poses the simple but crucial question, 'Why read?' in the article *Why Read?* from 2004. Attachments, as it turns out, are an important part of why we read. These brief examples show a general trend; affect and emotional connections to art have not been entirely abandoned, but the difficulty in establishing a clear theoretical framework makes the issue of attachment — like most topics in postcriticsm — less than straightforward. Worldbuilding and

atmosphere help readers form attachments. These atmospheres may be immersive and create powerful emotions that strongly remind us of particular narratives. The specific details of stories read in childhood may be hazy, but perhaps their vivid atmospheres are remembered, and the emotions once felt with them. In the following section, I will outline the theory of atmosphere and explain how it can be a useful analytical tool to help explain immersion and the diffuse *something* that becomes a natural, though intangible, part of narratives and storyworlds.

Atmospheres in Literature

In this section, I will clarify my understanding and use of atmosphere as a central analytical term and position it in relation to both postcritique and contemporary worldbuilding theory. All texts that rely on fictional worlds automatically and inadvertently produce an atmosphere, but the effectiveness and influence of this atmosphere relies on readerly involvement and attunement to what the text is trying to do. This is where I see atmosphere as a logical extension of the postcritical line of thinking; the necessity for a willing surrender to a text's atmosphere is linked to the affective component of reading. Because atmosphere relies heavily on emotion and investment into what the text both *does* and what it *tries* to do, it fits well with a postcritical approach to analysis. If the idea of atmosphere is combined with worldbuilding theory, which is primarily interested in the foundational narrative building blocks that make up a fictional world, then it becomes possible to build a theoretical and conceptual bridge between affect/emotion/atmosphere and explain the intangible part of worldbuilding which leads to immersion. What I am arguing, essentially, is that a crucial part of worldbuilding is the atmosphere it produces, and this atmosphere is precisely what is engaging and aesthetically pleasing and ultimately results in (a type of) immersion and emotional involvement. Lovecraft wrote at length on atmosphere in this essay "Supernatual Horror in Literature" (1927), and several scholars are (re)turning to atmosphere as a possible way of explaining how certain types of narratives work. While there is some conceptual overlap between Felski's work and the uses of literature she defines, atmosphere exists in a different category, primarily considering the aesthetic dimension of a text and its role for immersion. I see atmosphere as an extension of postcritique and an avenue with great potential for 'new' readings that highlight aspects of texts and their storyworlds.

The curious workings of art and the power of their aesthetics is a subject worthy of much discussion but quite resistant to concrete theoretical formulations. Artworks, and especially storyworlds, evoke a certain *feel* that readers may become instinctively and deeply attuned to and this feel(ing) is evoked through atmosphere[44]. Atmosphere is a central term that I employ to explain the force of form in the texts I analyze throughout this dissertation. Similar to Felski's ideas, however, atmosphere is somewhat intangible and a relatively recent phenomenon with still an early-stage theoretical framework. As a critical term, atmosphere has recently gained more attention and especially Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* from 2012 marked a turning point for our understanding of literary atmosphere, and his argument that, "atmospheres and moods offers literary studies a possibility for reclaiming vitality and aesthetic immediacy that have, for the most part, gone missing" (Gumbrecht, 12) is highly relevant to my purposes. It is lamentable that this vitality has gone missing and I endeavor to reclaim this lost ground. Cognitivists like Peter Stockwell have worked with the idea of atmospheres and tone in literary studies and these fitting notions seem to me underutilized in the study of fantasy literature and speculative fiction. I propose to employ atmosphere as a key term in thinking critically about literature because atmosphere is situated between subject and object, and between subject and environment. Atmosphere influences both subject and object; the subject's reading experience is influenced by conscious or subconscious attunement to atmosphere, and the object's aesthetic quality is often reliant on atmosphere. As such, there is a strong complementary relationship that not only helps identify what happens to subject and object, but also helps explain the "bridge" between the two. Put differently, I argue that atmosphere is useful for explaining what happens to both reader (because atmosphere influences immersion), and text (because atmosphere influences worldbuilding), and the connection, or "bridge", between these areas. Kathleen Stewart has argued in the same vein about 'atmospheric attunements'; the importance of becoming attuned to a fictional world and its atmosphere and dwelling there[45]. Some narratologists, such as Gérard Genette in *Narrative Discourse, An Essay in Method* (1979), distinguish between voice (author) and mood (reader), and atmosphere, then, seems to me a plausible way of bridging the gap between these two concepts by allowing for an abstract theory that influences multiple areas: author, reader, storyworld, and the in-between; the bridge.

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44 For more on this, see Caracciolo: Marco: "Notes for a(nother) Theory of Experientiality". Journal of Literary Theory Vol 6, No 1 (2012)

45 Kathleen Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements,"*Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29 (2011).

I want to explore atmosphere as a complementary aspect to worldbuilding because it is not as restricted by a clearly defined set of "rules" or schemata. Worldbuilding, as I will show in the following subchapter, is more readily describable by distinct narrative functions and elements (cf. Wolf, Ryan, Doležel), and usefully explains the mechanical workings of a storyworld whereas atmosphere is not limited or contained by conventional worldbuilding theory. Certain genres lend themselves well to scrutiny via an exploration of atmosphere, such as Gothic texts, but in other genres the tone and feel may at first glance appear to be further in the background. It appears that speculative fiction deliberately employs (or strives for) specific atmospheres. Texts like VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014), Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928), and Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) exemplify this well by their use of uncertainty, gaps, anticipation, unsettling moods, and unconventional worldbuilding. Also literary fiction is more easily understood with atmosphere in mind; particularly Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) is an expressive and remarkable text that exactly illustrates how a novel with a seemingly simple story may nevertheless provide a captivating reading experience where not just characters and setting matter, but also the 'bridge' to the reader; the atmosphere. This atmosphere, then, is precisely what promotes immersion, and storyworld-immersion is a crucial aspect of speculative fiction because engaging with the *world* is a major part of the reading experience — particularly in stories with a slow-paced plot[46].

Atmosphere permeates all narratives, albeit to varying degrees, and may help explain the diffuse *something* that seems undeniably part of a room, landscape, setting, or indeed a storyworld. Although it may seem a problematic tool for analysis due to its resistance to objective categorization and definition, I nevertheless want to investigate its potential and argue for the importance and strength of atmosphere as a critical term. It fits well with the general mode of thinking in postcriticism and is precisely one of the new avenues through which we may understand literature in a new light — one that is neither suspicious or ideological but rather focuses on what kind of mood the text is evoking. The omnipresent nature of atmosphere in various settings and situations, particularly in literature, makes it valuable even if there is a degree of intangibility to it. The affective qualities associated with atmosphere play an important role in the emotional connection to many types of storyworlds and it significantly impacts the immersive quality and potential of the text. This is crucial because it helps explain immersion in not

[46] See for example "The Speed of Plot" (2019) by Karin Kukkonen. Available in open access: https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/oli.12251

just stories but also storyworlds. Clearly many speculative fiction narratives focus more or less equally on story and atmosphere, but in texts where the storyworld is more important than the story, atmosphere becomes a key element in both understanding of the text and immersion in the text. For example, it is my view that a text like *The Call of Cthulhu* is interesting not solely because of the discoveries made by the main character and the eventual reveal of the Cthulhu entity; a large part of what drives immersion is exactly the cosmic horror atmosphere evoked by the text. Similarly, in *Titus Groan*, the *feel* of the storyworld combined with the peculiarity of the characters drives immersion as much as the story does — if not even more. *Titus Groan* is challenging but fascinating because it is a rare example of a text that is reliant on atmosphere to a very high degree; it is not a supplement, or an after-the-fact and a consequence of eloquent worldbuilding. In *Titus Groan*, atmosphere is a driving force, and I will show this in greater detail in chapter 3.

Gernot Böhme brought atmosphere as an aesthetic term to the fore of literary scholarship and described atmosphere as, "characteristic manifestations of the co-presence of subject and object" (Böhme, 2017, 26). Unlike worldbuilding, which has a mechanical function in the narrative, or even enchantment, which is a state of consciousness that (ideally) happens as a result of engaging with texts, atmospheres in a text must be *felt* or *experienced* at the time of reading. As Böhme argues, "aesthetics of atmospheres shifts attention away from the 'what' something represents, to the 'how' something is present." (ibid, 26). This is the crux of the matter, but also specifically what makes an analysis more difficult. These intangible problems are also what concerns Felski in *Uses of Literature*, and though her focus is slightly different, the overarching goal of trying to capture and explain potential reading experiences remains the same. How can one hope to depict and describe the atmosphere of a lengthy narrative if it needs to be felt or experienced in its entirety? Literary scholarship rarely deals with 'the time of reading' for obvious reasons — it is intangible, full of uncertainty, and theoretical approaches seem to fall flat. General descriptions and analysis trying to capture the 'how' of a story may end up being purely formal or structural, but the problem of 'how' something is present at the time of reading is nevertheless an important part of reading experiences and the affective dimensions of narratives and immersion.

Steen Christiansen describes the 'background feeling' of atmosphere in his book *The New Cinematic Weird: Atmospheres and Worldings* (2021):

> Atmospheres are what provide the background feeling of any given world, what allows stronger feelings to emerge from that atmospheric background, the aesthetic pattern that is our enjoyment of art [...] As an aesthetic term, atmosphere functions as a way to bring to the fore the sensory experience of works of art as something that permeates the entire work. (Christiansen, 19)

As a critical term, atmosphere thus tries to capture the general feel and tone of a narrative while accounting for the particular aesthetic effect this has. Christiansen further breaks down atmosphere in subcategories and argues that atmospheres may be creeping, unsettling, ominous, uneasy, eerie, or disquiet (ibid, 181). This is helpful because it stresses that atmosphere is not one coherent entity; instead, numerous atmospheres exist. Such a point can be helpful in an analysis that seeks to describe how one particular novel produces one type of atmosphere, and another novel in the same genre produces an entirely different atmosphere.. For example, while both *Earthsea* and *Titus Groan* belong in the fantasy genre, the atmospheres that they produce are completely different since the aesthetic components of their storyworlds differ significantly. The gothic tones and locations in *Titus Groan* are markedly different from the quasi-medieval expansive landscapes in *Earthsea*.

Robert Sinnerbrink has also contributed to the expansion of our understanding of atmosphere, and he argues for an aesthetics of mood in "Stimmung: Exploring the Aesthetics of Mood" (2012). Although his work is primarily situated in film studies, the analytical points are relevant for literary studies as well. His argumentation underscores my earlier point about the strong connection between atmosphere and the aesthetics that a storyworld relies on in order to create or enhance immersion, and since literature —unlike film — cannot rely on audio-visuals, this aspect becomes extremely important. Sinnerbrink's understanding of atmosphere is telling since it reveals the multifarious nature of the term:

> [Atmospheres] are expressive of how a (cinematic) world is revealed, of what aspects of such a world might be emotionally significant. They provide a "baseline" form of attunement that enables certain items within that world to show up as interesting, attractive, significant, disturbing, repellent, perplexing, threatening, fascinating, and so on. (Sinnerbrink, 154)

Sinnerbrink here directly acknowledges both that there are different aspects of (story)worlds that may be important and that what produces atmosphere is linked to what is 'emotionally significant'. This supports the postcritical argumentation that emotional connections to art — and my argument about emotional connections to storyworlds — are vital for atmosphere and cannot reasonably be separated. It is also significant that Sinnerbrink mentions how 'certain items' within a world may be interesting, attractive, or evoke other emotions. This highlights the fact that storyworlds, even ones that belong in

the same genre (such as the two fantasy storyworlds in the example I use above), may produce atmosphere in entirely different ways. An added complication is that one reader may become attuned to a part of the narrative and storyworld, which for another remains meaningless. However, both readings of the same story may produce atmosphere. For example, in my reading of *The City & The City* in chapter 5, I will highlight the impossible coterminous nature of the twin cities. While this, in my estimation, is a noteworthy part of what makes the storyworld atmospheric, another reader may feel more strongly about the murder mystery or other aspects of the same storyworld. The point remains that attunement to the storyworld and its atmosphere becomes a major part of the reading experience.

Analyzing atmospheres in literature may have any number of starting points. However, in the context of speculative fiction and fantasy it seems reasonable to focus on the fictional worlds themselves and how precisely they evoke feelings and immersion. For example, the generally nostalgic nature of Tolkienesque fantasy is a recognizable feature of the genre evoked through an atmosphere of used-to-be and far-away, in addition to romantized depictions of home and successful adventures into the unknown. Science fiction, particularly the kind spearheaded by the usual suspects such as Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, Philip K. Dick, H. G. Wells, Frank Herbert, and Ursula K. Le Guin has an atmosphere of expansiveness, challenge of social conventions, often great hope, and a willingness to explore grand or even outlandish ideas. In most cases, analyzing science fiction and fantasy requires a willingness to engage with the storyworld they present, but merely describing what is invented and what is 'new' will not suffice. These are genres of ideas, but the framework of these ideas creates an immersive atmosphere that the reader must attune to and understand to take the narrative seriously. In line with the possible worlds theory, speculative fiction presents fictions of the past, present, and future and entirely different realities that all produce a mood. Accounting for this mood is important in understanding readerly attachment to a fictional world. It is possible and perhaps reasonable to juxtapose speculative fiction with realism to show the pervasive power of atmosphere. When reading fiction from either the First or Second World War, a storyworld is created if the main characters are fictional; *Birdsong* (1993) by Sebastian Faulks and *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) by Erich Maria Remarque are but two examples. As I briefly touched on earlier, these novels rely on historical events to produce an atmosphere that provides the type of experimental epistemological knowledge that art can provide. The general mood in such novels is as much a part of

the reading experience since it is produced via the (often traumatic) events depicted. Similarly, events in entirely fictional worlds rely on a combination of factors in the storyworld to create atmosphere. Gumbrecht acknowledges the difficulty in working with atmospheres. This is reflected in his analysis of different works of art that are rarely as convincing as his conceptualization of atmosphere as a component of art.

> But how can we uncover atmospheres and moods, retrace them and understand them? Is there such a thing as a professional—or, for that matter, "scientific"—approach? For the very fact that every *Stimmung* is historically and culturally unique, and because the same elements that constitute the phenomenon go missing when meaning is at issue—and certainly because our field of study has displayed so little interest in the matter—I am skeptical about the power of "theories" to explain atmospheres and moods, and I doubt the viability of "methods" to identify them. (Gumbrect, 16-17)

Although Gumbrecht was skeptical at the time of writing, I see a glint of hope in the alliance I propose between reading for atmosphere and the postcritical line of thinking. As postcriticism is developed, new ways of articulating and identifying atmospheres in texts will be developed. Although atmosphere typically is a mood produced by the entirety of the fictional world and the reading experience, Gumbrecht makes a point about individual words that I find salient. "Often, we are alerted to a potential mood in a text by the irritation and fascination provoked by a single word or small detail [...]" (ibid, 17). This is important to point out since the aesthetic dimension is one effective avenue of producing atmosphere and one which I will delve into during my analysis chapters. I will offer brief examples though, even if it might be too subjective to be representative (then again, such is the nature of atmosphere) — in *Titus Groan*, Peake at one important point mentions a so-called death-owl[47], and this word to me is evocative and in a blistering instant evokes the entire novel. What is a death-owl? The combination of 'death', a bleak word with strong connotations, with 'owl', a nocturnal and mysterious creature, captures the essence of Peake's trilogy. The aesthetics of the word play a tremendous role too. Another example is the word 'crosshatched' in Miéville's *The City & The City*; the word describes areas which exist in two cities at the same time and in the same location (a major aspect of the novel). The word alone thus aesthetically encompasses the entire novel and contributes to the power of the 'single word' Gumbrecht references. These are but two examples of how one word may (for one reader) be fascinating and evocative, and also contribute to the *overall* mood of the narrative and storyworld. Gumbrecht also acknowledges that readers must discover and yield to

[47] "'I am the death-owl.'" (Peake, 272)

atmosphere. His argument that historical or cultural contexts mean little with regards to atmospheres fits well with a postcritical reading:

> Reading for *Stimmung* cannot mean "deciphering" atmospheres and moods, for they have no fixed signification. Equally little does reading for *Stimmungen* mean reconstructing or analyzing their historical or cultural genesis. Instead, it means discovering sources of energy in artifacts and giving oneself over to them affectively and bodily—yielding to them and gesturing toward them. (Gumbrecht, 18)

Naturally, this process is not easy and it depends heavily on the individual work and the individual reader. For the purpose of the dissertation, I have chosen four works that I argue produce different kinds of atmospheres, and through their worldbuilding produce this atmosphere in various ways. Highlighting these aspects and focusing on affect and the immersive potential of atmosphere will, I hope, inspire differentiated readings of novels with equally interesting storyworlds.

Possible Worlds Theory

Multiple branches of narrative theory exist, each with its own particular focus. It is a wide-reaching field, and I will now attempt to represent the aspects relevant to my arguments and approaches[48]. To establish a brief definition of narratology Fludernik's definition from *An Introduction to Narratology* is helpful: "Narrative theory – or to use the internationally accepted term narratology (Fr. *narratologie*; Ger. *Erzähltheorie*) – is the study of narrative as a genre. Its objective is to describe the constants, variables and combinations typical of narrative and to clarify how these characteristics of narrative texts connect within the framework of theoretical models (typologies)" (2009, 8). As we can see, there are several possible areas of research and one of them is the study of fictional worlds; this includes immersion and, to a degree, aesthetics. These areas are important for narratology in the context of speculative fiction, and I turn first to Marie-Laure Ryan whose contribution to the study of fictional worlds has been significant. Ryan provides helpful theoretical insight into the inner workings of storyworlds, and her work has been inspiring and influential in the field of narratology. Her books *Narrative as Virtual Reality 2* (2015), *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (1991), *Storyworlds Across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology* (2014) and the most recent *Possible Worlds Theory and Contemporary Narratology* (2019) constitute one part of the theoretical paradigm of this dissertation. Ryan's work is largely a continuation of a long discussion about the theory of imaginary worlds and (unlike Wolf's work which I will introduce in the following subchapter) is philosophical and technical in nature. Understanding Ryan will necessitate understanding of early scholarship in the same area by Tzvetan Todorov in *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970), Thomas Pavel in *Fictional Worlds* (1986) and Lubomír Doležel in *Mimesis and Possible Worlds* (1988). These scholars are all part of the same tradition, and they deal either explicitly or implicitly with the issue of fictional worlds. Ryan's vocabulary and understanding of narratology is a tangible and helpful starting point that enables in-depth analysis of multiple types of narratives. This section focuses on those directly relevant to fictional worlds

Narratology is deeply linked to immersion and storyworlds. Ryan spends considerable time on this, describing a "poetics of immersion" (*Revisiting Immersion*, 64; *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 89); the

[48] For general introductions to narratology, see Monika Fludernik's *An Introduction to Narratology* (2009), and Mieke Bal's *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2017, fourth edition).

relationship between the reader and immersion. Contrary to common perception, it is not necessarily the fictivity of a text that renders it pleasurable but rather the reader/text bond to the textual landscape. This relates to Ryan's discussion on the phenomenology of immersion (2001, 98)[49] where she suggests that language itself is removed into the background; readers become entirely caught up in what they read and no longer fully register the words they are reading but simply and automatically scan page after page. The aesthetic enchantment that results from such powerful immersion is one reason we (potentially) get so absorbed in storyworlds. Ryan's ideas of a reader being "transported" into a text and undergoing a journey is related to Felski's ideas on enchantment and is one of the ways I see the two as linked. A major contributor to a fictional world being immersive and enchanting is its ability to take itself seriously and present both a narrative and a storyworld with which readers can engage in stimulating ways. It is possible in part through a recentering of the self. Readers and audiences step into a fictional world, becoming immersed in the narration:

> For the duration of our immersion in a work of fiction, the realm of possibilities is thus recentered around the sphere which the narrator presents as the actual world. This recentering pushes the reader into a new system of actuality and possibility. As a traveler to this system, the reader of fiction discovers not only a new actual world, but a variety of APWs [Alternate Possible Worlds] revolving around it. Just as we manipulate possible worlds through mental operations, so do the inhabitants of fictional universes: their actual world is reflected in their knowledge and beliefs, corrected in their wishes, replaced by a new reality in their dreams and hallucinations. (Ryan, *Possible Worlds*, 1991, 22)

Instead of the actual world being the center of origin for the 'realm of possibilities' Ryan mentions, the fictional world instead becomes what we as readers are centered around. What is possible in the fictional world is made 'real' since expectations and assumptions about the fictional world have been modified. Without recentering into these worlds, immersion becomes a problematic affair since it is hard to justify or explain (emotional) investment. At worst, it may be difficult to think of anything presented within the narrative as legitimate or serious.

> The idea of recentering into fictional worlds explains why readers, spectators, or players can regard fictional characters as (fictionally) real people and why they can experience emotions toward these characters, rather than regarding them as purely textual constructs. (*Possible Worlds Theory*, 2019, 16)

In a detached or impersonal reading experience, these textual constructs are reduced to semantemes and the fictional world is never made actual or 'real' in the sense that promotes immersion. This is important for fiction generally because it explains why we can engage in serious conversations about

[49] Marie-Laure Ryan. *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 2001, p. 98

people and events that do not (or did not) exist in the real world; however, I argue that recentering is especially important in the context of fictional worlds since more is at stake. Not only do readers need to accept the realities of fictional characters, but also fictional worlds with a number of changes that influence their ontological status. A final quote from Ryan on recentering stresses this point further: "[...] I regard it as constitutive of the fictional mode of reading. Insofar as fictional worlds are, objectively speaking, nonactual possible worlds, it takes recentering to experience them as actual—an experience that forms the basic condition for immersive reading" (*Narrative as Virtual Reality*, 103). I agree strongly with the assertion that it takes 'recentering to experience them [fictional worlds] as actual'. Narratology can provide part of the vocabulary that explains the inner workings of fiction and fictional worlds, and it enables reflection on the role and position of readers. Even in fictional worlds, an infinite number of unexplored possible worlds remain. The events in a narrative are 'true' insofar as the text is regarded as true through recentering. Thus, storyworld and plot become, for the duration of immersion, real:l: "A narrative plot is not a single state of affairs; it is a succession of actually occurring events leading to a changed state of affairs" (*Possible Worlds Theory*, 2019, 19). This is tied to the philosophy of fictional (or multiple) worlds and the well-known statement that 'things could be different from what they are' (see ibid, 3). Not only do fictional worlds offer perspective on *how* things could be different, they also explore a wide range of possibilities; some are explored for the simple joy of creativity while others tackle important and contemporary issues including politics, gender, morality, and the environment.

In the Introduction to *Possible Worlds Theory and Contemporary Narratology* (2019), Alice Bell describes Ryan's stance on storyworlds and why the whole concept of storyworld is meaningful:

> Taking a stand against theories that do away with storyworld, Ryan suggests that the concept is theoretically necessary for the following reasons: (1) it provides the surrounding environment required for immersion; (2) it justifies the practice of transfictionality; (3) it encourages a mode of reading based on imagining, visualizing, and mentally stimulating the action rather than being limited to the propositional content of sentences; and (4) because "worldness" can be realized to different degrees, it allows variations in the mode of representation and ontological status of fictional entities rather than reducing all fictions to a uniform model. (*Possible Worlds Theory*, 2019, 29).

The link between Ryan's conceptualization as described above and the role of storyworlds in speculative fiction is apparent. The relationship between storyworlds and immersion is rightly acknowledged, and this goes beyond the actual creation of fictional worlds; all narratives create

storyworlds but whether the storyworld becomes an entity onto itself (such as Middle-earth) or simply an environment in which the story takes place depends on the individual story. While both are relevant in the context of narrative theory, I am mostly interested in the relationship between storyworlds and worldbuilding; it is difficult to imagine one without the other, but the idea is that it is fruitful to consider the building blocks of storyworlds through the lens of not just narrative theory but also worldbuilding theory itself. In this way, it becomes possible to delve into how precisely storyworlds are constructed and how they produce immersion. This is not an easy issue as will become clear during my four analysis chapters; certain storyworlds to a high degree rely on aesthetics and stylistics (*Titus Groan* and *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*), while others employ philosophical schools of thought as the foundation for their storyworlds (*Earthsea* and *The City & The City*). Speculative fiction houses an almost infinite number of possible storyworlds and my selection offers a glimpse of how some of these function.

According to Ryan, three major areas exist in which readers or audiences may become immersed: "Immersion in any media [...] is created via three forms of involvement with narrative: spatial immersion, the response to setting; temporal immersion, the response to story; and emotional immersion, the response to character" (*Possible Worlds Theory*, 2019, 27). This is related to my point in the previous paragraph about immersion and the role of worldbuilding. For example, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, *Titus Groan*, and *The City & The City* all rely on particular atmospheres produced by their storyworlds and as such it becomes viable to argue for a heightened sense of spatial immersion compared to other texts. Conversely, while *Earthsea* offers a wonderfully realized fantasy storyworld, it also has a strong *Bildungsroman*-component which enables temporal immersion to (probably) the same degree as spatial immersion. Readers have different proclivities and what may trigger one type of immersive response in one person may be different from someone else; the point remains, however, that speculative fiction is uniquely able to place significant focus on spatial immersion even if this relegates emotional immersion (or general character-focus) to a lesser role. Consider, for example, the *Foundation* (1942-1993) series by Isaac Asimov; few would call this a particularly character-driven novel (i.e. low on emotional immersion), but it is an extremely idea-driven novel in a science fiction setting (high on spatial immersion). The reverse might be true for many readers of Jane Austen whose clever novels feature memorable characters. The setting is not irrelevant

at all, but it is *less* relevant (and consequently less likely to cause spatial immersion) than conventional texts in the speculative fiction realm[50].

Principle of minimal departure

A vital and oft-invoked part of Ryan's work concerns the principle of minimal departure. This principle positions the fictional world in relation to the real world and dictates that readers will assume that the fictional world functions as the real world unless otherwise stated.

> [...] we can derive a law of primary importance for the phenomenology of reading. This law — to which I shall refer as the principle of minimal departure — states that we reconstrue the central world of a textual universe in the same way we reconstrue the alternate possible worlds of nonfactual statements: as conforming as far as possible to our representation of AW [Actual World]. We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text. (Ryan, *Possible Worlds*, 1991, 51)

First and foremost, this explains how and why narratives that construct fictional worlds can successfully focus on the aspects of the world that are *different* from the real world. This is related to Wolf's concept of Completeness which I turn to in the following subchapter. Ryan explicitly writes that we as readers, 'only make the adjustments dictated by the text' which speaks to both a conscious and subconscious level of reading. The conscious level concerns interpreting and understanding all the information presented within a narrative; the unconscious level concerns our assumptions (cf. Felski's point about prefigured expectations) about the storyworld, i.e. that unless otherwise noted readers may assume that there is a day/night cycle, that gravity remains the same, that people need food to survive, and so on. This, essentially, is the principle of minimal departure. This also means that there is a relationship between the 'distance' between a storyworld and the real world and its level of fictivity. For example, fantasy stories that invent their own geography and species are 'further' removed from the actual world, while realist novels with fictitious characters are 'closer'. In both cases, we may understand the narrative and its relation to the actual world by considering it in light of the principle of minimal departure. In an earlier section I referenced Doležel and his work in *Heterocosmica*. Doležel argued that it is impossible to conceive of a fully complete fictional world with the same ontological fullness as the real world; rather, they are incomplete by necessity: "It would take a text of infinite length to construct a complete fictional world. Finite texts, the only texts that humans are capable of

[50] For more information on the fantastic and speculative fiction, see: Simonis, Annette: Grenzüberschreitungen in der phantastischen Literatur. Einführung in die Theorie und Geschichte eines narrativen Genres. Heidelberg: Winter 2005.

producing, are bound to create incomplete worlds. For this reason, incompleteness is a universal extension property of the fictional-world structuring" (*Heterocosmica*, 1998, 169). We can see the complementary relationship between Ryan's and Doležel's ideas and how both contribute to further critical considerations of fictional worlds. As it turns out, the real world remains crucial for any understanding and analysis of storyworlds regardless of other factors. The same argument is brought forth in *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (1994) in which Ruth Ronen writes that fictional worlds, "are inherently incomplete [...] Fictional entities are *logically* incomplete because many conceivable statements about a fictional entity are undecidable [and] semantically *incomplete* because, being constructed by language, characteristics and relations of the fictional object cannot be specified in every detail" (Ronen, 114). It is true that fictionals objects 'cannot be specified in every detail', but it is also true that fictional worlds do not *need* to specify every detail. A level of incompleteness and cleverly-placed gaps will cause active participation as readers must analyze the storyworld and its workings in order to answer questions that the narrative itself does not directly answer.

It is noteworthy that possible worlds and storyworlds are conceptualized as constructs of the imagination. This is part of the reason why immersion is crucial; without immersion the constructs will be ineffectual. Storyworlds are furthermore objects of aesthetic contemplation with which readers can engage on an emotional level. The specific purpose of aesthetics is cause for debates. Without the aesthetic dimension to storyworlds the conditions for narrative immersion might be weakened. This is connected to the idea that writers and artists imagine possible worlds and possibilities; they describe and imagine what could become (or be) reality according to possibility, probability, and creativity. Science fiction is famously particularly preoccupied with a horizon of potential and basing different types of worlds on contemporary thoughts about the future. This marks an interesting departure from nonfiction in which the storyworld is necessarily indistinguishable from the real world. Fiction, on the other hand, creates its own storyworlds which must ensure narrativity. In other words, a fictional world without a story (narrativity) would fall flat; a temporal dimension is required. Ryan argues in the same vein: "I regard storyworlds as totalities that encompass space, time, and individuated existents that undergo transformations as the result of events" (*Possible Worlds Theory*, 63). It might seem self-evident, but these 'transformations' that happen as the 'result of events' are what drives storyworld

complexity and the possibility for immersion. Text typologists[51] conceive of narration and description as distinct text types where one is concerned with *events* that take place in *time*, while the other is concerned with the properties of the *entities* that exist in *space*. This relates to the earlier argumentation concerning modes of immersion (spatial, temporal, emotional). Developing these thoughts further, we might consider two possible ways of thinking about storyworlds. In one conceptualization, storyworlds are a type of container that possesses a special ontological and physical mode of existence. It is not the real world, but it does exist. In another conceptualization, we might consider the relationship between these entities which exist in a storyworld. This is a detailed way of differentiating between a focus on *worlds* (containers) and *descriptions* (relations). Genette regarded descriptions in a text as narrative "pauses" (1976, 6), and this line of thinking is relevant when viewed in the context of possible worlds since the function of description in speculative fiction is often (but not always) establishing the storyworld in which characters exist and act. I will return to this in the following subchapter. Essentially, descriptions are important because they help readers form mental images of characters and settings; as such, descriptions are a crucial component in narrativity and vital for both *imagining* storyworlds as well as *reporting events* within the storyworld. Furthermore, Ryan establishes three basic types of relation between the fictional world and the actual world: (1) it can be verified in it (accidentally true, and truthful narratives); (2) it can be possible in it (realism, fictionalized history); and (3) it cannot be possible in it (fairy tales, the fantastic) (*Possible Worlds Theory*, 66). This stresses that there always is a relationship between a (fictional) text and the real world but the nature of this relationship depends on the type of text/genre. The 'distance' to the actual world increases between each of these three possible realms, making them more fictitious. Contrary to what might intuitively feel correct, this does not cause issues in terms of logic or consistency because of the aforementioned recentering. In the context of my project, specific types of descriptions are how atmosphere is produced in the storyworld, and the same types of descriptions stand at the center of worldbuilding. As we shall see, both the *content* of a scene as well as how it is *described* may produce vivid atmospheres which foreground a crucial aesthetic dimension with significant immersive potential.

[51] Chatman, Seymour. 1978. *Story and Discourse*. Ithaca ny: Cornell University Press, & Virtanen, Tuija. 1992. "Issues of Text Typology: Narrative— a 'Basic' Type of Text?" text 12:293– 310. & Herman, David. 2009. *Basic Elements of Narrative*. Malden ma: Wiley- Blackwell

Reader Engagement & the Swiss Cheese Strategy

As long as a fictitious element is imaginable and consistent with the parameters of a fictional world, then possible worlds theory will consider such an element possible. Ryan is largely interested in the simultaneous process of reading and making possible worlds immersive and come alive: "Readers process texts according to what I call the 'Swiss cheese strategy': they close their eyes on the holes and process the rest of the text according to normal inference processes. This kind of contradiction thus remains compatible with world building and immersion" (*Possible Worlds Theory*, 66). This means that the visible parts of the text are interpreted and actualized and the 'holes' filled by inferring information. Thereby readers build or construct a mental image of the storyworld compatible with the entire text. For the sake of immersion, these Swiss cheese holes are useful because they activate and necessitate engagement and participation; readers' imagination must actively fill these gaps. As Wolf also argues, this is one of the major reasons why engaging with fictional worlds is pleasurable — they require and reward participation. This will also become evident in my four analysis chapters where different types of texts still expect a lot from the reader in terms of sense-making and construction of meaning, particularly in Murakami's work where figuring out the relationship between the dual-worlds in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* becomes a significant element in the enjoyment of the novel and the overall reading experience. Ryan provides brief examples to drive this point home. We must consider the differences between the following sentences: (1)"A young old man, sitting on a wooden stone, was reading a newspaper folded in his pocket in the light of a street lamp that had been turned off". (2) "An old man sitting on a stone was reading his newspaper". (3) "A young man sitting on a pile of wood had a newspaper folded in his pocket" (*Possible Worlds Theory*, 66). The original sentence carries conflicting elements that force the latter two sentences to make sense. This is a blunt example but illustrative of the role that engagement and logical inference play in making sense of storyworlds. This interesting thought-experiment continues when Ryan considers the ontological difference between the following two stories. These show the main difference between a possible world and a *story*world. Ryan first considers the story: "There is a rock", which in itself constitutes a legitimate possible world that is "ontologically complete" (69). However, it remains *just* a possible world that has a rock but neither a story nor, at this stage, room for a story. This is because there is no room for the imagination to do any work or to meaningfully engage with the possible world. Immersion

cannot take place to a reasonable degree. Ryan juxtaposes that story with E. M. Forster's famous minimalist story: "The king died, then the queen died of grief" (ibid) in which the same situation occurs. Although there are two characters (king, queen) and two events (death, grief), there is no *story*world around which to form an emotional attachment.

> If there is a possible world that contains only a rock, there should also be a possible world with just a king, a queen, and two events that make up Forster's example. But while this would be a possible world in a logical sense, it would not be a *story*world in a phenomenological or experiential sense because it lacks the ability to stimulate the imagination. We read Forster's narratoid as a collection of propositions to which we assign a positive truth value, but we do not attempt to construct a world in which these propositions hold true. In other worlds, we do not relate emotionally to the grief of the queen; we do not picture her death in our mind; and we do not try any interpretation, such as asking if the king loved her as much as she loved him, because there is nothing beyond the text. (69)

This is a fascinating line of thinking and raises the role and value of the imagination and textual engagement to a higher level. Forster's text might function well as a writing prompt; there *is* room for developing a story, but there is no room, as Ryan argues, for reasonable imaginative engagement because there is no invitation to do so. As such, there does seem to be some connection between the length and complexity of a text and its ability to produce an emotionally immersive and imaginative engaging storyworld. Storyworlds need to provide not only the story but also the context. Ryan finally references Hemingway's famous flash fiction narrative: "For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn". She argues that,

> I am much more tempted to construct a world out of this minimalist narrative than out of the Forster example because it gives far greater room to my imagination. With the Forster text I do nothing more than process the information because there is no need to make any inferences, but with 'baby shoes' I have to fill in gaps and construct past events to explain a puzzling situation. (ibid, 70).

While there is a degree of subjectivity to this argumentation, one can nevertheless understand the point since there is an emotional component to Hemingway's story provoked by the final two words, "never worn", and the potential for building a dramatic and tragic narrative around the limited information presented. "[...] when a text creates a storyworld, *we imagine that there is more to this world than what the text represents*" (ibid, 70, emphasis original). This is a central concern that will be evident in all my analyses as well since all the storyworlds I focus on present, explicitly or implicitly, a wider textual world than what is presented in the narrative itself. As will become apparent, this is a common and necessary feature of fictional worlds.

As a final point in this context, I want to circle back to Felski's notion of enchantment and closely link it to Ryan's ideas on storyworlds and immersion. It is hard to imagine a situation where enchantment is divorced from immersion and although Ryan does not reference Felski directly they nevertheless seem to think along the same lines:

> The notion of storyworld provides the surrounding environment required for immersion. Whatever name one gives to the experience of being totally absorbed in a story, of being present on the scene of the events, of feeling empathy for the characters, of eagerly awaiting to find out how the story ends, this experience cannot take place without the sense that the text projects a world that encompasses both characters and events. (Ryan, *Possible Worlds Theory*, 81)

It will be unsurprising at this point that I align myself with this line of argumentation. I see a strong connection between storyworlds and immersion, and, as my analysis will show, it is storyworlds themselves that can take center stage in an immersive experience. How precisely storyworlds are developed and how they (attempt to) produce immersion differs significantly, and this is one reason why I have chosen four texts that in terms of style, structure and even language are different. They remain connected, however, in their profound use of storyworlds, and Ryan's terminology and general approach to narratives and narratology will prove invaluable for my analysis.

Contemporary Worldbuilding Theory

Worldbuilding is an exciting emerging field with significant implications for narrative theory. Understanding the unique narrative and worldbuilding characteristics of speculative fiction requires an approach to worldbuilding which considers worldbuilding as both a genre-defining trait as well as its own unique entity. Aristole's assertion that plot (mythos) and action (praxis) precede other aspects of fiction is no longer necessarily the case; an inversion has taken place. Now, in many narratives, the storyworld comes first and stories happen within the storyworld. While other genres to lesser degrees make use of worldbuilding in a conventional sense, the phenomenon has particular interest in the realm of fantasy and speculative fiction because worldbuilding, together with story and plot, is a driving force that determines the immersive qualities of a setting and narrative. Readers no longer *only* engage with characters but become enchanted by imaginary worlds that may have any number of stories set within them. The generative properties of speculative fiction and fantasy remain mostly unexplored despite the genres having undergone significant change since their inception. Recent scholarly work on worldbuilding provides an important and helpful starting point for further analysis of storyworlds and their role concerning immersion, aesthetics, and narrative construction.

Studies of narratological structures in texts are not new. However, it was not until 2012, in *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* by Mark J. P. Wolf, that a descriptive approach to worldbuilding emerged. It is a foundational text because Wolf considers imaginary worlds to be dynamic entities that need to be understood based on different criteria than previously highlighted — including the abstract possible worlds theory and its reliance on theological arguments and modal logic. The descriptive nature of the book makes it almost a handbook of narratology, and it provides necessary baseline understanding of the field. Wolf's work on worldbuilding and storyworlds has continued in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (2017) where contributors further explore the theory of imaginary worlds, as well as in the recent *Exploring Imaginary Worlds: Essays on Media, Structure, and Subcreation* (2021) in which contributors examine specific storyworlds in great detail, showcasing the various ways storyworlds may be constructed and which outcomes this may have. Other interesting texts include *Sub-creating Arda: World-building in J. R. R. Tolkien's Works, its Precursors, and Legacies* (2019), in which Tolkien's Middle-earth serves as the foundation for

contemporary scholarship on both the theory of worldbuilding generally and Tolkien's works specifically. David Herman *Basic Elements of Narrative* (2009) also deals with storyworlds, and the Mythlore journal's special issue on Ursula K. Le Guin (2021) exists in the same category although its focus is not exclusively worldbuilding. Books such as these are becoming more and more common, and the shift from focusing on a genre or an author to focusing on specific storyworlds is a significant development. Worldbuilding is certainly not meant to replace previous analytical strategies but is rather a logical expansion of the available repertoire by which we understand the nature and structure of fictional worlds.

The study of imaginary worlds is made somewhat more complicated than the study of linear narratives exactly because we cannot follow a string of events that are tied together. Instead, the framework of the story is the focus which requires different analytical tools and entails a different set of analytical challenges. Conventional narratives are moved forward by the story-pieces the audience engages with, mostly propelled into action by a curiosity gap. Typically, events in a story are visible to the audience based on whether the given event(s) advances the story and plot. Worldbuilding, then, is generally what happens when readers are allowed information that does not directly serve to advance the story. The major objective is verisimilitude — a clear framework, coherence, and inner consistency are necessary parts of creating a successful imaginary world. In the case of fantasy literature specifically, part of this paratextual material may take the form of maps, appendices, and glossaries. Like J. R. R. Tolkien, some authors spent a great amount of time on their maps and genealogies, while other authors, such as Glen Cook in his *The Black Company* (1984-present) series, consciously decided to exclude maps. As Mark. J. P. Wolf notes in *Building Imaginary Worlds* concerning the role of this material:

> Such additional information can change the audience's experience, understanding, and immersion in a story, giving a deeper significance to characters, events and details. Audience members and critical approaches that center on narrative, then, may find such excess material to be extraneous, tangential, and unnecessary, while those that consider the story's world will find their experience enhanced. (Wolf, *Building*, 2-3).

Wolf's observation is crucial, as it helps explain how and why some readers get absorbed into fictional worlds. Devices such as maps may help a reader understand where certain locations are in relation to one another, and help track the adventures of a main character as they travel through the storyworld. Although much scholarly work has been done on narratives generally, the issue of worldbuilding within narratological studies is yet quite recent and we are still working towards a theory of imaginary

worlds. Some of the basics are well-established: most imaginary worlds are based almost entirely on the primary world (i.e., our world) and then progress from that point on. Readers apply assumptions about the rules and structures of an invented world that are based on the primary world and these assumptions and rules are challenged, changed, and re-worked by the worldbuilding process as the narrative progresses (cf. the principle of minimal departure). In order for the secondary world to be understood as being a world at all, its main point of reference is always the primary world. A simple example concerns gravity which functions within the storyworld exactly as in the primary world — unless otherwise described by the author. As Wolf writes in his essay "World Design" in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds*:

> This is necessary if the new secondary world is to be recognized as a world, and it also allows us to naturally fill in parts of the world that are neither seen nor described, through assumptions based on the Primary World defaults; a gap-filling process that has been referred to by Kendall Walton as the "reality principle[52]" while Marie-Laure Ryan calls it the "principle of minimal departure[53]". (67)

The gap-filling process is a significant part of both reading about and creating secondary worlds, and Ryan's principle of minimal departure, as we have seen, is a fitting description since readers project their understanding of the world onto that of the storyworld. Immersion and willing suspension of disbelief, then, make us accept changes that we recognize as impossible (or improbable) such as incredible scientific leaps in the science fiction genre (faster-than-light travel or wormhole travel; scientifically plausible leaps in technology are in sci-fi called novum[54]), and magic in the fantasy genre. Even though many stories within the same genre may share features and structures, they will typically have elements that make them distinct or unique. A significant portion of these features may be identified via the terminology Wolf proposes. In the following, I will clarify the notions of **invention**, **completeness**, and **consistency** and explain their function in worldbuilding theory and within this dissertation.[55]

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52 Walton, Kendall (1990), *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of Representational Arts*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press.

53 Ryan, Marie-Laure (1980), "Fiction, Non-Factuals and the Principle of Minimal Departure", *Poetics* 8, p. 406

54 See Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979)

55 For more strategies of worldbuilding, see: Simonis, Annette: "Konstruktion und Destabilisierung des Weltbezugs in ausgewählten Erzählfiktionen von Howard Phillips Lovecraft und Haruki Murakami", in: Sonja Klimek, Tobias Lambrecht, Tom Kindt: Funktionen der Fantastik. Neue Formen des Weltbezugs von Literatur und Film nach 1945, Winter: Heidelberg 2017, S. 103-117.

Inner consistency within storyworlds is an interesting topic in the context of fantasy and speculative fiction because it turns out that limiting freedom to a degree — that is, having a clear set of restricting rules — is healthy for the narrative as well as the construction of the storyworld. It would be nonsensical to have a medieval European fantasy setting where modern airplanes suddenly arrive; it would break the immersive spell. Additionally, fictional worlds may be analyzed based on their level of invention, completeness, and consistency. As Wolf has argued in several places, most notably in *Building Imaginary Worlds*, invention, completeness and consistency are vital aspects of making a world come alive.

> […] worlds can be evaluated according to the degree of invention, completeness, and consistency in a given world, and all three are also an important part of world design. Invention is what makes a world different from the Primary World, and also what gives it its uniqueness […] Completeness (or, rather, the illusion of completeness) is the degree to which a world is designed to cover all the necessary areas that make it feasible; it allows audience members to at least attempt an answer to any question they might have regarding the world. Consistency is the extent to which the elements within a world design agree with each other without contradiction […]. (Wolf, *Routledge Companion*, 72)

This is exciting territory due to the varying strategies employed by authors in several genres and subgenres. It is a common feature in fantasy literature to have a fictional history that becomes part of the narrative framework. However, the degree to which this history is fleshed out varies significantly. For example, in Robert Jordan's epic *The Wheel of Time* (1990-2013), the prologue introduces a major event from the Breaking of the World (also known as the Age of Legends), which sets the scene for the main plot in *The Wheel of Time*, but the history is not available anywhere else for further examination. A similar situation occurs in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-present) in which there are frequent references to past events that eventually he expounded upon in the 2018 book *Fire and Blood*, which reads more like a history book than a conventional fantasy story.

Wolf elaborates further on the theory of invention and secondariness[56] by dividing primary world default changes into four categories that deconstruct the process of worldbuilding. Worldbuilding happens on several different levels, the first one being the *nominal* realm. On this level, new names are given to things that already exist, and therefore we see relatively few changes here. One part of the nominal realm that has important influence is language. Even in the fictional world of fantasy,

56 Tolkien popularized the terms 'primary world', i.e. the actual, real world, and 'secondary world', the invented, fictional world. See his *On Fairy Stories*.

language dictates how the world is perceived, and the lengths authors go to in this area varies greatly. Typically inventing a new language entails inventing a new culture; the two are interlinked. Tolkien's elves, and their languages, Quenya and Sindarin, are examples of this. Changing existing language and using it in creative ways is another way of signifying that a given character has a different background. In Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000), the Weaver is a spider-like multi-dimensional being that speaks in riddle-like poetic torrents. When asked for help early in the novel, the Weaver responds:

> …THE WEFT OF THREADS SURROUND ABOUND ABOUT YOUR TOTTERING TITTERING CARCASSES YOU TUG AND SHRUG UNRAVEL AND REKNIT YOU TRIUMVIRATE OF POWER ENCASED IN THE BLUE-CLAD BRISTLING WITH SPARKING FLINT BLACK POWDER IRON YOU STILL POINT THREE HAVE CAUGHT HANG NAIL SOULS ON THE FABRIC SNAGS THE FIVE WINGED RIPPERS RENDING UNWIND SYNAPSE AFTER GANGLIOL SPIRIT SUCK ON MINDFIBRES… (Miéville, *Perdido*, 404)

The dream-like confusion of the language makes it clear that this creature has a way of thinking and communicating that is not grounded in the real world. The degrees to which language is employed as a tool for creating a sense of otherness varies, but it is not uncommon to see non-human races in fantasy and science fiction use a variant of language that is strange but recognizable.

The next level is the *cultural* realm, and it is here we typically find the greatest degree of change and invention. Generally, the cultural realm deals with all things made by humans. Wolf elaborates on what this includes: "objects, artifacts, technologies, customs, institutions, ideas and so forth" (*Building Imaginary Worlds*, 35). This area carries great potential even if the changes made are subtle. Innovations may include a distinct group of people, such as the Orogenes from N. K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* trilogy; the female Aes Sedai scholars and magic-wielders from Jordan's *The Wheel of Time*; the garuda from Miéville's Bas Lag universe, or the Jedi Order from *Star Wars*. Inventing new cultures is useful for a number of reasons; it allows the author to portray social and cultural situations with a hypothetical distance, and without the limitations that pre-existing conditions would naturally impose if an existing culture were to be used. Since we have established that readers will fill in gaps based on their primary world understanding, fictional narratives can make even small changes that will have significant impact on worldbuilding. Fictional cultures and people are also further removed from the social, cultural and political spheres of real life, which allows for critically dealing with contemporary issues in a framework where the audience can share an experience and engage with a

particular topic without necessarily being weighed down by the political and social realities of the primary world. Most texts might contain a political component, even if unconsciously so[57], and difficult moral and ethical dilemmas can be safely explored in the frameworks provided by speculative fiction[58].

The third level concerns the *natural* realm, and includes new geography, plants, animals, and so on. As far as geography is concerned, many fantasy narratives base their worlds (subconsciously or not) on medieval Europe. Interesting approaches exist in the context of geography: *Earthsea* is set in an archipelago; Westeros, the continent in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, is based on an inverted map of Ireland; *Discworld* is a disc resting on four elephants standing on the back of a turtle swimming through space; and the world of *Ringworld* features an alien construct 186 million miles in diameter. On a smaller scale, the natural realm also often expands on races and creatures. The sandworms in *Dune* are iconic, as are dragons in fantasy literature. In the 2015 sci-fi novel *The Children of Time*, Adrian Tchaikovsky takes the combination of evolution, posthumanism, and zoology to exciting heights and explores consciousness and societal development of spiders on their own planet. Making spider-culture 'complete' without breaking the immersive spell requires explanations regarding biology, zoology, and evolution in order to ensure verisimilitude. All this speaks to the importance of clear worldbuilding and the significant impact it has on a narrative. If the storyworld falls flat then a plot cannot showcase its strength.

The fourth level deals with the *ontological* realm which "determines the parameters of a world's existence, that is, the materiality and laws of physics, space, time and so fourth that constitute the world" (Wolf, *Building*, 36). The Weaver from Miéville's universe is one example of a character that challenges conventional understanding of time and space. Science fiction often features faster-than-light travel and other dimensions — elements that disrupt our current understanding of physics and natural laws. Wolf goes on to argue that certain objects may become genre conventions or at least recurring elements because they solve common issues (for example questions such as "How does magic work?" or "How do humans travel the vast distances of space?").

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57 See Frederik Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981)

58 See Vera Nünning, *Reading Fictions, Changing Minds: The Cognitive Value of Fiction* (2014) for how fiction can positively impact individuals.

> Successful invention may spill over into other worlds; objects and ideas that prove useful or solve narrative problems can appear in multiple worlds and even become generic conventions. Faster-than-light spaceships, laser guns, magical swords, incantations, wormholes, changelings, anti-gravity technology, elves, dragons, clones, force fields, sentient robots, and other tropes of science fiction and fantasy have all transcended their worlds of first appearance to become familiar and acceptable conventions […]. (Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, 37)

It is important to note that these elements must be introduced in a framework that narratively makes sense. Faster-than-light dragons in space would be hard to justify. Generic conventions are useful for worldbuilding because they allow for a starting point, but also because conventions may be challenged and narrative problems may be solved in new and creative ways. As for creative inventions, there are fixed limits; Wolf correctly argues that all invented worlds must "retain some form of causality, concepts of good and evil, and emotional realism. Without causality, narrative is lost" (ibid, 37). This is important in part because of narrative coherence, and the audience's ability to properly understand what is going on, not least on an emotional level. There may be creative understandings of good and evil, and invented cultures may think of emotions in ways that seem odd, such as the garuda from *Perdido Street Station*, or the stoic Vulcans from *Star Trek*. However, we can relatively easily justify it within the storyworld. The underlying guiding principles must be respected, however, because readers (to a degree) need to be able to form an emotional connection to the world and its inhabitants. Even if the storyworld and its inhabitants are strange and not particularly human-like, emotions constitute an area where recipients are able to form meaningful connections and experiment with phenomenological knowledge. Stanisław Lem's *Solaris* again proves an interesting example since a major point in the novel is the human inability to comprehend the alien lifeform, but even here the realm of emotional realism is consistent since the confusion experienced by the human characters is relatable and the issue of the limits of human rationality is explored meaningfully.

With what I have outlined so far, we may understand storyworlds and invented worlds as existing some distance away from the real world. The exact distance, then, depends on the degree of invention and remains closely tied to the issue of ontology. Ryan further argues this point and compares a realist novel and its functions to that of a fantasy novel:

> In a possible worlds perspective, imaginary worlds can be situated at variable distances from the world we regard as actual or primary; for instance, the world of a realist novel such as Jonathan Franzen's *Freedom* (2010) stands closer to the actual world than the world of a fantasy such as *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) because its description requires fewer modifications from the assumed description of reality […] (Ryan, *Routledge Companion*, 74)

This outline ties in well with what I have described so far, and it also illustrates some of the potential difficulties that may arise when creating and analyzing a secondary world. Few readers will question the setting of a realist novel simply because the setting is not a primary focus, whereas in speculative fiction the world plays as important a part in the narrative as the story and plot; it is its own entity. Ontological specificity and consistency functions as the foundation for a well-realized world. The same is true for nonfiction narratives because the story will only be accepted as plausible if the storyworld does not differ from the real world.

Speculative fiction features a high degree of invention, and with that follows the issue of storyworld completeness. How do some storyworlds seem more well-realized and alive than others? Why does a comparatively small fantasy world seem more comprehensive than a science fiction space opera? These questions all deal with the problem of completeness. One factor is the sheer impossibility of total completeness — fictional worlds are by their nature incomplete. Wolf elaborates on this point:

> […] *completeness*, then, refers to the degree to which the world contains explanations and details covering all the various aspects of its characters' experiences, as well as background details which together suggest a feasible, practical world. Stories often have very incomplete worlds […] (Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, 38)

This relates to the process of gap-filling and the swiss cheese strategy and is an important part of the reading process. All stories require a certain degree of completeness in order to be comprehensible, but the degree of completeness may necessarily be lower than what may intuitively seem to be the case. It is possible to make a strong argument for incompleteness being beneficial for immersion and Lubomír Doležel proposed as much in *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds* (1998), arguing that incompleteness is a necessary and universal feature of fictional worlds, and one of the main ways they differ from the actual world[59]. Although it is worth pointing out that even the real world is 'incomplete' insofar as no person can truly know or understand all aspects of the world, it nevertheless is an important observation that incompleteness may enhance the properties of a fictional world. This does not mean that a low degree of invention is necessarily better, but rather that readers can be trusted to fill in gaps in the storyworld if the ontological framework does not prevent them doing so. Eric Hayot in *On Literary Worlds* (2012) also deals with the issue of completeness; he highlights the existence of

[59] Lubomír Doležel, *Heterocosmica: Fiction and Possible Worlds,* Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p. 169

objects within the storyworld that move outside the immediate action but nevertheless remain important in the context of completeness:

> Completeness in narrative has a strong temporal dimension, since it refers not only to the knowledge of facts, like apple prices, but also to the ongoing existence of fictional objects that move out of the immediate frame of narrative or descriptive attention. (Hayot, 147**)**

There are, then, central questions about the ontological status of objects within a storyworld. The ontological status of possible worlds is a key part of the theory as well as the problem of completeness in literature. Ryan writes on this, saying, "Insofar as they owe their existence to an act of the mind, the entities found exclusively in possible worlds differ in ontological status from the objects of the actual world" (Ryan, 1991, 20[60]). Ryan is interested in whether a fictional book can ever be *complete* in the philosophical sense as fictional worlds will always have properties that differ from the primary world. It is theoretically possible to eventually ask a question about a novel that it cannot answer — questions relating to the inner workings, functions and general properties of the storyworld. As far as completeness is concerned, Benjamin J. Robertson argues in his article "World Completeness" (2017) that, "[n]o matter the comprehensiveness of a fictional world, however, it will always remain incomplete" (Robertson, 82). *In*completeness, then, is an inescapable feature of both the topic of completeness and fictional worlds, and the ways (in)completeness is relevant in a given narrative depends on the particular focus of the narrative in question. Different areas are realized in different types of books, and one book may have a relatively 'complete' set of circumstances in one context that another book neglects.

A storyworld must be able to answer basic questions if it is to be believable. For example, if the story is set in a foreign world made of ice, how will the character(s) eat, sleep, and stay warm? Weaving explanations of this kind into the story is not always an easy task; in his online lecture titled "Lord of the Rings: How to read J. R. R. Tolkien[61]", Michael D.C. Drout humorously refers to a hypothetical chapter offering too much information on the workings of a storyworld as "the treaties of tedium". Drout outlines how some conventional fantasy stories begin with an enthralling chapter with a dramatic call-to-adventure, perhaps a battle, or the major antagonist showing himself. Then follows a

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60 Ryan, Marie-Laure, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory*, 1991, Bloomington: Indiana University Press

61 Drout D.C., Michael: "Lord of the Rings: How to Read J.R.R. Tolkien", Carnegie Mellon University's Dietrich College. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lXAvF9p8nmM&t=1s

significantly less interesting chapter on the infrastructure of the storyworld. There seems to be a fine line to walk between offering too little and too much information, and the specific timing matters as well. Wolf goes on to explain how this is important because a believable fictional world must stretch beyond the main plot:

> The completeness of a world is what makes it seem as though it extends far beyond the story, hinting at infrastructures, ecological systems, and societies and cultures whose existence is implied but not directly described or clearly shown. Likewise, a sense that a world has a past history is also necessary for it to seem complete. (Wolf, *Building*, 42)

Particularly what Wolf mentions regarding a past history is something most fantasy stories make use of. It may be symptomatic of the post-Tolkien era; most famous fictional worlds have a history that reaches far into the past. Earlier I mentioned *The Wheel of Time* and *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and these are stereotypical examples. Novels like *Gormenghast* are less exhaustive, and by and large makes use of relatively few conventions typically associated with the fantasy genre. It is a beautiful book and one that focuses on creating an atmospheric and aesthetically engaging storyworld. In *Gormenghast*, there is little need for a past history. In fact, the vagueness of the rituals and the strangeness of the land is accentuated by the lack of details (cf. incompleteness leading to immersion), while *The Lord of the Rings* is much more explicit in its references to past events and history. I delve into this to a greater degree in chapter 3 which focuses on *Gormenghast* and how it produces an immersive atmosphere despite its minimalistic plot.

How does this interact with the earlier argument that a degree of incompleteness is inevitable but also necessary because of the effectiveness of the gap-filling process by the reader? Part of the answer lies in the very fact that invented worlds can never be fully realized. I touched upon this earlier: it will eventually be possible to ask a question of the novel that it cannot reasonably answer. Robertson argues in the same vein, stating:

> The present definition agrees that incompleteness seems to be a necessary dimension of any world described by texts and also agrees that there can be no full account of all of the properties of all (or any) objects in such worlds. However, it reframes this discussion by insisting that we must think about objects in *worlds* in a manner altogether different that we think about objects in *stories* or *text* […] (Robertson, "World Completeness", 84, emphasis original)

A fully-realized world would be overwhelming. The manner in which a storyworld is realized, however, is of great interest, and Robertson is right in stating that our approach to *worlds* must differ

from our approach to *stories*. They are separate textual entities, and the set of challenges present in creating a storyworld are different from the challenges associated with creating a coherent narrative. A central concern with regards to narratives is the need for consistency in a way that leaves little room for (accusations of) plot holes and inconsistency (unless these are unimportant or even part of the text's self-conscious meta-commentary as seen in e.g. *The Simpsons* and *South Park*). If the overarching problem the characters face is easily solvable then the immersive spell might more easily be broken. As far as the storyworld goes, readers must be willing to assume a potentially great number of things about the workings of the storyworld without being explicitly told so. This relates to earlier points; readers, unless otherwise told, can safely assume that physics, for example, functions as in the real world. As Wolf notes, there is a correlation between degree of details offered in the narrative, and storyworld consistency. It becomes progressively more difficult to portray the storyworld as consistent when more and more complicated and interlinked information is added to the equation. Robertson uses an apt example from the storyworlds of Superheroes; these characters often exist in multiple places, and many authors contribute to their stories. This very easily results in problems with consistency, and readers must either willingly ignore these problems, or find creative solutions either within or outside of the texts in order to explain inconsistencies and other problems with storyworld logic.

The next pillar concerns consistency in worldbuilding. As noted above, problems with consistency all too easily arise, and the immersive spell is often broken if the storyworld does not function logically. Wolf defines consistency as, "the degree to which world details are plausible, feasible, and without contradiction" (*Building,* 43). Unsurprisingly, inconsistency is more likely to occur as a storyworld grows in size and complexity, but it is also important to note exactly where these inconsistencies arise when they do. Minor faults can more readily be forgiven, or perhaps entirely overlooked, whereas major inconsistencies can be severely damaging for the storyworld. Wolf points out that, "inconsistencies can occur in the main storyline, secondary storylines, background details, world infrastructure, or world mechanics" (Wolf, *Building*, 43). Arguably, inconsistencies in the main storyline carry the greatest potential for disrupting the reading experience and making the storyworld seem flawed. Inconsistencies in secondary storylines and background details have more room for error — to a degree. Consider Leibniz's[62] notion of *compossibility*: the premise that for a set of entities to

62 Leibniz, G. (1989), *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2nd Edition. Dordrecht: D Reidel

coexist in a given storyworld they must not be mutually contradictory (Leibniz, 661-662). In other words, a successful storyworld must be free of contradictions, and all the pieces of the storyworld must follow the given set of rules for that particular world. Storyworld consistency, just like worldbuilding, functions on several levels with varying degrees of impact on the narrative and on the storyworld itself. In their article "World Consistency" (2017), Rodrigo Lessa and João Araújo elaborate on the three dimensions that are relevant in the context of consistency:

> Therefore, when thinking of an imaginary world's level of consistency […] it is important to keep in mind that consistency works in at least three dimensions: one regarding singular entities and elements, such as characters and how they develop throughout the work; one regarding the compossibility of the world elements, and their ability to work together without blatant contradictions; and another one regarding the world's conformity to expectations that stem from its parent work's mode of narration, tone, genre, or even franchise […]. (Lessa & Araújo, 93)

All three elements are important, though readers will attach more (or less) importance to each as their inclinations and dispositions dictate. Unsurprisingly, length and level of complexity of the narrative in question significantly influence these three spheres. Nowadays, when transmedia franchises hold sway, we can observe new and unique challenges regarding storyworld consistency. As a storyworld is transferred and adapted to various other media, the challenge regarding consistency becomes more significant[63]. Although a transmedia perspective is outside of the scope of this dissertation, the topic nevertheless remains relevant for storyworlds since transmedia developments play a major role in the current focus on worldbuilding and storyworlds.

All the textual elements that provide context, framework, and storyworld plausibility have the common goal of enabling immersion; this is not unique to speculative fiction, but I will reiterate how fragile a storyworld becomes as otherworldly mechanisms are introduced. Immersion is a difficult entity that operates on several levels; Wolf highlights three of these, starting with physical immersion, which are full-immersion experiences such as theme-park rides or walk-in video installations (*Building*, 48). Second is sensual immersion, in which particular senses are activated in an effort to immerse users. For example, virtual reality headsets strive for exactly this kind of immersion. Wolf refers to such situations as controlled experiences (ibid). The third (and for us most interesting) concerns *conceptual*

63 For example, the transition between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* caused some trouble for Tolkien since the origin and power of the Ring changed. In the context of transmedia, these types of issues become even more complicated. Adapting a story to a new genre presents both opportunities *and* limitations and balancing an interpretation in a new medium becomes a tightrope walk *if* transmedia consistency is a desired goal.

immersion which relies on the imagination of the user. Generally speaking, reading provides conceptual immersion if the storyworld and narrative are successful at transporting the reader into its world and convincing the reader of what is happening. While experiences provided by virtual reality are more tangible (not least because our sight is such a powerful sense), conceptual immersion seems contingent on both quality of the text and willingness on the readers' part to lose herself. Wolf goes on to correctly stress how listening to music or reading newspapers do not provide conceptual immersion because, "neither is likely to provide the kind of vivid experience of going elsewhere, into a different place, that one can find in other more 'immersive' media" (*Building*, 48). This is not to place literature on a pedestal and in any way argue that it evokes a heightened sense of immersion and therefore of higher quality. It simply concerns the phenomenology of immersion, and precisely what makes literature immersive and enjoyable for many readers seems relatively unique compared to other forms of art. This willing and voluntary self-loss that at the same time has a mechanical side (i.e. the act of reading) spans wide, and while readers may find different types of narratives enjoyable, they mostly rely on the same activation of the imagination. In line with what Felski argues, there is a strong emotional side to engaging positively with literature and readers must be fully engrossed in a narrative if immersion on any level is to be achieved. Immersion is fragile and another metaphor is necessary to understand it more clearly, namely that of textual absorption. Wolf argues that:

> Absorption differs from immersion in that it is a two-way process. In one sense, the user's attention and imagination is absorbed or "pulled into" the world; one willingly opens a book, watches a screen, interacts with a game world, and so forth. At the same time, however, the user also "absorbs" the imaginary world as well, bringing it into mind, learning or recalling its places, characters, events, and so on, constructing the world within the imagination […] (Wolf, *Building*, 49)

This is an interesting phenomenon that arguably makes such absorptive experiences distinctly different from immersive experiences. For many readers, narratives will fall flat if the storyworld fails to manifest clearly in their imagination. The primary world is essentially being willingly replaced by the secondary world, enchanting the reader, but not disabling them or their mental faculties. Marie-Laure Ryan writes more on absorption in *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media* (2001), where she divides absorption in the act of reading into four distinct categories: (1) concentration, a 'nonimmersive' engagement with difficult texts; (2) imaginative involvement, a 'split subject' reading in which a reader is both immersed but

simultaneously consciously aware of aesthetics and their own detachment; (3) entrancement, which is complete immersion where both language and aesthetic quality 'disappear' in favor of total self-loss; and (4) addiction, which covers both a**)** immersion that remains incomplete because the textual landscape is traversed 'too fast' and 'too compulsively', and b**)** the loss of a reader's ability to distinguish the real world from the fictional one (98-99). As we can then see, immersion may take several forms and different types of texts may produce different versions of immersion (or even nonimmersion). Speculative fiction and fantasy ideally strive for a pleasurable level of *entrancement* (connected to Felski's idea of enchantment), but *imaginative involvement* also remains an important immersive aspect of speculative fiction and fantasy since their aesthetic quality and the 'accuracy' of what the text presents are often crucial elements of a reading experience. Without imaginative involvement it would be impossible to critically assess the truth-value of a storyworld's worldbuilding. As such, active involvement with the text becomes a vital component of immersion into a text.

How our understanding of narratives changes over time is related to a number of philosophical, abstract, and scientific areas such as psychology and neuro-humanities. Narrative competence[64] helps explain how narrative understanding helps further personal development in prosocial ways. Our own experiences in life factor in quite heavily when we interpret texts (hermeneutics deals with this extensively), but also *world gestalten* from psychology influences interpretations and understanding of narratives. Wolf usefully applies the idea of gestalt to the earlier-mentioned conceptual realm although, historically, it has primarily been a theoretical tool applied in the *perceptual* realm, i.e. dealing with vision.

> [Gestalt] saw the whole as being more than the sum of its parts. In particular, the gestalt principles of emergence, reification, good continuity, closure, and *prägnanz* all have to do with how the human perceptual system organizes sensory input holistically, automatically filling in gaps, so that the whole contains percepts that are not present in the individual parts from which it is composed. (Wolf, *Building*, 51)

While parts of a narrative may be understood as their own entities, such as certain dialogue, general understanding and appreciation of a complex narrative set in a difficult and large setting requires a process where these percepts form the whole and therefore contain elements not present in individual constituent parts. This is the automatic gap filling process which is more easily exemplified using film;

64 See, for example, Vera Nünning, *Reading Fictions, Changing Minds: The Cognitive Value of Fiction*, 2014, Universitätsverlag Winter

a traveling scene where a character is on a train in one scene and arrives at a destination in the next scene requires an automatic (and not counter-intuitive) gap filling process; a *narrative gestalt* (*Building*, 51). It would often be meaningless and time consuming to show every detail of a journey and narrative gestalt, then, helps construct narrative situations where the gap filling process is useful for both storytelling and the audience. Since storyworlds in speculative fiction constitute their own entities, Wolf proposes expanding gestalt to include *world gestalten* (Wolf, *Building*, 52). Analyzing storyworlds requires a slightly different toolset than analyzing narratives, and toying with the idea of world gestalten may be useful in this context. Wolf describes the idea of world gestalten:

> […] the idea of world gestalten, in which a structure or configuration of details together implies the existence of an imaginary world, and causes the audience to automatically fill in the missing pieces of that world, based on the details that are given. (Wolf, 52)

As I have noted, implied off-the-page details are crucial for constructing fictional worlds with a sense of depth and because it is not plausible to communicate everything in the narrative. Although Wolf focuses mainly on the storyworld, there is a narrative element to this. Small, seemingly insignificant pieces can provide information that ultimately expands the storyworld and the narrative. All these topics have significant implications for storyworld consistency, and consequently, the issue of consistency will always be relevant when critically analyzing storyworlds. However, consistency alone cannot be the foundation for an analysis but is rather a supporting actor that together with our other available tools help form a theoretical toolbox that presents valuable critical vocabulary that enables analysis of storyworlds and worldbuilding.

In this subchapter, I have highlighted how Wolf's terminology and conceptualizations are helpful in the context of storyworlds. Research on worldbuilding has made it possible to analyze fictional worlds and their foundational structures without relying solely on abstract philosophical concepts. I find the ideas behind invention, completeness, and consistency a solid starting point. I will draw on Wolf's terminology in the analysis, both expanding and problematizing the terms for the sake of perspective. First, however, the following subchapter delves into additional avenues by which we may understand fictional worlds.

On Literary Worlds

I have stated that Wolf's work on worldbuilding in *Building Imaginary Worlds* can serve as a handbook. This is primarily due to how he approaches the issue of fictional worlds. However, to offer contrast and explore (albeit briefly) other ways of thinking about storyworlds, I will introduce Eric Hayot's work in the following section. In *On Literary Worlds* (2011), Hayot identifies five variables that can help analyze and understand fictional worlds. While it will not explain Hayot's work in detail, the following section provides a brief overview to offer helpful terminology, introduce a different take on literary worlds. It also highlights that the worldbuilding theory I have described thus far is not the only available path.

Hayot clarifies the distinction between *world* as both place and space where (and when) a person exists and as a *totality*:

> [...] the word means something like the unity of form, diegesis, and feeling composed by the rough totality of a work: the world of the work of art. The world of a Balzac novel, for instance, is located in a time (the early nineteenth century) and a place (mostly Paris); includes certain kinds of people (the petit bourgeoisie; the aristocracy) and excludes others (the noncriminal underclass); is oriented around certain types of plots and social units (the family, particularly the nonnuclear family); and so on. (Hayot, On Literary Worlds, 136)

The focus on unity of form, diegesis, and feeling immediately is noteworthy, and Hayot ultimately argues for a totality that encompasses many different areas that together form a literary *world*. This is a different take on worlds and worldbuilding than Wolf, who is mostly concerned with major narrative building blocks that exist as separate entities from the story itself. In this conceptualization of literary worlds, for example, it would be easier to group Le Guin's and Tolkien's fantasy (due to the unity of form and their certain recognizable background feeling), while Peake's fantasy would exist in a different category because of its grotesque and weird tone *despite the fact* that Peake and Tolkien lived and worked in more or less the same historical context. Hayot further argues for his understanding of what constitutes a literary world:

> By literary world let us mean, therefore, the diegetic totality constituted by the sum of all aspects of a single text, constellated into a structure or system. This unity need not be diegetic in a purely conventional sense; it need not, that is, be a function solely or partly of narrative development or progress. It is enough that this unity emerges from the interior representational content of the work and that it thus belongs as a formal concept most properly to the arrangement of the work's content, of which it is the formal expression. (Hayot, 137)

Hayot further argues that a haiku also has (or is) a literary world even if nothing happens in it. This stands in direct opposition to Ryan's argumentation in which she identifies the need for narrativity, i.e. that texts need to include a narrative in order to construct fictional worlds (cf. *Possible Worlds Theory*, 63). Wolf's understanding of worldbuilding implicitly constructs a hierarchy in which certain elements play a more important role in terms of *constructing* a fictional world than others; Hayot, on the other hand, considers the 'sum of all aspects of a single text' to be what ultimately creates a fictional world. Furthermore, Hayot's perspective includes the idea that the fictional world always has an inseparable relationship to the real world. This does not counter what either Wolf or Ryan argue, but Hayot's argumentation never considers the literary world divorced from the real world and as such the fictional world is considered less unique or as a stand-alone entity. Both Wolf and Ryan also consider the intrinsic relationship that a fictional world has to the real world but their perspective is generally that the real world is a point of reference for the fictional world, and the fictional world may depart from the real world. Hayot's approach differs:

> At the extremes, a work of pure romance defines its world as a microcosm—a ship, a city, an apartment building—or presents a completely formed alternative to the lived world in which it is produced. This creates fantasy, utopia, or science fiction. Such fictional worlds often open an aperture to a realistic version of their contemporary world; even "a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away" stays open to the possibility of a historical and spatial reunification of the world of Star Wars with the world of our Earth. Such otherworldly fictions seem to need the aperture or bridge that simultaneously ties them to and separates them from the natural world. (Hayot, 139)

In connection with this, Hayot strives to connect what he calls *worldedness* with aesthetics — a line of thinking that fits well with postcriticism and particularly my own arguments concerning the role of atmosphere in fictional worlds and its ability to function as a bridge: "[W]orldedness, the world-oriented force of any given work of art, is an aesthetic effect that emerges only at certain scales of the work itself" (ibid, 137). The focus on aesthetics is another area where Hayot diverges from Wolf, whose work generally steers clear of aesthetics and affect, although he does acknowledge the emotional component to worldbuilding. The kind of 'aesthetic effect' a text produces depends on the text and the reader and is not necessarily bound by genre or convention.

Another interesting addition to our critical vocabulary is *attention*. This is connected to *amplitude*, "which refers to the relative spread of narrative attention across the diegesis, and particularly of the distribution of that attention relative to the narrative importance of any given object in diegetic space"

(143-144) — the narrative consists of a background and a foreground and the significance of events depend largely on the degree of attention they receive. It is ingenious in its simplicity and may help showcase and explain why certain features can produce both worldedness and atmosphere (Hayot never engages with the latter explicitly):

> By attention I mean the way that any work can mark some of its aspects as privileged by spending more time or space on them than on others, or by surrounding them with the privileged marks of aesthetic attention that are appropriate to the formal regime to which the work of art belongs: placing these aspects centrally in a frame, making them protagonists, allowing them to speak in direct or free indirect discourse, associating them with privileged paratexts (e.g., titles or epigraphs), and so on. (ibid, 144)

Aesthetic experiences may be explained by considering degrees of attention, but not just attention in terms of pure word count but also depth, vocabulary and importance in terms of aesthetics. For example, Peake spends considerable time establishing scenes in his works that advance the plot very little but which produce a distinct mood. As such, because these scenes receive particular *attention*, they become a focal point and main object of interest. There exists, of course, the less abstract level in which serious attention is given to the act of worldbuilding in speculative fiction; this in itself highlights the importance of worldbuilding but this point is less interesting than aesthetics since worldbuilding also has a purely mechanical function in that it helps set the stage for the story and the characters. We may then consider the effects it has when certain elements in a narrative receive particular attention, and/or consider what precise type of attention they receive. It seems that considering which aspects of a narrative receive this kind of attention must be combined with other considerations to avoid generally superficial readings; nevertheless, thinking in terms of attention may be useful in highlighting textual features and what effect (or potential experience) these features produce.

Hayot also discusses metadiegetic structures and significance in an attempt to pinpoint aspects of particular narratives that are important to a given work. In the context of speculative fiction and fantasy, this may be a useful tool in understanding where precisely the focus of a given narrative lies which may, in turn, inform or guide an interpretation as well as a reading experience. Considering aspects of worldbuilding in a kind of hierarchical system is one potential way of analyzing storyworlds:

> Metadiegetic structure thus allows us to discuss the ways that a work assigns and distributes certain kinds of importance, the ways that it articulates the forms of significance available in a total world-space (diegesis + metadiegesis) (Hayot, 152)

Although they belong to the same genre, we might clarify the diegetic differences between storyworlds presented by authors like Le Guin, Tolkien, and Peake by considering this perspective. In Le Guin's work, the introspective and emotional realm becomes part of the plot and a major focus in the novel's metadiegetic structure. These topics, in other words, are important in Le Guin's unique world. We can juxtapose this with Tolkien's strategy to focus on descriptions of both locations and their history, emphasizing how the depth of his created storyworld weighs heavily on *The Lord of the Rings,* even if the plot with Frodo and the Ring is central to the reading experience as well. In Peake's world, on the other hand, another mode may be identified, one that highlights specific isolated storyworld scenes (like paintings) in which microcosmic stage play-like encounters unfold in and around Gormenghast castle. Peake's storyworld is smaller than Le Guin's and Tolkien's. The metadiegetic structure thus highlights how Peake assigns importance to areas that vary considerably from other fantasy authors. As a narrative and storyworld *object*, Gormenghast castle is tremendously important. Le Guin also has several relatively important locations for her storyworld; the Roke school of magic, the magical forest, and so forth. However, neither is as important to *Earthsea* as Gormenghast castle is to *Gormenghast*. Ged has to travel far and encounters several locations, but this simply underscores how the metadiegetic structure in Peake differs from Le Guin. The same line of thinking can be applied to any number of works to pinpoint which aspects are of considerable analytical and interpretive importance. In Hayot's conceptualization, this also becomes an avenue for potentially identifying the textual elements which produce "what Max Weber would describe as the 'enchantment'" (ibid, 152) — which creates a direct path to Felski's line of argumentation as well, which may be useful given Felski's difficulty with (or reluctance to) identifying specific textual structures or elements that result in enchantment. With Hayot's strategy in mind, we might conceive an analytical model that can incorporate Felski's *enchantment* – although it is likely that it would need further refinement.

The final area I want to highlight concerns the *character-system*. Here, characters are considered in terms of attention. How many different characters and the number of pages devoted to each one. Wolf generally considers characters as separate entities to the structures he finds relevant in worldbuilding. With this view, characters are necessary vehicles through which a storyworld is explored, and characters are required precisely because the reader needs a point of view through which to explore the

storyworld and the story. Hayot considers characters in light of the 'attention' in terms of narrative importance and simple page count.

> Character-system is a feature largely of narrative worldedness, one that measures the distribution of two very different resources: the first, invariably limited, simply involves the number of pages devoted to any character; the second, unlimited, involves characterological access to privileged narrative markers (e.g., the opportunity to have their point of view "shown"). Equal or unequal distributions of these forms of privilege effectively create an economy of representation, a field of contestation and social organization that represents—and practices—civil society in the modern democratic era. (ibid, 155-156)

One aspect of this is identifying the major and minor characters, but it also illustrates how inter-character relationships might reveal facets of hierarchies and the social sphere in which the characters exist. Although Hayot does not explicitly engage with speculative fiction and fantasy, there might be some potential with this approach insofar as one agrees that there is a close relationship between the fictional world and the real world:

> Though character-system appears most strongly only in the age of the realist novel, can it count as a general feature of aesthetic worlds beyond the modern period? Yes, if only because it directs us to the degree that all works that represent human life constitute social wholes, and thus to the ways in which the arrangement of personages in diegetic space both reflects and reflects on the dynamism of the social sphere that the diegesis represents. (ibid, 156)

There is a connection between the fictional landscape of a realist novel and the real world than there may exist between the storyworld in speculative fiction and the real world. My dissertation is evidence of this since I pay little attention to individual characters and their social spheres as they relate to real-life social spheres. In certain types of storyworlds, however, such a focus may be fruitful since many fictional worlds have tremendously complicated character-systems that enhance the storyworld by its very existence. In this way, for example, one might imagine how Hayot's arguments about the social systems in *Dune*, which could highlight the Bene Gesserit and how it is reflective of aspects of the real world, differs significantly from Wolf. The latter is content to classify this secretive matriarchal social order as a *cultural invention* and note its influence on the storyworld without delving too deeply into individual characters.

In the following four chapters, I will present readings of Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea*, Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*, Haruki Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and lastly, China Miéville's *The City & The City*. The theory that I have presented in this chapter will stand at the heart of the coming chapters and provide a framework and important vocabulary and baseline

understandings that inform my work. As I will show, storyworlds are complex structures that play a meaningful role in immersion, and these storyworlds employ many strategies for evoking atmospheres. How these structures and atmospheres function, which purposes they serve, and what types of atmospheres they produce depend on each work's singular qualities. With a postcritical perspective, I will highlight several important passages from each text to show the importance of emotions in the reading experience and how storyworlds, too, are evocative and absolutely central to immersive experiences with literature.

2. Atmospheres & Worlds in the Quest Narrative: Exploring *Earthsea*[65]

Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* stories, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), *The Farthest Shore* (1972), *Tehanu* (1990), as well as *The Other Wind* (2001), and the collection of short stories in *Tales from Earthsea* (2001), are a cornerstone of fantasy literature. Le Guin's storyworld has evolved and changed from the inception of the storyworld to the final installment. In the context of this dissertation, *Earthsea* represents conventional fantasy narratives, and an analysis of the style of worldbuilding in Le Guin's work, as well as considerations of the type of literary atmosphere evoked by these (and similar) novels, enables the creation of a typology of fantasy that includes considerations of affective and aesthetic qualities as evoked and produced by the texts. Considerations about the communicative practice of fictional worldbuilding are important because these practices engage reader imagination; the fictional world is both created but also understood and interpreted as an idea or a thought experiment which in the context of Le Guin is relevant given her interest in philosophy and politics. Her storyworld must necessarily be considered in light of these perspectives. Throughout the chapter, I will closely link the Taoist philosophy and Le Guin's worldbuilding; this aspect, more than anything else, is what drives the focus of this chapter since it shows the foundational narrative mechanisms of *Earthsea*. Several important aspects of the storyworld are influenced by the Taoist worldbuilding: the atmosphere of the storyworld, its moral quality, the aesthetic dimension, and the narrative construction of all the *Earthsea* novels.

While many narratological aspects of *Earthsea* undoubtedly belong to the post-Tolkien era of fantasy writing (such as maps, a quest, extensive traveling, fantastic creatures, and magic), there is still great potential for unlocking the inner workings of Le Guin's widely-read and fairly widely-studied fantasy storyworld in order to understand their construction and atmospheric dimension. While *Earthsea* is no doubt a classic within the fantasy genre and lauded for its timeless quality, Le Guin's fantasy world is less overtly political than her science fiction novels, particularly *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969),

[65] Parts of this chapter have been published in: Friedrichsen, Dennis (2021) "Aspects of Worldbuilding: Taoism as Foundational in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea Saga," Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature: Vol. 39 : No. 2 , Article 1.

The Lathe of Heaven (1971), and *The Dispossessed* (1974). Consequently less scholarly work exists on *Earthsea* than Le Guin's other texts. The aim of this chapter is twofold: first, I will use worldbuilding theory to demonstrate how the building blocks of Le Guin's storyworld function. I will show how Le Guin's storyworld construction fits with the fantasy genre and what elements of the storyworld enable immersion and provide a sense of depth, coherence, and scale. I will link worldbuilding to Le Guin's interest in Taoism; while this particular area is commonly found in Le Guin studies, most scholars focus on characters and dialogue; I will instead highlight the worldbuilding that happens as a consequence of the Taoist influence. This is necessary because Le Guin's storyworld occupies a core position in the history of fantasy literature, but the mechanisms and construction of her storyworld have not been analyzed with contemporary worldbuilding focus. In order to do this, I will first detail the influence that the Taoist philosophy and Jungian psychology has had on *Earthsea* and progress onto a structural level. Second, I argue that Le Guin's storyworld produces a distinct but recognizable atmosphere that impacts the reading experience and the storyworld itself. Although the three other major objects of analysis in this dissertation (Peake's *Titus Groan*, Miéville's *The City & The City*, Murakami's *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*) arguably strive more deliberately for certain atmospheres in their storyworlds, my overarching argument is that not only textual elements but also genre assumptions and genre conventions inadvertently produce atmosphere within the storyworld, and readers attune to this particular atmosphere in the reading process. These perspectives are in line with postcritical readings since the singular nature of each book offers unique potential experiences depending on the proclivities of readers.

The first book in the original trilogy, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, deliberately employs the structure of a conventional fantasy narrative. Ged, the otherwise unremarkable youth from an unremarkable island, discovers and develops his magical abilities. He is at first arrogant and struggles both under the tutelage of Ogion, his first master, and later causes trouble by being unable to withstand taunting from Jasper, a fellow student at the Roke school of wizardry they both attend. In a foolhardy moment of needless bravado, Ged unintentionally summons a Shadow from the world of the dead; Ged flees from this entity but eventually learns that he must face his fears and confront the Shadow head-on. The structure is noted in several articles on Le Guin, including "The Last Dragon of Earthsea" (2003) by Peter Hollindale: "In reckless showmanship, he summons a shadow from the world of the dead. He causes 'a

rent in the darkness of the earth and night, a ripping open of the fabric of the world,' and must first flee the shadow, then pursue it 'to the coasts of death's kingdom,' and finally confront it on 'the dark slopes beneath unmoving stars' (1971, pp. 74, 200, 195)" (184). At first glance this may seem a conventional or even clichéd story, but the underlying mechanisms of the storyworld and Ged's journey — especially once considerations and analysis include more of the *Earthsea* books — showcase Le Guin's archipelago as an inventive realm that produces significant moments in both reader and narrative construction. In the context of fantasy literature and its tradition, *Earthsea*'s position and Le Guin's influence only seem clichéd since she invented many of the tropes and structures that have since been re-used and re-worked in later fantasy novels.

We can understand *Earthsea* in light of Brian Attebery[66]'s notion of the 'fuzzy set' from his 1992 book *Strategies of Fantasy* — the fundamental idea that there are no boundaries in the fantasy genre. Instead, we have a core of texts with central ideas that we draw from to create and understand other texts. *Earthsea* has defined and characterized much Anglophone fantasy literature as one of those principal texts. The other novels I include in this dissertation push the genre outwards from this core. The idea of the 'fuzzy set' became a central term in fantasy studies, and Farah Mendlesohn developed the idea in *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) in which she offers a taxonomy of (certain kinds of) fantasy. Mendlesohn's four categories, the Portal-Quest Fantasy, Immersive Fantasy, Intrusion Fantasy and Liminal Fantasy, are a useful starting point for an analysis of a fairly conventional storyworld. *Earthsea* is a quest fantasy story and the storyworld and its construction is recognizable in that context. Mendlesohn provides a general but fitting description of this subset of fantasy that is immediately applicable to the first *Earthsea* book, *A Wizard of Earthsea*: "Characteristically in quest fantasy the protagonist goes from a mundane life — in which the fantastic, if she is aware of it, is very distant and unknown (or at least unavailable to the protagonist) — into direct contact with the fantastic, through which she transitions, to the point of negotiation with the world via the personal manipulation of the fantastic realm" (Mendlesohn, 19). This is in line with the narrative construction of *A Wizard of Earthsea* since Ged's journey conforms with the basic requirements of that structure. This can be observed via Ged's simple origins as a goatherd on Gont, an island where magic is initially only performed by witches and seems to be little more than tricks, to his arrival at the island Roke, where

[66] See also his work on *Earthsea* in "On a Far Shore: The Myth of *Earthsea*" (1980)

powerful magic is taught and practiced. However, I argue that the later novels in the series, beginning with the second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, break conventions and create a certain narrative shock effect (cf Felski's ideas on shock) that challenges the recognizable structure of the typical quest fantasy. My chapter on Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan* (chapter 3) presents an analysis of an immersive fantasy narrative, and the major difference between such a novel and *Earthsea* is the role of the reader and the manner in which information is conveyed. In both the immersive fantasy and quest fantasy story, readers depend on a main character (or set of characters) to absorb and interpret the storyworld around them; in the quest fantasy specifically, the reader occupies a companion-role in which the reader depends on information and exposition from the main character(s). *Earthsea* is here in an interesting position because the structure of the narrative follows the quest fantasy formula, but compared to other narratives in the same subset of fantasy, such as *Narnia* or *The Lord of the Rings*, the smaller scope of *A Wizard of Earthsea* permits less direct exposition and explanation of the inner workings of the storyworld. This is partly because Ged is followed closely in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, and partly because this novel is quite short. As Mark J. P. Wolf has correctly identified, there is a relationship between the amount of data of a given storyworld and the level of detail in the information available[67]. Marie-Laure Ryan argues in the same vein in the context of storyworld size:

> The size of a storyworld is a function of the amount of information it gives about the world it purports to describe. A thousand-page narrative, a series of novels, or a transmedial franchise has a large storyworld, unless it is highly repetitive; a three-hundred-page stand-alone novel has a medium storyworld; and a short story, a joke, or a text of microfiction has a small storyworld. (Ryan, *Possible Worlds*, 68)

This issue is particularly interesting in *Earthsea* because Le Guin changed the basic makeup of the *Earthsea* storyworld with every book; especially every book following the original trilogy[68]. Consequently, while the amount of data about *A Wizard of Earthsea* is comparatively small, the story covers much storyworld space due to Ged's travels. Moreover, his travels fall under Mendlesohn's identification of the typical quest fantasy strategy in which there are two movements: transition and exploration (Mendlesohn, 29). Since both reader and protagonist in the quest fantasy most often occupy a position of naivete, both parties explore the storyworld together and learn information at approximately the same rate. Conventional examples of this are Tad Williams' *Memory, Sorrow, and*

67 See "World Design" in *Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* p. 67
68 It is noteworthy that the original trilogy was published between 1968 and 1972, while the fourth book, *Tehanu*, was not published until 1990.

Thorn, Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings.* In these types of narratives, transition and exploration and closely linked and speculative fiction and fantasy all make use of unknown locations that become an enjoyable aspect of the reading experience. These locations are necessarily explored via principle characters. In the following, I will highlight one such location from *Earthsea* in order to showcase the profound influence that locations, which are a central part of worldbuilding, may have.

One particular location I want to highlight from the storyworld is the Immanent Grove. It serves multiple purposes in the narrative and continually evolves; the Immanent Grove is a mysterious and magical place that, through these qualities, can evoke a storyworld atmosphere that readers attune to and recognize as distinctly belonging to the fantasy genre. There are several reasons why this location is so meaningful, and part of it is its unexplained nature; this relates to storyworld gaps and the deliberate role they play. Fantasy literature often uses unattainable vistas that provide the storyworld with a sense of depth; not everything hinted at or portrayed in a story is shown in its entirety. If handled carefully it enables exploration, wonder, and immersion. For the Immanent Grove, Le Guin employed this strategy. As *Earthsea* grew and readers were allowed more insight in subsequent books, more information about the Immanent Grove became available. The location changed from being an unattainable vista to suddenly playing a central role in the story (particularly in *The Other Wind*). I will highlight the Grove's role in the narrative by focusing on the particular atmosphere it evokes. Atmosphere, I argue, is a central aesthetic quality in much speculative fiction, but it is often an intangible aspect of literature that defies precise characterization. As such, I will employ numerous examples and draw on Felski's notion of enchantment to underscore my argument that aesthetic quality and atmosphere are of vital concern in immersion and fantasy worldbuilding.

An important aspect concerns character reactions to the Immanent Grove and how characters in *Earthsea* react to it. Le Guin lets central characters' reactions to key locations influence how readers perceive the location. The same strategy was used by Tolkien often to drive home the importance of certain locations — even if these are shown off-page or do not significantly impact the plot. In *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (1954), when Gimli beholds the Glittering Caves (or the Aglarond) behind Helm's Deep, his profound reaction to this particular location that we as readers never experience showcases its importance and grandeur. Put differently: if even a dwarf is impressed with

the quality of the cave (which never appears in the story beyond Gimli's descriptions *after* having visited it 'off-screen'), then it indeed must be magnificent. The interaction deserves a lengthy quote from *The Two Towers* since this point is important. Note the wonder and awe in Gimli's description of this unseen and seemingly plot-irrelevant place that ends up occupying a great portion of his mind. Gimli is desperate to explain the splendor of the Glittering Caves to Legolas:

> 'And, Legolas, when the torches are kindled and men walk on the sandy floors under the echoing domes, ah! then, Legolas, gems and crystals and veins of precious ore glint in the polished walls; and the light glows through folded marbles, shell-like, translucent as the living hands of Queen Galadriel. There are columns of white and saffron and dawn-rose, Legolas, fluted and twisted into dreamlike forms; they spring up from many-coloured floors to meet the glistening pendants of the roof: wings, ropes, curtains fine as frozen clouds; spears, banners, pinnacles of suspended palaces! Still lakes mirror them: a glimmering world looks up from dark pools covered with clear glass; cities, such as the mind of Durin could scarce have imagined in his sleep, stretch on through avenues and pillared courts, on into the dark recesses where no light can come. And plink! a silver drop falls, and the round wrinkles in the glass make all the towers bend and waver like weeds and corals in a grotto of the sea. Then evening comes: they fade and twinkle out; the torches pass on into another chamber and another dream. There is chamber after chamber, Legolas; hall opening out of hall, dome after dome, stair beyond stair; and still the winding paths lead on into the Mountains' heart. Caves! The Caverns of Helm's Deep! Happy was the chance that drove me there! It makes me weep to leave them.' (Tolkien, *Two Towers*, 714)

Tolkien uses the same technique when Legolas walks in Fangorn Forest or when Frodo and Sam behold Lothlórien for the first time. In this way, worldbuilding and fantastic locations are explored — and reacted to — via characters and their behavior. The interaction between Gimli and Legolas is a prime example of worldbuilding. The effect on how the storyworld is perceived is powerful. It is no accident, then, that Le Guin also uses many enigmatic locations to support and underscore the aesthetic and atmospheric features of *Earthsea*. In conventional quest fantasy, as I have stressed before, the companion-role of the reader makes the main character(s) the first and (usually) best source of information, and our attunement to these characters lets readers filter the mundane from the unfamiliar. This goes beyond the 'crossing of the threshold' in Campbell's Hero's Journey; it provides an emotional center from which other reactions can spring. In quest fantasy, the attunement to (main) characters is even more important than in immersive fantasy. As I will show in my chapter on *Titus Groan*, immersive fantasy challenges the reader by not providing a clear-cut guide through the storyworld; much remains unexplained. The advantages of providing information and reactions through a main character seem clear, and the storyworld is more easily navigated, explained, and explored when both characters and readers rely on the same level of information about the storyworld. In *Earthsea*, the

same unattainable-vista quality marks the Immanent Grove in the first trilogy. The first glimpse of the Immanent Grove produces an atmosphere of anticipation veiled in naturalistic beauty in a scene where Vetch, Ged's friend, is present:

> The path climbed and wound. They passed oak groves where shadows lay thick for all the brightness of the sun. There was one grove not far away to the left that Ged could never quite see plainly. The path never reached it, though it always seemed to be about to. He could not even make out what kind of trees they were. Vetch, seeing him gazing, said softly, 'That is the Immanent Grove. We can't come there, yet…' In the hot sunlit pastures yellow flowers bloomed. 'Sparkweed,' said Jasper. 'They grow where the wind dropped the ashes of burning Ilien, when Erreth-Akbe defended the Inward Isles from the Firelord.' He blew on a withered flowerhead, and the seeds shaken loose went up on the wind like sparks of fire in the sun. (Le Guin, *Wizard,* 44)

Vetch's comment about their inability to 'come in there, yet' has a prescient quality, although it stands to reason that Le Guin in the original trilogy hardly imagined the location to become meaningful so many years later. The importance of focalization in the context of producing atmosphere in the following quote illustrates that the storyworld holds secrets that neither Ged nor readers yet can uncover. In many instances, Le Guin may have given thought to a particular area or difficulty in the storyworld but *deliberately* chose to withhold information. She is not telling us. This incompleteness in the storyworld (cf. Wolf) ideally results in deeper immersion because readers will wonder about the location and thus *engage* with the storyworld, and the associated atmosphere contributes to the immersive potential of the storyworld:

> That spring Ged saw little of either Vetch or Jasper, for they being sorcerers studied now with the Master Patterner in the secrecy of the Immanent Grove, where no prentice might set foot. (Le Guin, *Wizard,* 56)

There is a strong quality of anticipation here which is underscored by how few times the Immanent Grove is mentioned in *A Wizard of Earthsea* (and indeed all the novels), as well as a sense of progression in both the storyworld (because it is hinted that the Grove will play an important role later), and in Ged, since it appears that his progression from mere 'prentice' to something greater is inevitable and somehow linked to the Immanent Grove. These are parts of the reason why I argue that atmosphere is so crucial in fantasy storyworlds and immersion therein, since it allows for an immersive dimension which factors in both the construction and structure of the storyworld as well as the immersive potential and aesthetic quality of what is being experienced by both reader and character(s). To explicate: atmosphere stands in the place of complete and detailed descriptions — we do not and cannot know

exactly what the Immanent Grove is, but we *feel* like there is more to it beyond what is shown in the narrative and told to us by various characters. This type of mystery and lack of information allows for immersion into a given atmosphere in a storyworld, but what triggers this mystery or atmosphere may differ; often, it seems, locations evoke atmosphere. However, characters, descriptions, and dialogue may also contribute positively to the production of atmosphere.

The aesthetic of the fantastic remains evident in the next instance of the narrative where the Immanent Grove plays a role, and every time the location is mentioned the atmosphere surrounding it is present and evoked by the severity of the scene:

> On the next day the Nine Masters of Roke gathered in a place somewhere under the dark trees of the Immanent Grove. Even there they set nine walls of silence about them, that no person or power might speak to them or hear them as they chose from amongst the mages of all Earthsea him who would be the new Archmage. (Le Guin, *Wizard*, 66)

Seemingly only decisions of great importance are made in the Immanent Grove; fantasy narratives rely on such locations to a high degree. The 'dark trees' of the place, and the 'walls of silence' the wizards create, all contribute to the creation of atmosphere by employing relatively imprecise (though beautiful) or quasi-mythological language. The trend continues in the final instance where the Immanent Grove is mentioned in *A Wizard of Earthsea*; Le Guin plays up the uncertain nature and enchanting properties of the Grove:

> What is learned in the Immanent Grove is not much talked about elsewhere. It is said that no spells are worked there, and yet the place itself is an enchantment. Sometimes the trees of that Grove are seen, and sometimes they are not seen, and they are not always in the same place and part of Roke Island. It is said that the trees of the Grove themselves are wise. It is said that the Master Patterner learns his supreme magery there within the Grove, and if ever the trees should die so shall his wisdom die, and in those days the waters will rise and drown the islands of Earthsea [...]. (Le Guin, *Wizard*, 73)

The impersonal account conveyed via the numerous uses and variations of 'it is said', contributes to the uncertainty concerning the Grove and its seemingly unknowable nature. Contrary to the gothic and dark atmosphere evoked in Peake's *Titus Groan*, the enchanting atmosphere produced by the Immanent Grove carries a positive but mysterious potential that we can recognize as magical and as a defining aspect of fantasy literature. This, in my estimation, is where fantasy is uniquely able to produce a particular kind of enchantment in line with what Rita Felski describes in *Uses of Literature* (2008). While Felski is arguing for the power of literature to enchant generally, the power of fantasy is especially evident. As Felski writes concerning enchantment: "[...] a common experience of

enchantment, of total absorption in a text, of intense and enigmatic pleasure. The experience of being wrapped up in a novel or a film – whether 'high' or 'low'— confounds our deeply held beliefs about the rationality and autonomy of persons" (Felski, 54) - while what exactly readers become enchanted by in a novel may differ (specific characters, prose, time periods, aesthetic qualities, conventions), fantasy literature is able to enchant via its production of exotic and nostalgic locations such as the Immanent Grove, and these locations are exactly what produce the atmosphere that is distinctly recognizable as part of the fantasy genre.

Continuing the same line of argumentation, I want to briefly highlight a few examples from the subsequent Earthsea novels to show how the Immanent Grove develops in the narrative but retains its enchanting properties within the storyworld. The magic that seems to emanate from the Grove is in its workings more similar to the mythopoeic quality of Tolkien's unexplained magic rather than the structured systems identifiable in modern fantasy writing. Unsurprisingly, there are no mentions of the Grove in Tombs of Atuan because that novel's storyworld is smaller, but both *The Farthest Shore* and *The Other Wind* offer glimpses of the Grove. The following illustrative example is from The Farthest Shore and showcases the 'mystifying manner' of the place:

> Somewhere to the west of the Great House of Roke, and often somewhat south of it, the Immanent Grove is usually to be seen. There is no place for it on maps, and there is no way to it except for those who know the way to it. But even novices and townsfolk and farmers can see it, always at a certain distance, a wood of high trees whose leaves have a hint of gold in their greenness even in the spring. And they consider - the novices, the townsfolk, the farmers - that the Grove moves about in a mystifying manner. But in this they are mistaken, for the Grove does not move. Its roots are the roots of being. It is all the rest that moves. (Le Guin, *Farthest Shore*, 310)

It is obvious that the Grove is important, but the general vagueness of the descriptions such as the 'roots of all being' necessarily provoke interaction and interpretation; what does it mean, and how does it connect to prior information learned about the storyworld? Answers concerning the function of the Grove are not provided freely, but the enchanting atmosphere nevertheless underscores the Grove's importance. While the above quote seems to describe the Grove as seen from afar, the following showcases the Grove from up close as Ged enters it:

> He came to the path that led to the Immanent Grove, a path that led always straight and direct no matter how time and the world bent awry about it, and following it came soon into the shadow of the trees.
>
> The trunks of some of these were vast. Seeing them one could believe at last that the Grove never moved: they were like immemorial towers gray with years; their roots were like the roots of mountains.

> Yet these, the most ancient, were some of them thin of leaf, with branches that had died. They were not immortal. Among the giants grew sapling trees, tall and vigorous with bright crowns of foliage, and seedlings, slight leafy wands no taller than a girl. (*Farthest Shore*, 310-311)

The enchanting properties of the Grove are inextricably linked to nature. The quiet power and its magic all contribute to a distinct mood surrounding the place even though the actual trees and roots radiate no discernable magic. Rather, the sum of everything within the Grove ultimately carries the enchantment. Readers recognize this phenomenon through the actual descriptions, characters' reactions to the Grove, and culturally-learned experiences with the fantasy genre that makes magical locations not only plausible but also expected. Put differently, intradiegetic markers (descriptions) and extradiegetic markers (reader expectations) contribute to enchantment since enchantment relies on textual elements and willful self-loss in the postcritical and affective sense. So, descriptions *produce* enchantment, and reader expectations and self-loss *allows* enchantment via the type of self-loss Felski mentions. Enchantment is individual in nature; if readers are not willing to immerse and lose themselves in a text, then no degree of aesthetically pleasing descriptions will result in enchantment. Furthermore, while I highlight the Immanent Grove as enchanting and atmospheric, other readers might have been left cold by it but felt a strong connection to other aspects of the novels.

Within the Grove itself, both things and people are seemingly shielded from the outside world, and Alder in *The Other Wind* explains the peaceful nature and quiet workings of the Grove:

> "As soon as I came there, I knew I could sleep. I felt as if I'd been asleep all along, in an evil dream, and now, here, I was truly awake: so I could truly sleep. There was a place he took me to, in among the roots of a huge tree, all soft with the fallen leaves of the tree, and he told me I could lie there. And I did, and I slept. I cannot tell you the sweetness of it." (Le Guin, *The Other Wind*, 34)

There is a double-significance here, since Alder's trouble with sleep enhances his joy at being able to peacefully rest within the Grove; then there is the actual enchantment of the location which Alder seems to feel and recognize immediately. The effect of the Immanent Grove on sleep is repeated in another passage from *The Other Wind*, in which a different character, Azver the Patterner, also experiences sleep that is 'light [and] transparent':

> Among the trees of the Immanent Grove on Roke Island, Azver the Patterner slept as he often did in summer in an open glade near the eastern edge of the wood, where he could look up and see the stars through the leaves. There his sleep was light, transparent, his mind moving from thought to dream and back, guided by the movements of the stars and leaves as they changed places in their dance. (Le Guin, *Other Wind*, 208)

The connection between the Jungian influence (more on this in the following) on the narrative in especially *The Other Wind*, the Taoist equilibrium and balance, and the conceptualization of the Immanent Grove, all showcase the important role the Immanent Grove plays in the context of worldbuilding. The worldbuilding strategy of repeating phrases and descriptions, as in the case of the Immanent Grove, is also found in other conventional fantasy fiction and drives home the otherworldliness and magical nature of specific locations, which contributes to the general atmosphere of a storyworld. In a final passage I want to highlight in this context, we see a certain type of repetition since at first the Grove is seemingly remarkable and 'like any grove of trees', but then somehow morphs into something that 'draws your eye', mixing the ordinary and the remarkable; the familiar and the strange:

> Tenar had asked Ged about the Grove more than once, liking to hear him describe it. "It seems like any grove of trees, when you see it first. Not very large. The fields come right up to it on the north and east, and there are hills to the south and usually to the west… It looks like nothing much. But it draws your eye. And sometimes, from up on Roke Knoll, you can see that it's a forest, going on and on. You try to make out where it ends, but you can't. It goes off into the west… And when you walk in it, it seems ordinary again, though the trees are mostly a kind that grows only there. Tall, with brown trunks, something like an oak, something like a chestnut." (Le Guin, *Other Wind*, 213-214)

Tenar's fascination with the Grove and Ged's description of it are both factors in its importance for the narrative, and for reader's potential engagement with it. Ged almost seems to struggle with explaining its nature since it can 'seem ordinary' but also one might not discern 'where it ends'.

I have shown several passages relating to the Immanent Grove because this particular location is mentioned and meaningful in several of the *Earthsea* books. Consequently it becomes a crucial part of the magical worldbuilding that characterizes *Earthsea* and its atmosphere. While other locations are also enchanting in their own way (such as the Tombs in *The Tombs of Atuan*), these are not recurring. The Immanent Grove represents and illustrates how worldbuilding is crucial for the creation of literary atmosphere in fantasy literature, and because the Grove is developed through several different novels it ultimately proves a useful example. Characters, quests, and dialogue also in various ways produce atmosphere, but the foundational nature of worldbuilding and the philosophical Taoist pillars on which this worldbuilding rests must be considered in any detailed analysis of the *Earthsea* construction and its atmosphere.

Taoist & Jungian Perspectives as Foundational in Earthsea

The tenets of the Taoist philosophy play an important role in the construction of *Earthsea*, and Le Guin has made no secret of her interest in this branch of Eastern philosophy[69]. Employing Ted Honderich's *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Marek Oziewicz provides a general introduction to Taoism in the context of Le Guin in his 2008 *One Earth, One People: The "Mythopoeic Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeleine L'Engle and Orson Scott Card*, where he observes that:

> Taoism is a Chinese school of thought which sees universal correspondences between all planes of existence, holds that "operations of the human world should ideally be continuous with that of the natural order", and assumes that the ultimate reality called by the name of "*Tao* (the Way)" is "the source of all things, … is characterized by *wu* (non-being, vacuity), [and] transcends all distinctions and conceptualizations (865). (Oziewicz, 120)

This 'natural order' is connected to the well-known idea of yin and yang in which balance and correlation between all things play a central role. In this part of Taoism that we find a building block of *Earthsea* since Le Guin's interest in 'balance' is evident in her construction of all the stories set in the *Earthsea* storyworld. For example, in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged upsets balance by bringing the Shadow into the world and must strive to restore order; in *The Tombs of Atuan*, the broken ring of Erreth-Akbe must be made whole, and Tenar must achieve a balance between her role and persona as Priestess, Arha, and her new life as Tenar. In *The Farthest Shore*, Le Guin's careful navigation of the idea of death is a core problem as death is automatically juxtaposed with life, and the balance between the two is a recurring theme in the later novels. Introspection has been a general trend in most of Le Guin's writing and Sandra Lindow notes the same in her work *Dancing the Tao: Le Guin and Moral Development* (2012) where she states that, "Ged in *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), Genly in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), and Shevek in *The Dispossessed* (1974) are more interested in subduing their own inner demons than in heroic derring-do" (Lindow, 2). As we can see, although the structure and focus of each of Le Guin's stories differ, there are still foundational elements that inform her storyworlds and particularly Taoism is a recurring aspect that we can trace through multiple of Le Guin's works. As Oziewicz notes, "Tao is the union of opposites" (Oziewicz, 120), and while arguably only *A Wizard of Earthsea* has a direct oppositional relationship manifested through the struggle between Ged and the Shadow, the groundwork of the narratives is still linked to Taoism and its focus

[69] See, for example, Le Guin's 1997 Introduction to her rendition of *Tao Te Ching*

on balance and equilibrium. This also marks a specific area where Le Guin's starting point for her storyworld differs from most other well-known Anglophone writers of similar stories and storyworlds, and Oziewicz juxtaposes Taoism with Judeo-Christian thought in which a given cosmology "emphasizes creation by a Supreme Being transcendent to creation" (121). There is no godhead figure in *Earthsea*, only somewhat vague legends or creation myths in which Segoy raised the islands of the archipelago out of the water long ago: "[...] in those days the waters will rise and drown the islands of Earthsea which Segoy raised from the deeps in the time before myth, all the lands where men and dragons dwell" (Le Guin, *Wizard*, 73). Importantly, Segoy was a wizard, not a god. Oziewicz elaborates on the differences between Taoism and Judeo-Christian thought by establishing how the concept of power, femininity and masculinity (issues Le Guin was concerned with in most of her writing) differ in the two schools of thought:

> Whereas Taoism is charged with images of power as feminine and sustains a matriarchal culture informed by a plurality, overlapping, intuitiveness, flexibility, communion, and receptivity, Judeo-Christianity is charged with masculine symbolism and sustains a patriarchal culture based on uniformity, distinctions, reason, laid-down structures, domination, and activity. Whereas Taoism acknowledges deep interdependence between the world of humans and that of nature, Judeo-Christianity holds on to the idea of human supremacy and dominance over nature. (Oziewicz, 121)

While Taoism and Judeo-Christian thought are not opposites, they nevertheless represent different fundamental assumptions about life, nature, social structures, and the role of humans. The core ideas about Taoism are important in an analysis of *Earthsea* and its storyworld because Taoism informs the storyworld much as Welsh, Roman, Norse, Greek, and Finnish mythology did for Middle-earth and similar narratives. The major components of Judeo-Christian thought described above are easily recognizable in much Western fantasy literature, making Le Guin's departure from it noteworthy. While I want to investigate Le Guin's storyworld with regards to its construction and ability to produce atmosphere, it is first important to acknowledge the significant scholarly work that already exists on Taoist perspectives in *Earthsea*. Although not focused specifically on the *Earthsea* novels, Douglas Barbour's "Wholeness and Balance in the Hainish Novels" (1974), Elizabeth Cogell Cummin's "Taoist Configurations: *The Dispossessed*" (1979), and Dena C. Bain's "The *Tao Te Ching* as Background to the Novels of Ursula K. Le Guin" (1980) trace the influence of Taoism in Le Guin's science fiction. Several scholarly articles delve into *Earthsea*: for example Patricia Dooley's "Earthsea Patterns" (1979), John Crow and Richard Erlich's "Words of Binding: Patterns of Integration in the Earthsea

Trilogy" (1979), Robert Galbreath's "Taoist Magic in *The Earthsea Trilogy*" (1980), David Rees' "Earthsea Revisited" in his *The Marble In the Water: Essays On Contemporary Writers of Fiction for Children and Young Adults* (1980), and Richard Patterson's "Le Guin's Earthsea Trilogy: The Psychology of Fantasy" (1985) all consider Taoism to play a central role in the narrative and trace it through different parts of the *Earthsea* storyworld. "The Psychology of Power" (1988) by Mason Harris considers both a Taoist aspect and the role of power[70]. Several scholarly books also exist that focus on Le Guin and *Earthsea*, and all the following also pinpoint Taoist influence on Le Guin's writing; George Slusser's *The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin* (1976), James Bittner's *Approaches to the Fiction of Ursula K. Le Guin* (1984), Charlotte Spivack's *Merlin's Daughters: Contemporary Women Writers of Fantasy* (1987), and Mike Cadden's *Ursula K. Le Guin beyond Genre: Fiction for Children and Adults* (2005). As might be apparent, given the publication dates of the work mentioned here, none of it has significant focus on the construction of storyworlds or the worldbuilding, which is at the center of the dissertation.

While Taoism necessarily carries an element of myth, critical readings of Le Guin have also focused on her use of archetypes and as such drawn connections to Jungian perspectives and its investigations of human psychology. Interestingly, Le Guin wrote in "Dreams Must Explain Themselves" that she did not plan Earthsea, "but rather discovered it bit by bit in her unconscious mind" (White, 16) - not an accidental allusion to Jung's work. Sue Jenkins notes in "Growing Up in Earthsea"[71] that "[t]wo of the most important strands in Ursula K. Le Guin's ideology are the Jungian concept of universal archetypes and the Taoist idea of balance or equilibrium between complementary forces throughout creation" (Jenkins, 21). These analyses again provide necessary background information in any critical assessment of *Earthsea*; some relevant examples are Eleanor Cameron's "High Fantasy: *A Wizard of Earthsea*" (1971), Margaret Esmonde's "The Master Pattern: The Psychological Journey in *The Earthsea Trilogy*" (1979), Edgar C. Bailey's "Shadows in *Earthsea*: Le Guin's Use of a Jungian Archetype" (1980), Gordon E. Slethaug's "The Paradoxical Double in Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*" (1986), Edith Crow's "Integration in Earthsea and Middle-Earth" (1988), and Craig & Diana Barrow's "Le Guin's *Earthsea*: Voyages into Consciousness" (1991). The core idea is that Le Guin

[70] Harris, Mason. "The Psychology of Power: in Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Orwell's 1984 and Le Guin's A Wizard of Earthsea." Mythlore, vol. 15, no. 1 (55), 1988, pp. 46–56

[71] Jenkins, Sue: "Growing Up in Earthsea" *Children's Literature in Education* 16 (1985): 21-31

deliberately employed archetypical confrontations or quests. According to Oziewicz: "[...] Le Guin has created narratives of archetypical encounters which present the universal, psychological journey toward human wholeness" (Oziewicz, 124). As I have noted previously, these aspects marks Le Guin's writing as different from much other fantasy fiction. One point to note is the lack of world-altering altercations. Le Guin focuses instead on introspection, growth, and personal quests that either literally make characters whole, such as in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, or quests that figuratively make them whole by advancing their personal 'wholeness', such as Tenar in *The Tombs of Atuan*..

Taking the Jungian perspective a step further, I want to briefly combine Jung's concepts with the narrative strands in *The Other Wind*, as this novel perhaps more overtly than *A Wizard of Earthsea* takes Jungian perspectives and weaves them into the problems that drive the story and the storyworld. While *A Wizard of Earthsea* conceptually draws on the idea of the Shadow and individuation from Jung, Alder in *The Other Wind* experiences symbolic dreams that force him into the wider world in search of answers and help. Using dreams, both as their own entity but most often as a means of foreshadowing and/or in combination with prophecies, is not uncommon in fantasy literature. However, as I want to illustrate, their purpose in *The Other Wind* is somewhat different and the lengthy discussions between Alder and Ged early in the novel signify the importance of the dream's symbolic meaning and, consequently, the importance for Alder not to disregard the dreams. As Alder meets Ged, he explains the reason for seeking out the former Archmage:

> "All with pleasure, lord," Alder said, "but for the sleep. That's what I fear."
> It took the old man a while to register this, but then he said, "You fear to sleep?"
> "Dreams."
> "Ah." A keen glance from the dark eyes under eyebrows grown tangled and half gray. (Le Guin, *The Other Wind*, 10)

Alder has been kept awake by dreams since his beloved wife died, and in his dreams he now finds himself standing by a wall of stones, the border between the land of the living and the land of the dead, while the dead, including his wife, gesture to him and talk to him pleadingly; they want to be 'set free'. This recalls the adventures of Ged and Arren (Lebannen), who also traveled to the land of the dead in *The Farthest Shore*, and this famous quest and its happy conclusion is why Alder now seeks out Ged despite him having lost his ability to perform magic.

As it turns out, things are revealed in Alder's dreams that the unconscious mind recalls or conjures. This is a Jungian concept that was developed over many years and unsurprisingly has its roots in Jung's work and relationship with Freud. Le Guin takes these conceptualizations and makes them material as the land of the dead (a luxury afforded by speculative fiction), and we may juxtapose her creative output with Jung's own description of the role of the unconscious. In *Man and His Symbols* (1964), Jung offers an introduction to his core philosophy and writes about the role of the unconscious:

> What I have so far said about the unconscious is no more than a cursory sketch of the nature and functioning of this complex part of the human psyche. But it should have indicated the kind of subliminal material from which the symbols of our dreams may be spontaneously produced. The subliminal material can consist of all urges, impulses, and intentions; all perceptions and institutions; all rational or irrational thoughts, conclusions, inductions, deductions, and premises; and all variety of feeling. Any or all of these can take the form of partial, temporary, or constant unconsciousness. (Jung, 24).

One can quickly glean the significance attributed to dreams and symbols, and the complicated way in which the way we 'know' the world via our conscious thoughts may differ from the way we know or perceive the world via the unconscious. Jung continues laying out his views by arguing how the unconscious may actually produce knowledge which it then communicates through symbols (typically via dreams): "But just as conscious contents can vanish into the unconscious, new contents, which have never yet been conscious, can *arise* from it" (Jung, 25, emphasis original). I am trying to very briefly explain some of the core ideas here in order to illustrate the deliberate influence Jung has had on Le Guin's storyworld, and how Le Guin's employment of these ideas seems to have developed in conjunction with her writing and her conceptualization of the *Earthsea* storyworld and the problems that arise in the story.

In *The Other Wind*, content in Alder's unconscious mind has arisen in ways he does not understand, and he must explore this path in order to set things right (cf. *A Wizard of Earthsea* and the Jungian idea of the Shadow and individuation). The relationship between Le Guin's use of Jungian concepts and immersion is also noteworthy since there is once again an overlap in analytical vocabulary. Developing the idea of willing suspension of disbelief, Michael Saler argues in *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary PreHistory of Virtual Reality* (2012) that speculative fiction lets readers employ a 'double-consciousness' that permits emotional investment in two worlds at the same time. This seems to draw on the idea that the conscious and unconscious mind process and interpret information differently. The

'alternate truths' gleaned from double-consciousness is in line with Jung's argument that the unconscious mind may reveal content that is new and insightful. The idea of double-consciousness and a focus on emotional investment is conceptually in line with postcritical argumentation, although postcritique as a school has not yet addressed these topics directly. As far as I can see, they are linked to postcritique's ideas on epistemology and the way knowledge, including self-knowledge, develops and is an inherent part of reading experiences.

Le Guin herself has written numerous texts about her relationship with Taoism and Jung. These offer insight into her writing and thinking process and the development of her philosophical alignment. Although it differs how much a writer's take on their writing is useful for critical analysis, the self-reflexive nature of Le Guin's essays make them a valuable source of information for any in-depth look at her creative fiction. Some pertinent examples include "Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" (1974), "Dreams Must Explain Themselves" (1973), "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie" (1973), "The Child and the Shadow" (1974), "Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction" (1976), "Fantasy, Like Poetry, Speaks the Language of the Night" (1976), "Things Not Actually Present" (1988), *Earthsea Revisioned* (1993), "The Question I Get Asked Most Often" (2003), and "A War without End" (2003). These texts provide insight into Le Guin's perspectives on Taoism and Jungian archetypes, and she offers definitions of fantasy while arguing for the genre's positive potential. For example, her statement that fantasy is "a universal and essential faculty of the human mind" ("The Child and the Shadow", 65) reveals her strong opinions on a genre often dismissed (especially in the late-1960s when *Wizard* was published). Fantasy with its 'essential faculty' seems somewhat divorced from the overt use of political themes in her science fiction novels. Instead, it focuses on nostalgic ideas about the nature of being, evidenced by Ged's journey and the archetypical challenges he faces. I return to Brian Attebery and his views on the limitations but also potential of fantasy and the genre's inherent ability to generate awareness: "Fantasy does impose many restrictions on the power of the imagination, but in return it offers the possibility of generating not merely a meaning but an awareness of and a pattern for meaningfulness" (Attebery, 2004)[72]. There is a strong connection between this meaningfulness in fantasy and the influence of Taoism that is evident in the construction of *Earthsea* because it showcases how fantasy, despite its fictitious nature, is able to pose questions about life and meaning, and present

[72] 2004. "Fantasy as Mode, Genre, Formula." In Fantastic Literature. A Critical Reader, edited by David Sandner, 293–309. Westport: Praeger Publishers

themes or problems from the real world in a recognizable-but-different other world. In this way, Taoism in *Earthsea*, even if the reader does not pick up on the finer points of the philosophy itself, permeates the narrative and storyworld to a degree where engagement with the novel automatically results in a broadening of horizons and a gaining of new perspectives. In other words, if readers do not immediately understand the Taoist undertones in the storyworld, then they nevertheless engage with characters and a storyworld in which tenets of the philosophy manifest.

In her dissertation on speculative fiction, Hanna-Riikka Roine also makes the argument that speculative fiction and its worldbuilding enables us to imagine alternatives to our reality: "While in mundane life, our understanding of reality leads us to readily think of several possibilities for certain facts (choices, actions, controllable events, forbidden actions, and so on), speculative worldbuilding serves the valuable function of enabling us to imagine alternatives to the received reality itself, allowing us to think of the world as something else than it currently is" (Roine, 104). Imagining the world as 'something else than it currently is' is part of both the power and difficulty of fantasy; the genre is uniquely able to present otherworldly characters and situations. However, therein lies the difficulty since ideas (or concepts, problematizations, and philosophies) must be integrated into the storyworld and its narrative(s) without being the sole dominant feature. Storyworlds must contain narratives, and through these narratives, philosophical, political, and ideological discourse and inspiration may become present in the text.

Oziewicz contributes to the same discussion although his starting point is mythopoeic fantasy and its ability to address cultural and aesthetic needs. I believe that aesthetic needs remain complex to classify (cf. the difficulty in creating an analytical approach to identify and adequately describe literary atmosphere). Nevertheless, it remains a crucial aspect in self-realization and emotional connections to texts (cf Felski's and enchantment). Oziewicz states that:

> I argue for a mythopoeic fantasy as a holistic, soul-nurturing type of narrative capable of addressing vital psychological, cultural and aesthetic needs which are disregarded by most other forms of contemporary literature. I stress that the secondary worlds that mythopoetic fantasy employs are morally charged universes in which human actions are meaningful and may suggest a paradigm for a creative and fulfilling life in the real world. (Oziewicz, 8)

It seems redundant to say that Earthsea is 'morally charged'. Through worldbuilding, the progressive and positivistic nature of the novel's concern with wholeness and balance presents meaningful actions

and may lead to — or at least inspire — a 'fulfilling life in the real world'. Although she writes about fantasy more generally, Mendlesohn approaches the same issues from a moral standpoint and argues that fantasy fiction and storyworlds rely on moral universes more so than science fiction. Along those lines I believe that fantasy is perhaps *based on,* and not reliant on, moral foundations more often than science fiction. Mendlesohn notes that "What underpins [her arguments about fantasy] is the idea of moral expectation. Fantasy, unlike science fiction, relies on a moral universe: it is less an argument with the universe than a sermon on the way things should be, a belief that the universe should yield to moral precepts. This belief is most true of the portal-quest narratives" (Mendlesohn, 32). This reliance on a moral universe is evident in *Earthsea* and any reflection on the underlying moral foundations of Le Guin's storyworld will arrive at Taoist influence. For the sake of contrast, we may consider popular storyworlds such as G. R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* with a deliberately different take on morality that is inspired by historical events and reactionary in how it strives to counter the Tolkienian (and arguably the Le Guinian) tradition of establishing a moral foundation for a storyworld. Taking this argument a step further, we might consider how worldbuilding that is 'based on' a moral foundation is different from what Mendlesohn argues in the context of fantasy being 'reliant on' a moral universe. Tolkien, Lewis, and Le Guin all based their storyworlds and their foundational elements on religious ideas and structures. Consequently, they explicitly engage with those ideas as well although how this engagement manifests itself differs. Tolkien, for example, was an unapologetic Christian but significantly less heavy-handed and overt in his religious imagery than Lewis, and famously declared his dislike for allegorical readings[73]. Lewis clearly intended his Narnia world to be read allegorically and the relationship between Christian themes and motifs and the structure and events in Narnia seem clear. What unites both Tolkien and Lewis is precisely the moral foundation of their storyworlds. In Tolkien's work, the mythological quality and the creationism myth in *The Silmarillion* is based on Christian ideas; monotheism, a 'fallen' angel-entity that becomes a manifestation of evil, and clear distinctions between good and evil[74]. There are meaningful changes, such as Eru Ilúvatar, or The One,

[73] In the Foreword to second edition of *The Fellowship of the Rings* Tolkien wrote: "I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history – true or feigned– with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author." (Tolkien, *Fellowship,* xxv, 50th anniversary edition 2004)

[74] For more on this, see: Friedrichsen & Rubæk: "J.R.R. Tolkien's Silmarillion: a seminal mythological work and inspirational source for the author's conception of Middle Earth" Komparatistik Online, 2021

singing the world into being (inspiration taken from Finnish mythology), but major components remain religious and primarily Christian. Even when Tolkien's worldbuilding did not directly draw on Christianity or mythology, the underlying structure(s) nevertheless remain informed by the Christian aspect and the accompanying moral foundation. In Lewis' work the same is apparent, although one might expand the argument since Lewis also wrote science fiction. Regardless, my argument ultimately is that these influential fantasy storyworlds are thus *based on* ideas that are fundamentally religious and moral in nature. In the case of Le Guin, then, who was undoubtedly extremely inspired by Tolkien and wanted to write something similar in style, her work and its worldbuilding was ultimately *based on* the Taoist philosophy and its religious or spiritual aspects, which means that Taoism in Le Guin's worldbuilding plays much the same role as Christianity does in Tolkien's Middle-earth. This is also the primary motivation behind this chapter, namely that Taoism is not only visible in the main characters' actions, dialogue, and motivations, and problems, it also informs the worldbuilding in *Earthsea* and is recognizable in all the structures of the storyworld. Like Christianity in Narnia and Middle-earth, Taoism in Earthsea is a *conscious* structure. Taoism is a worldbuilding element but on a grander scale than Wolf generally deals with in his work. Le Guin is not alone in being inspired by Tolkien; much post-Tolkien fantasy writing employs the same worldbuilding structure although not all of it is done consciously. Whether primarily informed by Tolkien himself or the general style of Western fantasy literature, post-Tolkien narratives were for many years based on the same formula. There are outliers, naturally, but Tolkien is recognized as a towering presence in fantasy literature since the structure he popularized is so clearly visible in the fantasy novels that followed *The Lord of the Rings*. It must be stressed that not all storyworlds based their worldbuilding on the pillars that Tolkien and Lewis did, but a significant number nevertheless remain in this category. We can identify the development of Le Guin's storyworld by briefly considering the structural changes between the *Earthsea* novels; as noted, *A Wizard of Earthsea* follows a quest structure much like *The Lord of the Rings* despite the tonal and stylistic differences; *The Farthest Shore* generally is similar in construction. Noteworthy deviations occur in *Tombs of Atuan* and especially in *Tehanu* (these two are primarily feminist and further removed from the Tolkienian style); *The Other Wind* does not conform to the typical quest structure either, but the Taoist worldbuilding is ultimately what binds the novels — and indeed the whole *Earthsea* storyworld — together by creating a philosophical, religious and mythological backbone whose tenents are visible despite the particular focus of each individual novel.

Continuing the argument that there is a moral foundation, we may look to structural differences in worldbuilding in Tolkien and Le Guin. Due to the nature of the moral philosophy that informed Tolkien's writing, it was both convenient and not entirely illogical to have distinctly evil races with few redeeming qualities. The orcs and goblins that Tolkien popularized are not without personality, but they automatically follow whatever evil powers exist and create a stark contrast to the moral heroes; the quaint but relatable hobbits, and the larger-than-life quasi-mythological figures such as Aragorn and Galadriel. As inherently and intrinsically flawed the orcs appear to be, as moral and unequivocally *good* Aragorn appears to be. This specific area is where Le Guin, through Taoist worldbuilding, shifts away from Tolkien; there are significantly fewer species in *Earthsea*; in fact, only humans and dragons play any meaningful role. Within the two groups, there is no intrinsic *goodness* or *evil* but instead sheer personality and cultural upbringing and belonging. This observation is important because Tolkien's clear moral borders are a major area that post-Tolkien fantasy writers were inspired by and they created evil that functions in the same predictable and disposable manner: trollocs in Jordan's *Wheel of Time*, reavers in Farland's *The Runelords*, and murgos in Eddings' *The Belgariad*. The introspective nature of *Earthsea* speaks to the Taoist notions that drive its worldbuilding, and this is a major reason why *Earthsea* — a storyworld that in many ways does belong to the Tolkienian tradition — nevertheless is markedly different and deliberately set out to portray good and evil in a contrasting manner.

For Le Guin, fantasy and science fiction are genres through which readers can explore different meanings through fantastic places and people. Fantasy becomes a narrative mode that effectively functions as a vehicle for philosophical problematizations and it handles these ideas through creative writing that offers a dimension which pure realism does not. In the case of traditional fantasy that I have discussed (Tolkien and Lewis in particular), the texts are created with specific (often allegorical) meanings that either directly influence the story (Narnia), or exist with such a strong pre-packaged religious and philosophical backbone (Middle-earth) that the meaning-making process for the reader necessarily has to consider these elements. While *Earthsea* is also based on a specific philosophy, the tenets of that philosophy allow for a different kind of reader-reactions and immersion exactly because Taoism is broader in scope. For example, specific ideas about 'wholeness' and 'equilibrium' may mean a variety of different things to different readers depending on their proclivities and focus in the process of reading and interpreting. Le Guin herself commented on interpretation and her dislike for allegory in

"The Language of the Night", ultimately trusting readers to engage with her work with an open mind without the need for senselessly de-coding pre-defined secrets:

> I hate allegories. A is "really" B and hawk is "really" a handsaw -- bah. Humbug. Any creation, primary or secondary, with any vitality to it, can "really" be a dozen mutually exclusive things at once, before breakfast. (Le Guin, Language, 53)

We may then assume that there is no 'correct' way of reading literature, but rather that Le Guin wanted to create a storyworld in which ideas and thoughts that inspired and influenced her were allowed to have free rein, which is precisely in line with contemporary postcritical perspectives on literature and literature's potential.

Marie-Laure Ryan's arguments about how readers are on a 'trail' that introduces them to elements in the storyworld is closely linked to the above arguments: "[t]he plot serves as a trail that takes the audience through the storyworld and provides a glimpse into its distinctive natural features and cultural institutions" (2015b, 24)[75] — these elements, then, are both absorbed and interpreted through the reading process and thereby exposes readers to the moral, ethic, and philosophical undertones in a given work. In *Earthsea* specifically it does seem like the 'natural features' Ryan mentions are more prominent than the 'cultural institutions', but this is due to Le Guin's extreme focus on characters and character development rather than macro-societal explorations (which, for example, China Miéville does more overtly as we shall see in Chapter 5). Earlier in the dissertation I introduced Ryan's now well-known ideas on fictional recentering (cf 1991; 2001). Juxtaposed with that is David Herman's transportation metaphor. With this metaphor, Herman aims to explain the sheer power of narratives and how they are able to "transport interpreters from […] the space-time coordinates of an encounter with a printed text or a cinematic narrative, to the here and now that constitute the deictic center of the world being told about" (2002, 14)[76]. In this line of thinking, what happens in a narrative thus becomes knowable and possible in the real world through this 'transportation'; this is related to the ideas in cognitive narratology in which a basic assumption is that experiences and the real world are put into context and made sense of by constructing narratives (cf Herman, 2009)[77]. This does seem like a

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[75] "Texts, Worlds, Stories: Narrative Worlds as Cognitive and Ontological Concept." In *Narrative Theory, Literature, and New Media. Narrative Minds and Virtual Worlds*, edited by Mari Hatavara, Matti Hyvärinen, Maria Mäkelä and Frans Mäyrä, 11–28. New York and London: Routledge)

[76] Herman, David. 2002. *Story Logic. Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press

[77] Herman, David. 2009. *Basic Elements of Narrative.* Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell

stronger take on Ryan's re-centering, but it all points in the same direction, namely that what happens in a fictional world is able to influence readers in the real world (just like real world knowledge shapes reading experiences and interpretations). For Le Guin specifically, the question is what is 'brought back' from the fictional storyworld to the real world; what do we gain after engaging with texts such as *Earthsea*? One aspect relates to Felski's ideas on enchantment, which in and of itself is a noble goal, but for Le Guin fantasy is also able to positively influence readers in ways that become transformative and knowable in the real world. This, then, brings Le Guinian fantasy beyond immersion and into a realm of positive transformation. As a final point in this context, Genette also famously discussed 'two worlds' and their respective narration: "two worlds: the world where narration takes place and the world which is narrated" (1980, 245)[78]. While both are important for immersion, clearly their functions differ and their relationship is ideally complementary but not necessarily so. In *One Earth, One People*, Oziewicz summarizes part of Le Guin's argument from her National Book Award Acceptance Speech[79] where she talks about these topics: "As a science fiction and fantasy author, she believes that '[a]t this point, realism is perhaps the least adequate means of understanding and portraying the incredible realities of our existence,' and so 'imaginative fiction' — a category which includes science fiction and fantasy genres — must be the natural choice of writers who seek relevant, 'precise and profound metaphors of the human condition'" (Oziewicz, 126). Similar phenomenological arguments are not uncommon in the pro-fantasy camp from both authors and scholars, and it seems apparent that Le Guin's ideas inform much of her writing and worldbuilding which lends an air of authority since the underlying foundations of her narratives are built upon specific philosophical ideas that permeate both story and storyworld. Implicitly countering the argument that genre fiction is merely escapist in nature, Oziewicz states that Le Guin, "is motivated by a sense of high social responsibility of art" (128), a topic which Le Guin herself discusses at length in the aforementioned essays. In the following, I will delve deeper into the foundational role Taoism plays in *Earthsea* and use examples to highlight the importance that Le Guin placed on balance and equilibrium as core elements in her worldbuilding.

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78 Genette, Gérard. 1980. "Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method." Translated by Jane E. Lewin. New York: Cornell University Press. [Original in 1972.]

79 "National Book Award Acceptance Speech." In *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science FIction*. Ed. Susan Wood and Ursula Le Guin. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989

Balance & Equilibrium in Le Guin's Fantasy Worldbuilding

Taoist philosophy is a cornerstone of the worldbuilding within *Earthsea*. This can be seen both in the nature of the quests that characters undertake and the core assumptions about the storyworld that Le Guin presents. Although I have called *Earthsea* conventional fantasy, a label that applies because of the narrative construction of the series, Le Guin's storyworld differs from other quest narratives by its general focus on wholeness and harmony instead of domination and power. In typical quest narratives from authors such as Martin, Sanderson, Jordan, and Eddings, a power struggle dictates the course of events and as such lays the groundwork for both the worldbuilding and the story. There is no overarching struggle for domination in *Earthsea*. Major driving elements and characters in the storyworld may at first glance seem opposites; Ged and the Shadow, Tenar and Arha, life and death — these are, in fact, complementary rather than opposed. This is in line with the Taoist philosophy, and I want to illustrate this point by highlighting a section from the fourth book in the series, *Tehanu*, because here Le Guin seems to comment on this herself. I will return to examples from the original trilogy afterwards.

The illustrative scene includes Tenar, the major character besides Ged in *The Tombs of Atuan*, who in *Tehanu* is now an older woman. Ogion, Ged's first teacher and an extraordinary though humble wizard, has died, and Tenar talks to a village witch, Moss, about Ged and about life and complementary opposites:

> 'Aunt,' she said, taking up a reed, 'I grew up among women. Only women. In the Kargish lands, far east, in Atuan. I was taken from my family as a little child to be brought up a priestess in a place in the desert. I don't know what name it has, all we called it in our language was just that, the place. The only place I knew. There were a few soldiers guarding it, but they couldn't come inside the walls. And we couldn't go outside the walls. Only in a group, all women and girls, with eunuchs guarding us, keeping the men out of sight.' (Le Guin, *Tehanu*, 529)

While clearly an intertextual reference to *The Tombs of Atuan*, this piece of dialogue also begins an in-depth discussion about the nature of understanding both oneself and others. Tenar was forced to grow up in an isolated environment and as such did not neither know nor entirely recognize herself. Tenar, continuing her conversation with Moss, tries to explain her position:

> … But do you see, Aunty, I never saw a man till I was a woman grown. Only girls and women. And yet I didn't know what women are, because women were all I did know. Like men who live among men,

> sailors, and soldiers, and mages on Roke - do they know what men are? How can they, if they never speak to a woman?' (Le Guin, 530)

This gender-discussion impacts worldbuilding in *Earthsea* by illustrating how the Taoist focus on balance and equilibrium influences character relationships but also the quest-goals in the story itself. Le Guin's interest in critical gender discussions is no secret, but what I am interested in here is rather how the underlying philosophy that inspired Le Guin has shaped the whole storyworld. *Tehanu* furthermore occupies a noteworthy position since it was released many years after the original trilogy was finished (*The Farthest Shore*, the third book in the original trilogy, was released in 1972 and *Tehanu* in 1990).

Following the same line of argumentation balance and mending are made explicit as magical attributes in *The Other Wind.* Alder, seemingly a wizard of relatively unremarkable skill, nevertheless possesses talent in an area of magic that impresses Ged:

> The sorcerer Gannet had taught Alder the few words he knew of the True Speech, and some spells of finding and illusion, at which Alder had shown, he said, no talent at all. But Gannet took enough interest in the boy to discover his true gift. Alder was a mender. He could rejoin. He could make whole. A broken tool, a knife blade or an axle snapped, a pottery bowl shattered: he could bring the fragments back together without joint or seam or weakness. [...] "That is a kind of healing," Sparrowhawk said. "No small gift, nor easy craft." (*Other Wind*, 15)

Here, Le Guin combines a core idea from the Taoist philosophy with the way magic functions in her storyworld; consequently, the storyworld becomes even more tightly interwoven with Taoism. There are two levels to this: character and storyworld. On a character level, Alder can perform magic that advances his story and personality. Particularly when Alder sets out on his quest and eventually gives up his magic, we can appreciate the significance of both his magic and the fact that he gives it up. On a storyworld level, magic is not destructive or violent. In Alder's case, it is only usable for healing and mending. It carries with it the same mysterious, unknowable, and mythopoeic character as much traditional magic in fantasy literature, which stands in opposition to the structured and elaborate rules-based systems popular in contemporary fantasy (see, for example, novels by Brandon Sanderson and David Farland). This is a tangible example of Le Guin weaving together the Western fantasy tradition (which was still evolving in the wake of Tolkien at the time) with the Taoist philosophy, and marks an important intersection where magic and philosophy meet within the worldbuilding in *Earthsea*. We can thus ultimately see how Le Guin has considered Taoism directly or indirectly in almost all the workings of *Earthsea*; dialogue, motivation, creations, inventions, magic, conflicts, and more.

There are numerous direct and indirect ways that the Taoist notions of balance and wholeness influence the narrative and its structure in *Earthsea*. As noted in the overview of some of the scholarly material on Le Guin, Taoist influence can be traced clearly with numerous references to wholeness, balance, and the importance of truth. The direct references to balance are important, as are the formalist aspects such as the circular nature of the narrative: Ged's journey is characterized by a circularity evidenced in the first three books. Ged is assisted by Ogion and enters the wider world beyond Gont in *A Wizard of Earthsea*; Ged then becomes the experienced wizard who helps Tenar leave behind her secluded existence in *The Tombs of Atuan. Finally,* Ged becomes the Archmage and replaces Ogion in the narrative as he travels with young Arren in *The Farthest Shore*, thus completing the circle. This structure is continued in the fourth book, *Tehanu*. Tenar now supports Therru, or Tehanu, while Ged only appears on the fringes of the story. Oziewicz describes the overall themes in the *Earthsea*, noting the importance of harmony and balance: "In all those works the multifaceted quest for harmony and wholeness — for balance and equilibrium between what seems to be opposites but is inherently complementary — is an overriding concern" (Oziewicz, 128-9). Basing a storyworld, or at least major components of it, on philosophy or philosophical ideas is not an inherently new angle. However, Le Guin's approach lends her worldbuilding a degree of genuine harmony that produces an atmosphere recognizable in fantasy but still distinctly different from Tolkien's nostalgic beauty, Peake's gothic weirdness, Lewis' allegorical simplicity, or Abercrombie's grim violence.

In *The Other Wind*, the central role of harmony and balance is explicitly communicated by Lebannen when, by the end, he states that, "a great change is upon us. We must join together to learn what the change is, its causes, its course, and how we may hope to turn it from conflict and ruin to harmony and peace." (Le Guin, 221). Resolving the central conflict in *The Other Wind* (a book that attempts to tie together strands from the first three books) requires a balanced approach. Several different characters from different cultures, genders, social classes, and varying power levels must assist each other. This is in line with Le Guin's worldview and is reflected and recognized in her fiction. The way it impacts both her storyworld and the atmosphere it produces is influenced by the themes permeating her writing. At times, archaic stylistics in *Earthsea* lend a quality reminiscent of other fantasy tales from that period.

Although vast in book count, *Earthsea* itself is less ambitious in the details and minutiae of its worldbuilding than other fantasy stories. This represents a style of worldbuilding where single locations

and especially character development are a central concern. This focus on character lets Le Guin, through conversations and story development, explore the philosophical ideas that are the basis of her storyworld. Oziewicz observes that *inner* harmony and *personal* wholeness are central concerns in especially the first three books:

> The quest for inner harmony and personal wholeness dominates the first trilogy, but is also a significant theme of the second one, albeit side by side with other themes. This quest is something that every young protagonist must take in order to come of age, which for Le Guin means becoming psychologically mature and developing a relatively stable identity grounded in experience and self-knowledge. (Oziewicz, 130)

The differences and similarities between Le Guin and other fantasy writers become immediately apparent: personal quests, young protagonist(s), and coming of age are conventional in quest fantasy literature and will as such be recognizable and familiar. The fact that personal wholeness and introspection instead of a quest against a major antagonist is central sets Le Guin apart from other authors, and she explores this via all the main characters in each book. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged's arrogance and foolhardiness must be overcome to defeat (or make whole) the Shadow, and comparisons to conventional coming of age stories are reasonable. The overlap between the narrative construction of *A Wizard of Earthsea* and Jungian psychological concepts is aptly called serendipitous by Oziewicz (130), and the connection between the Jungian idea of the Shadow, relating to the personal unconscious, and Le Guin's major antagonist with the same name, seems a logical starting point for any analysis. Oziewicz takes it a step further and draws on Jung's ideas on individuation in which there are three phases that Ged also passes through: "[...] the *release phase*, in which the shadow manifests; the *flight phase*, in which it is suppressed through projections and refusal; and the *integration phase*, in which it is accommodated and acknowledged as part of oneself" (Oziewicz, 131, emphasis original). We can trace Ged's journey through these phases and the narrative: he first releases the Shadow and is saved by the self-sacrificing Archmage Nemmerle; he then flees from the school and from the Shadow where his trouble started and returns to Ogion, his first mentor, to ask advice; and lastly integrates the Shadow after a long journey and is finally made whole again when he names the Shadow with his *own* name. There is more to Ogions role, however, as several aspects of this character are informed by Jungian ideas. In *Dancing with Dragons* (1999), Donna White explains another part of the individuation process in the first novel:

> In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged represents the Jungian ego and his mentor Ogion represents the archetype Jung called the Wise Old Man. Ogion fulfills this archetype completely, leading Ged through the self-questioning necessary for the adolescent ego and assisting him in his quest for individuation. Ogion even carries out the Wise Old Man's optional task of providing something tangible to help the seeker on his journey; in this case, Ogion fashions a new wizard's staff for Ged. When Ged gives his shadow his own name and accepts that dark part of himself, he achieves the Jungian goal of maturity. (White, 28)

As this illustrates, any analysis of *A Wizard of Earthsea* is reliant on understanding Le Guin's relationship with Jung to some extent since the Jung's ideas influenced the *Earthsea* storyworld to a high degree. Ogion and Ged represent specific Jungian concepts in the first book, and the worldbuilding is necessarily woven around Ged and the foundational ideas that drive the narrative. Without the Jungian and Taoist concepts, both Ged and his journey through the story would look different.

In the second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, Arha must develop into Tenar and find peace within herself in a comparable coming of age story[80] that focuses on a more feminine variant of the individuation process — feminine because both Le Guin and Jung acknowledge the different journeys of men and women. While Ged's enemy, the shadow, is born out of his mistakes, Tenar is bound to ancient and evil powers and serves as a priestess forever reborn and thus 'immortal' according to their teachings. A major difference between Ged and Tenar is that Ged must overcome and master himself. In contrast, Tenar must break free from the shackles imposed upon her by her Order and then experience a new form of liberty outside of the tombs where she grew up. She must rediscover her identity. Her story is one of moving from darkness, in the dark Tombs of Atuan where she must learn to navigate without seeing and into the light. The disconnect Tenar feels between her Kargish identity and her new life as an inhabitant of the archipelago is a constant theme of her character throughout the rest of the *Earthsea* novels. At the end of *Tombs*, she was "like a child coming home" (*Tombs*, 300). This homecoming is not possible with the process of individuation, however, which in *Tombs* manifests in a manner distinctly different from *Wizard*. The role of the shadow has changed since there is no longer a physical manifestation. Instead, there is a pronounced psychological component that Tenar must overcome: "Like Ged, Tenar finally accepts the dark part of herself and becomes whole. The process is more passive than Ged's experience because Tenar is almost pure Shadow and faces the problem of

[80] For more on Tenar's coming of age, see: Esmonde's "The Master Pattern", 20-27; Crow & Erlich's "Words of Binding" 205-206; the Barrow's "Le Guin's Earthsea" 32-36; White's *Dancing with Dragons* 12-13; Spivack's *Ursula K. Le Guin* 32-38; Attebery's "Women's Coming of Age" 10, 15-17; Sobat's "The Night in Her Own Country".

integrating the more active ego" (White, 29). It is in this context noteworthy how the inventions within the worldbuilding in *Earthsea* serve the function of enabling this journey and process. The tombs themselves seem less like a vista that must be explored and enjoyed, but rather a vehicle that serves as a setting for Tenar's experiences and is a representation of the darkness within her isolated and closed-off personality. The darkness in the tombs is literal but also figurative as it has veiled Tenar's true person in oppressive darkness from which she must break free in order to, in the Taoist sense, find herself and become whole.

In *The Farthest Shore*, Arren (or Lebannen) must accept responsibility and find balance between his personal wants and Earthsea's need for him to become king. The idea of death figures prominently in this book and the integration of the shadow is consequently more abstract but still present; there is no physical shadow as in *Wizard* but rather an intangible (or subconscious) shadow represented in the concept of death and Arren's fear of death. Accepting mortality is part of becoming an adult and part of the coming of age aspect of this novel. The weight of Arren's looming responsibilities as future king causes fear and uncertainty that he must overcome in order for him to "find wholeness and return to the land of the living ready for kingship" (White, 29). Taking this argument a step further, Peter Hollindale argues that death introduces a 'new complexity' to the story:

> *The Farthest Shore* certainly seemed to introduce a new complexity to the heroic fantasy of *A Wizard of Earthsea* and *The Tombs of Atuan*. It brought powerfully into focus a preoccupation with death, which had already been introduced in the first two books and would thereafter become the metaphysical centre of the Earthsea series". (Hollindale, 184)

A stronger conceptualization of death does indeed characterize *The Farthest Shore*. One explanation is the evolution of *Earthsea*; from *A Wizard of Earthsea*, which follows the *Bildungsroman* structure, to *The Farthest Shore* which assumes a degree of maturity in both readers and characters.

In *Tehanu,* Tenar protects the fragile girl Tehanu and tries to balance personal challenges and Ged's absence, while Tehanu herself now has started her own journey towards wholeness despite the challenges she faces because of her physical deformity and the uncertainty with regards to her connection to dragons. Tehanu's development and eventual fate differs from those presented in the original trilogy since, "[h]er maturation cannot be linked with heroism as was the case with Ged; with sexual awakening as was the case with Tenar; or with acceptance of mortality as was the case with Lebannen" (Oziewicz, 133). The tone and atmosphere in *Tehanu* lend the novel a quality which

diverges from other *Earthsea* novels and the manner in which Le Guin built (or continued) the storyworld itself is a significant component of this.

In *The Other Wind*, Tehanu's quest for balance concludes as readers learn more about her mysterious powers and link to the dragons. The connection between, for example, *The Tombs of Atuan* and *The Other Wind* is also shown in Tenar as she comments on her psychological development herself and how her view of the world, and life and death, has changed:

> 'I no longer believe,' Tenar said, 'that I am or was, as they told me, Arha forever reborn, a single soul reincarnated endlessly and so immortal. I do believe that when I die I will, like any mortal being, rejoin the greater being of the world. Like the grass, the trees, the animals. Men are only animals that speak, sir, as you said this morning.' (*Other Wind*, 145)

Growth and self-awareness become central issues in Tenar's character development. Like Ged, she becomes an important figure who, through life experience and compassion, meaningfully and positively impacts the lives of other characters. Focusing on Tenar's journey from the postcritical perspective is apt given its preoccupation with emotions. Through Tenar, readers become exposed to various encounters that necessitate emotional involvement; there is no fight and no discernable quest, but Tenar stands at the center of several immersive and crucial moments in *Earthsea*.

The common thread is indeed that of balance and psychological development that (ideally) lets characters progress from uncertainty to balanced stability and self-knowledge. Le Guin cleverly weaves character motivation with worldbuilding and the trouble each character faces is explored in specific parts of the storyworld. Ged, mostly in *Wizard*, explores several parts of the archipelago; in *Tombs*, through Tenar, the scope is much smaller but culturally rich and mysterious; in *Farthest Shore*, the physical manifestation of the land of the dead is present as a dominant feature of the storyworld and the story. Although slightly unusual in the context of fantasy literature, I want to briefly draw on a few famous lines from T. S. Eliot's poem *Little Gidding* (1942) from his "Four Quartets" series that, I think, eloquently illustrate what Le Guin is essentially talking about:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.

These lines bring to mind both the circularity of Le Guin's narrative structure and the importance of self-knowledge that happens due to (self) exploration. In two meaningful ways Ged 'arrive[s] where

[he] started', and 'know[s] the place for the first time': he returns to his home as an old man, content with his relationship with Tenar, and seemingly satisfied with what he has accomplished and with a restful sense of acceptance at what he has lost. He knows the beauty and simplicity in the winter of his life and has learned to appreciate it through trials and travels. There is balance and wholeness, and the particular Taoist self-knowledge has enabled Ged's personal growth and (largely) his completion of the Jungian individuation process by the end of the series.

Worldbuilding in Earthsea

The foundational elements in *Earthsea* are, as we have seen, primarily based on ideas from philosophy and psychology. However, the storyworld is also based on identifiable fantasy worldbuilding strategies. The different elements in worldbuilding generally and *Earthsea* specifically allow us to analyze and understand the underlying structure of the storyworld and thereby gain insight into the context that the characters operate within. As I have noted already, *Earthsea* is surprising since each novel differs in focus and scope. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, readers follow Ged and consequently obtain information about the storyworld along with him. Additionally, Ged travels fairly extensively in *Wizard*, although the book itself is relatively short. Genette's ideas on focalization are helpful in order to illuminate the contrast between the novels; in *Wizard*, we exclusively follow Ged in a grand adventure. In the second book, *Tombs of Atuan*, focalization changes radically as we now follow Tenar (or Arha) who is female and whose inclusion also marks a difference in scope. While both novels are narratives focusing on personal quests and development, the change in focalization is a narrative 'shock' (cf. Felski) that may disrupt assumptions about how a conventional fantasy trilogy is usually structured. Ged enters *The Tombs of Atuan* relatively late in the story, and even when he does enter, readers still follow Tenar. I want to elaborate on Felski's idea of shock to include a narrative-disruptive element that is 'shocking' in the way a narrative develops; this shock, I argue, may manifest itself based on several factors in a text and not only visceral images. Felski introduces her notion of shock as follows:

> Shock, then, names a reaction to what is startling, painful, even horrifying. Applied to literary texts, it connotes something more brusque and brutal than, for example, the idea of *Stoss* advanced by Heidegger: the claim that what defines an artwork is its blow to consciousness, its rupturing of familiar frames of reference. (Felski, 105)

As her examples make clear, her focus is generally on violence. I want to explain what happens between texts such as *Wizard* and *The Tombs of Atuan* in terms of shock and base further considerations on worldbuilding in *Earthsea* on these ideas. It seems self-evident that the storyworld has progressed and changed dramatically between novels. The later novels (beginning with *The Other Wind* in 2001) induce another level of 'shock' since many core elements of the storyworld and its worldbuilding established in earlier novels have been shaken or changed — consider, for example, the quest fantasy and *Bildungsroman* elements of *Wizard* juxtaposed with the overtly feminist focus in *Tehanu*. This, unsurprisingly, has caused both positive and negative reader reactions. It seems logical to expect a level of coherence between novels set in the same storyworld, but that is not the case nor is it necessary; a storyworld as expansive as those often created in fantasy may house any number of stories and these stories may overlap and interplay, or be entirely divorced from each other. That is a core principle in worldbuilding and how storyworlds fundamentally alter our understanding of, and approach to, narratives. Furthering the idea that Le Guin's storyworld causes a level of 'shock', Bernado and Murphy touch on this issue in their *Ursula K. Le Guin: A Critical Companion* (2006) when highlighting the shift in perspective in the second novel:

> [...] Le Guin provides challenges to the white Anglo-Saxon world of fantasy. By creating characters of color at the outset of the trilogy and including the development of a young woman as a major character in the second book, she begins to expand on the horizons of the genre". (Bernado & Murphy, *Critical Companion,* 92)

This element contributes to the shock-effect between the first and second novels. The differences between Le Guin's strategy and the Tolkienian approach, with one story progressing through typically three books, are apparent. With a (known) storyworld, we can expect narratives that aesthetically, thematically, and conceptually are similar and consistent with tone, style, and even structure. However, the actual *stories* presented within the *storyworld* do not need to be connected. As a storyworld grows in size and complexity, it becomes easier for that storyworld to encompass several narratives. Star Wars is an obvious example, as is Middle-earth. In the latter, we may briefly consider *The Children of Húrin* alongside *The Hobbit*: there is no clear-cut relationship, but the two stories exist in the same storyworld. There are foundational elements that influence the underlying structures in *The Children of Húrin* and *The Hobbit*, and the same is true for Le Guin's worldbuilding where Taoism influences the core structures even if the *stories* differ or are unrelated. Mark J. P. Wolf has argued in the same vein

and it is his terminology alongside what I have established on Taoism thus far that I want to include in the considerations of the *Earthsea* storyworld. Wolf's ideas on invention, completeness, and consistency provide a baseline understanding of any storyworld and allow a brief analysis of the core elements in a storyworld. My major argument is that immersion into a storyworld is as likely and enchanting as immersion into a story, Therefore, it is crucial to understanding how the storyworld is constructed and how its worldbuilding functions. That is why understanding Taoism is necessary for any detailed analysis of *Earthsea*.

In terms of cultural invention in *Earthsea*, I first want to highlight the role dragons play in the storyworld and in the conceptualization of ideas. Le Guin remarks in "Earthsea Revisioned" that "The dragons of Earthsea remain mysterious to me" (1993, 22); a statement which partly explains the different roles dragons play in the storyworld. Peter Hollindale builds his argument in the same context and shows some of the ways in which dragons evolved and changed throughout the story:

> Le Guin discovers her dragons gradually in Earthsea. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* the dragons of Pendor are 'worms' and 'baneful lizards,' threats to be destroyed. Ged can defeat Yevaud, Archipelago-fashion, by knowing his true hidden name. The dragons of later books use their true names openly. Orm Irian seeks hers, and declares it. Never again are they a 'lizard-brood.' The true dragons of Earthsea are characterized by laughter, and they laugh especially at the spectacle of humankind. ("Last Dragon", 192)

Worldbuilding functions on multiple levels, and these may influence each other; dragons in *Earthsea* influence a macro-level in the context of worldbuilding by changing the political and geographical landscape, and they influence the micro-level by influencing the personal landscape. Importantly, they also add an element of otherness through which both the macro-level and micro-level areas are explored, not least since the dragons themselves (in addition to the human characters) have wants, personalities, and a rich history. The dragons also lend *Earthsea* part of its mythopoeic character, evidenced, for example, through the Kargish dragon lore the princess Seserakh shares which is relevant for the entire archipelago. The following hard-won conversation between Seserakh, who is struggling to learn a new language, and Lebannen, who is trying to get to know Seserakh, is an instance of world-foundational mythopoeic structures being communicated through character dialogue:

> "Long ago long ago - Karg people, sorcery people, dragon people, hah? Yes? - All people one, all speak one - one - Oh! *Wuluah mekrevt*!"
> "One language?"
> "Hah! Yes! One language!" In her passionate attempt to speak Hardic, to tell him what she wanted to tell him, she was losing her self-consciousness; her face and eyes shone.

> "But then, dragon people say: Let go, let go all things. Fly! - But we people, we say: No, keep. Keep all things. Dwell! - So we go apart, hah? dragon people and we people. So they make the Vedurnan. These to let go - these to keep. Yes? But to keep all things, we must to let go that language. That dragon people language."
> [...]
> "In the middle - you! Sorcery people! Hah? You, middle people, speak Hardic language but too, also, keep to speak Old Speech language. You *learn* it. Like I learn Hardic, hah? Then, then - this is the bad. The bad thing. Then you say, in that sorcery language, in that Old Speech language, you say: *We will not to die*. And it is so. And the Vedurnan is broken." (*Other Wind*, 202-203, emphasis in original)

This lengthy sequence is an illustrative conversation in which the relationship between Seserakh and Lebannen grows, and the lore and myth of *Earthsea* is expanded by including the Kargish perspective. According to the story Seserakh shares, the 'sorcery people' of the Archipelago have made a mistake by trying to conquer death; it is implicitly clear that the balance between life and death must not be upset (a clear Taoist line of thinking), but that death must be accepted as part of life. This is the primary reason why necromantic sorcery is such a disturbing force in *Earthsea*. As we can see, the cultural realm of the inventions (cf. Wolf) in *Earthsea* is important in establishing and communicating the structure of the storyworld. This framing device is not uncommon (especially where fictional history is concerned) and part of what makes *Earthsea* a conventional fantasy novel.

Like the storyworld, the dragons also evolve from book to book, and their importance grows as their function in the storyworld becomes more complicated and active. This is part of the invention-aspect of the storyworld, although dragons themselves naturally are not a new invention. Their evolving role, however, as well as their portrayal, makes them an important object in the storyworld. While dragons in *A Wizard of Earthsea* primarily serve as a vehicle for Ged's self-discovery and evolution into a powerful mage, their function is expanded in subsequent novels. Dragons provide an element of 'otherness' in the storyworld, through which macro-issues (political, geographical) and micro-issues (personal, interpersonal) can be explored. The dragons have wants, personalities, and history relating to all the archipelago (cf. the Seserakh's story). This drives the major geo-political conflict in *The Other Wind* since the dragons want to reclaim parts of the archipelago that they argue belongs to them:

> Then some of the dragons said to Kalessin, 'Men in their envy of us long ago stole half our realm beyond the west from us and made walls of spells to keep us out of it. So now let us drive them into the farthest east, and take back the islands! Men and dragons cannot share the wind.' (*Other Wind*, 152)

Although a true conflict never arises, this situation is nevertheless the closest the *Earthsea* sequence gets to a large-scale conflict. The situation is mediated and diffused by the intervention of Tehanu, the

dragon in human form Orm Irian, and the other main characters in *The Other Wind*. The core ideas surrounding balance, equilibrium, and life and death are again represented in the dragons since their 'otherness' also encompasses death as an additional 'other'. There are narrative strands created because of the fact that death, to dragons, has a different meaning compared to humans; this is shown in part by the fact that dragons do not reside in the bleak land of the dead after they die. Tension is created between humans and dragons which is amplified by the pre-existing tensions between the peoples of the archipelago, and the core issues concerning the dragons (including life and death) become both philosophical tools that expand on the worldbuilding within *Earthsea*, and simultaneously influence the story itself. In connection with this, the idea of freedom becomes relevant since this is what drives and motivates dragons:

> "The wizard I destroyed," she said, "the Summoner of Roke, Thorion - what was it he sought?"
> Onyx, stricken, said nothing.
> "He came back from death," she said. "But not living, as the Archmage and the king did. He was dead, but he came back across the wall by his arts - by your arts - you men of ROke! How are we to trust anything you say? You have unmade the balance of the world. Can you restore it?" (*Other Wind,* 154)

Ultimate balance in all things is only possible if there is freedom; freedom to live, die, and simply exist without fear of oppression or persecution. This is embodied and represented in the dragons, who are wild but instinctively attuned to the balance of Earthsea, whereas humans are capable of upsetting the balance through, for example, necromancy. Necromancy is particularly what both dragons and the Kargish non-wizards take issue with because it upsets natural balance and is immoral. Hollindale elaborates on this as well with an example from the antagonist Cob's dialogue, stating:

> *The Farthest Shore* is full of references to Balance and Equilibrium, but there is force in the words of the evil Cob, as he faces Ged in the Dry Land and claims to have found the way to Immortality: "You sought it. All of you. You sought it and could not find it, and so made wise words about acceptance and balance and the equilibrium of life and death. But they were words—lies to cover your failure—to cover your fear of death. What man would not live forever, if he could? (1973, p. 186) (Hollindale, *Last Dragon,* 189)

We can once again see how Taoist notions of balance and morality inform the storyworld and constitute significant components in establishing both core tenets in Le Guin's worldbuilding and core conflicts in the story. The dragons' interpretation of freedom is what motivates them and makes them different from humans:

> Kalessin said: 'Long ago we chose. We chose freedom. Men chose the yoke. We chose fire and the wind. They chose water and the earth. We chose the west, and they the east.' (*Other Wind*, 151-2)

The development of the dragons, and their ability to represent and encompass philosophical and political ideas is a central issue in the later books. What 'freedom' means to the dragons is different from what it means to the people of the archipelago. However, despite the differences, there is room for cohabitation and balance — key Taoist aspects:

> [...] underlying all those themes and plots is a deeply Taoist, visionary and Le Guinian notion that harmony rather than disharmony and wholeness rather than incompleteness are more conducive to human happiness and fulfillment. (Oziewicz, 143)

Although Oziewicz writes 'human happiness' here, the point remains the same, namely that through cooperation and completeness people (and dragons) may exist peacefully and in harmony. This is closely related to another aspect of Le Guinian writing: balance between genders. While an in-depth analysis of gender issues deserves and requires more attention than what I can offer in this chapter, the area itself is nevertheless a crucial part of the quest-dimension in the entirety of *Earthsea* and a driving force in both the storyworld's social relations and political foundation (evidenced especially strongly in *Tehanu*, the most clearly feminist of the *Earthsea* books although Le Guin's feminist politics can be identified throughout all her novels).

My next point concerns the quest-equilibrium; this relates to the dragons and *Earthsea* in a grander perspective. See, for example, the importance of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe and what it means for the archipelago. The search for a new Archmage after Ged loses his powers, the goal of establishing a new kingdom with a new king, and maintaining peaceful relations with the Kargish lands. In all these areas, the quest narrative in *Earthsea* relies on peaceful cooperation between different cultures, and even different species, in order to obtain equilibrium. In this way, the invented cultures (cf. Wolf) and species in Le Guin's worldbuilding influence several narrative aspects. Consequently, there is potential for immersion in the main story, which concerns the main characters and the landscape of the storyworld, culture, and history. The importance of all these areas and how they interplay and are interdependent underscore the importance of the cultural realm in worldbuilding that Wolf defines. Inevitably, the cultural realm automatically encompasses a political dimension, particularly pronounced in Le Guin's deliberately subversive and generally feminist worldbuilding.

In terms of Wolf's ideas on storyworld completeness, *Earthsea* seems mostly interesting in the evolution of its worldbuilding. This evolution is simultaneously part of expanding the storyworld and this happens organically and inevitably as more books are released. As I have established earlier, and as

Doležel and Wolf also point out, *in*completeness is a fact of storyworlds since it will eventually become possible to ask questions of the storyworld that it cannot answer. The main issue, then, is whether these questions are *answerable*; Wolf provides a number of examples, mostly relating to the Star Wars storyworld, which illustrate the situation well. Unlike other fantasy stories, especially stories that place greater focus on extreme levels of completeness, *Earthsea* rarely provides detailed answers about many workings of the world such as where food comes from and how materials and clothes are produced. However, because *Earthsea* in many ways is a stereotypical faux medieval setting we can deduce and answer several basic questions based on an assumption about the level of technology in *Earthsea*. Wolf argues that the issue of completeness is always present regardless of whether an author consciously or not intends to address it because readers who become immersed in a storyworld automatically ask questions about it:

> However, if a world is to be important to an author or audience, to be the setting of a series of stories or a franchise, or just to be compelling enough that an audience will want to vicariously enter the world, then completeness - or rather, *an illusion of completeness* - will become one of the subcreator's goals [...]. (Wolf, 39, emphasis in original)

Storyworld consistency, the final of Wolf's three major categories, is primarily relevant in light of *in*consistencies. These become more and more common as a storyworld grows in size and complexity. The nature of these inconsistencies may be somewhat reader dependent. In terms of storytelling consistency, the differences in tone, style, and structure in especially *Tehanu* compared to the other novels has been pointed out[81]. This, I argue, constitutes a type of storyworld inconsistency that Wolf does not explicitly deal with, but one that affects the storyworld and possible reading experiences and atmosphere. As a whole, Le Guin's storyworld is highly consistent with Wolf's analysis of fictional storyworlds, and the reason as to why is unsurprising: Wolf based his work on stories exactly like *Earthsea* and, as a result, the style and structure are quickly identifiable. Wolf is primarily interested in the building blocks of fictional worlds and deliberately does not focus on aesthetic dimensions and issues of atmosphere. Through Wolf's work, it becomes possible to gain a detailed understanding of how *Earthsea* is constructed. However, it is necessary to venture into Le Guin's personal history with Taoism to include a crucial aspect. I will highlight a few passages from *A Wizard of Earthsea* to illustrate this point and show this connection more clearly. As I argued earlier, Taoism for Le Guin

81 See for example Amy J. Ransom "Three Genres, One Author: Recent Scholarship on Ursula K. Le Guin" (2009)

plays the same role that Christianity did for Tolkien, which is why it must be understood and factored in when studying the storyworld

Consider first the very poem that starts *A Wizard of Earthsea*; a small epigraph that sets the tone for the storyworld in five brief sentences and is later repeated two times in the novel. The epigraph reads:

> Only in silence the word,
> only in dark the light,
> only in dying life:
> bright the hawk's flight
> on the empty sky.
> *The Creation of Éa* (Le Guin, 12)

While epigraphs are often used to convey tone and style, Le Guin's use also reveals important aspects of the core Taoist ideas behind her worldbuilding, although this fact may only become clear after reading the novel. The issue of balance is visible early, with complementary opposites in the form of 'silence' and 'the word, 'dark' and 'the light', and 'dying', and 'life'. A careful reading will reveal a structure that runs through the entire series. The repeated use of references to *The Creation of Éa*, an intradiegetic text, underscores its significance. As we learn while Ged is an apprentice at the school on Roke: "Part of each day he studied with the Master Chanter, learning the Deeds of heroes and the Lays of wisdom, beginning with the oldest of all songs, the Creation of Éa" (*Wizard*, 47). Here we also immediately see how Tolkien inspired Le Guin. The Creation of Éa is a song, a phenomenon Tolkien also used to create his world as it was sung into being, as well as the fact that Le Guin borrowed the Éa-word; Tolkien writes Eä (meaning "the Created World"), but the similarity is hardly a coincidence. The tonal and atmospheric significance is important for the storyworld and for worldbuilding. The literary style in *Earthsea* is immediately clear. Readers can successfully draw on their learned experience of the fantasy genre to (re-)position themselves (cf. Ryan) and accept the nature of Le Guin's magical world[82]. While the Taoist elements may not immediately be apparent, a knowledgeable reader will quickly recognize them, and an unknowledgeable reader will become exposed to them. Next, in a moment showcasing both structural balance and circularity, the very end of *A Wizard of Earthsea* recalls "The Creation of Éa" when Vetch sings the song in a meaningful conclusive moment:

> Now when he [Vetch] saw his friend and heard him speak, his doubt vanished. And he began to see the truth, that Ged had neither lost nor won but, naming the shadow of his death with his own name, had

[82] The map, which is presented before the epigraph, is naturally a very significant part of this as well.

> made himself whole: a man: who, knowing his whole true self, cannot be used or possessed by any power other than himself, and whose life therefore is lived for life's sake and never in the service of ruin, or pain, or hatred, or the dark. In the Creation of Ea, which is the oldest song, it is said, "Only in silence the word, only in dark the light, only in dying life: bright the hawk's flight on the empty sky." That song Vetch sang aloud now as he held the boat westward, going before the cold wind of the winter night that blew at their backs from the vastness of the Open Sea. (Wizard, 165-166)

Earlier I highlighted passages that show the direct influence Taoism has had on *Earthsea* and its characters; in this context, focusing on "The Creation of Éa", we see the analytical point concerning the foundational role Taoism plays in *Earthsea*'s worldbuilding. Not only do we return to the beginning in the final pages via "The Creation of Éa", but may also identify how the song encompasses the entirety of *Earthsea* and its structure; the balance, the circularity, the aesthetics, and the atmosphere. As a final point in this context, I want to showcase a conversation between Ged and Vetch's family that also indirectly recalls the song. In this situation, Ged has left the school (where he learned the words of the song) and we see how "The Creation of Éa" has become part of his personal philosophy in a much more overt manner:

> Staying his knife on the carved wood, Murre asked, "What of death?"
> The girl listened, her shining black head bent down.
> "For a word to be spoken," Ged answered slowly, "there must be silence. Before and after." (*Wizard*, 152)

Ged paraphrases the song in a recognizable way, directly drawing on the meaning of the words and communicating them to Murre. Ged has evolved and progressed from his arrogance and willfulness to a mature individual who sees the need for balance in all things — even between life and death, precisely as his first master, Ogion. Interestingly, in this instance, Ged also almost quotes words from Ogion, who uses silence as an example for the uncomprehending young Ged: "'To hear, one must be silent'" (*Wizard*, 26).

Through the worldbuilding elements in *Earthsea* we may ultimately pinpoint underlying and foundational structures that dictate both the aesthetics, structures, and narratives within the storyworld. There are narratological building blocks that are important for understanding the exact nature of a storyworld; these are linked to Wolf's understanding of storyworlds and worldbuilding and generally relate to the tangible parts such as invented cultures, invented species, and invented geography. I have expanded on that somewhat by including considerations on the production of atmosphere, as well as how specific modes of thought may dictate the direction of a storyworld. How Taoism influenced Le

Guin and *Earthsea* remains an important topic and it is worthwhile to consider this philosophy as constitutive in the same way that religion was important for Tolkien and Lewis. While many storyworlds cannot, do not, or need not draw on philosophy or religion to this degree, it seems that fantasy storyworlds generally benefit from such an approach to ensure a level of coherence. In terms of pure scope, fantasy storyworlds are often quite large (cf. Ryan) which necessitates core structures that can direct the development of both storyworld and stories. Le Guin created a storyworld, drawing on Tolkienian and other fantasy traditions (although the genre was still quite 'new' at the time when Le Guin conceptualized what became *Earthsea*). Her contributions resulted in elements from *Earthsea* becoming tropes within the genre — tropes that are still re-used and re-imagined today. This is possible because the story and characters are captivating, the storyworld is innovative, and the atmosphere rich and unique. Le Guin created a complex and rewarding storyworld with significant atmospheres and immersive moments that drive the reading experience. In the following chapter, I analyze Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan.* It contrasts *Earthsea* due to the different worldbuilding tactics. Le Guin relied on tried-and-tested strategies but, as we shall see, there are other ways of constructing fictional worlds.

3. Towers of Black Ivy: Worldbuilding Strategies in *Titus Groan*[83]

In this chapter, I will present an analysis of Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan* (1946), focusing specifically on three areas that help explain the text's inner workings, aesthetic quality, and immersive potential. Peake's storyworld has been lauded but remains in the strange category of fantasy books labeled a classic but not widely read. The body of academic criticism is also relatively small, considering the age of the trilogy. The trilogy itself consists of *Titus Groan* (1946), *Gormenghast* (1950), and *Titus Alone* (1959) and its construction and qualities mark it as an outlier in the context of fantasy literature. While some scholarly work does exist on Peake's novels, *Gormenghast* is more often mentioned in passing and comparatively few articles, chapters, and books in recent scholarship deal explicitly with the *Gormenghast* novels. Relevant scholarly works include John Bactchelor's *Mervyn Peake: A Biographical and Critical Exploration* (1975) which focuses on Peake's prose and style; Tanya Gardiner-Scott's *Mervyn Peake: The Evolution of a Dark Romantic* (1989) rightly drew attention to the Gothic aspects of the three novels; Alice Mill's has produced *Stuckness in the fiction of Mervyn Peake* (2005) that focuses on Jungian, Freudian, and Kristevan perspectives. Colin Manlove, in an early scholarly book on fantasy, has written about Gormenghast in his *Modern Fantasy* (1975) with a mostly biographical focus; and Peter Winnington's *The Voice of the Heart: The Workings of Mervyn Peake's Imagination* (2006) includes analysis of Peake's entire professional life, i.e. illustrations, drawings, and poems. "'Suckled on Shadows': States of Decay in Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast Novels" (2020) by Edward O'Hare is a recent and exciting contribution which explores, in part, themes of tradition and disintegration and the role of history. Although I also want to highlight the existence of *Peake Studies*, which published issues from 1988 to 2015 but unfortunately no longer is active, there seems to generally be little scholarly work done on the Titus novels. The absence of scholarly work that focuses on the storyworld, its atmosphere, and the narrative construction in his books is lamentable because Peake's achievement in these areas is remarkable.

[83] Parts of this chapter have been published in: Friedrichsen, Dennis: "Atmosphere as Aesthetic Experience in Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan*", Comparatio, Bielefeld Aisthesis, 2019

Several new books focus on storyworlds that follow a (by now) recognizable pattern. For example, the recent *Sub-creating Arda* (2019), edited by Dimitra Fimi and Thomas Honegger, makes a valuable contribution to the area of worldbuilding and Tolkien studies but neglects texts that exist on the fringes of generic fantasy literature. The same is true for the otherwise helpful *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008) by Farah Mendlesohn. This chapter attempts to explain why *Titus Groan* works regarding storyworld, atmosphere, and narrative construction. As Winnington argues in *The Voice of the Heart* (2006), critical focus has typically been on one of three areas: biographical readings, political readings, or genre analysis:

> Practically all the articles and dissertations about Peake's work […] have taken one of three approaches. They attempt to 'explain' the work by the life, or to prove some preconception about it (that it's political allegory, for instance) or else treat it as an example of a genre (like the gothic or the grotesque) in order to compare Peake with other writers. (Winnington, 2006, 3)

My undertaking is not an attempt at placing *Titus Groan* within a certain genre. In fact, for my purposes is it somewhat less relevant whether the *Gormenghast* novels are categorized as fantasy or something else. What I am interested in are the textual mechanics that make Gormenghast, and especially *Titus Groan*, evocative, and which imbue the storyworld with the uncommon quality and atmosphere that seems uniquely attributable to Peake. Winnington strives to understand Peake's work and the major themes, motifs and structural patterns by considering almost everything produced by Peake during his lifetime. My aim is different, and I will be content to consider only his literary work, particularly *Titus Groan*, and identify the foundation for Peake's worldbuilding and its reliance on characters and atmosphere. A bigger scope would necessitate more than a single chapter.

Mervyn Peake's three novels, *Titus Groan*, *Gormenghast*, and *Titus Alone* together are often referred to as the Gormenghast trilogy, and they construct a storyworld where Gormenghast castle plays a central role. In order to adequately explain the inner workings of Peake's creation, I have chosen to focus on *Titus Groan* specifically. This, I hope, will ensure that the scope of this chapter is manageable. Many of the arguments I make, especially pertaining to atmosphere as created by literary devices as well as the spiderweb narrative construction, are relevant for the entire trilogy. The points I make concerning worldbuilding, particularly about invention, completeness, and consistency, are also adequately explored through *Titus Groan* alone, although I will note that the third book, *Titus Alone*, deviates in

ways that would have been interesting to explore had this dissertation focused exclusively on the entire *Gormenghast* trilogy.

Let me briefly note that clear-cut genre categorization of the trilogy remains a somewhat contentious topic, although most critics and readers are willing to label it "fantasy" despite the storyworld lacking what many would presume to find in similar narratives – elements such as a defined secondary world, magic and magic systems, fantastical creatures and, typically, some kind of quest or goal for a main character. O'Hare notes the same in his article on Peake, identifying that few commonly-found tropes are present in Peake's work: "his books contain none of the uncanny or preternatural elements traditionally thought of as intrinsic to the Gothic genre, nor do they feature any of the wizards, dragons, or invented languages which readers commonly associate with Fantasy novels." (O'Hare, 127). While better-known and more successful stories, such as Le Guin's *Earthsea*, contain elements that are recognizable, for example the quest structure of the plot, the strength and allure of *Titus Groan* is markedly different. As I will show, immersion into fantasy texts hinges primarily on the effectiveness of atmosphere creation, and atmosphere itself plays an important role in the overall landscape of the text. While conventional fantasy narratives by authors such as Martin, Tolkien, Sanderson, and Jordan also produce a certain (textual or generic) atmosphere in their texts, the aesthetic quality of these stories fits neatly within the fantasy genre and thus cause few surprises in this area; Peake's worldbuilding and narrative construction differ, and instead of producing atmosphere as a by-product of writing within a certain genre, atmosphere instead plays a much more front stage role in *Titus Groan*.

The first section of this chapter deals with narrative construction, and focuses on inter-character relations which illustrates how Peake's storyworld relies on narrative strategies that challenge readers and their genre expectations by employing unconventional techniques that place emphasis on atmosphere creation through character mannerisms, dialogue, and interactions. In order to explain the narrative construction of the novel I have detailed a term for the purpose: the spiderweb narrative. It enables an understanding of the novel's construction and aesthetic dimension. Using the spiderweb narrative as a starting-point, I will analyze both the narrative construction of *Titus Groan* as well as include considerations on the meaningfulness of atmosphere as evoked through the main characters and their lively interactions. The term will serve as a structural analogy and it also recalls a Gothic aesthetic that I find suitable in the context of Peake's writing. Additionally, I draw particular attention to several

of the main actors within the narrative who play a role in both creating atmosphere within the storyworld that the narrative largely depends on. A central argument in this section is that the immersive qualities of the text rely on the interplay between characters. The spiderweb metaphor lets me account for the movement and significance of several characters and reflect on their function within the narrative. The spiderweb construction is part of the reason why Peake differs from many other fantasy writers, and since I am interested in how we may account for both character interactions, spatiality in the storyworld, and atmosphere in specific scenes as well as generally in the text, the idea of the spiderweb narrative proves useful and, I imagine, can serve as a stepping stone for analysis of texts that are similar to Peake's in style or construction.

The second part of this chapter focuses on atmosphere and will include an analysis of a specific narrative strand that captures the strange aesthetic quality of the novel. In a close reading of the scene, two characters fight in an evocative and decidedly Gothic environment framed by dark humor. I will show how character behavior and mannerisms, stylistics, and the aesthetic quality of the storyworld contribute to the production of atmosphere. I draw primarily on Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, who in *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* asserts that "often, we are alerted to a potential mood in a text by the irritation and fascination provoked by a single word or small detail—the hint of a different tone or rhythm" (Gumbrecht, 17). I will argue in this section that the power of *Titus Groan* relies profoundly on the peculiar atmosphere evoked by the colorful descriptions of the castle, strange inter-character events and relationships, as well as the importance of the storyworld itself.

The third section of this chapter will focus on an analysis of the worldbuilding in *Titus Groan* with insights based primarily on the work by Mark J. P. Wolf. His terminology and analytical approach will supplement the spiderweb narrative and atmosphere analyses by looking at degrees of invention, completeness, and consistency. Worldbuilding in *Titus Groan* is unique partly because of the small size of the storyworld and the fact that Gormenghast seemingly exists by itself. Anthony Burgess comments on the storyworld in his introduction to the trilogy, noting the immovability and self-enclosed nature of *Gormenghast*:

> The world created in Titus Groan is neither better nor worse than this one: it is merely different. It has absorbed our history, culture and rituals and then stopped dead, refusing to move, self-feeding, self-motivating, self-enclosed. This is the world of Gormenghast. (Burgess, Introduction, 1)

This differs from many other fantasy stories, contemporary or otherwise, and places Peake's world in an interesting position in relation to other fantasy novels. As I will show in my analysis, the spatial dimension in Gormenghast plays a more important role than the temporal one. This fact is shown in the worldbuilding and in individual scenes in which characters (inter)act. There are many moving parts and pieces in Gormenghast. These interplay in central ways which sometimes can make the novel a challenging read (since the plot is relatively minimal and progresses slowly), but also makes it unique because it is an example of a storyworld where worldbuilding is reliant on atmosphere and narrative construction as much as on its narratological building blocks. While I have little interest in a biographical reading, I find the following observations by Colin Manlove noteworthy because he highlights the static nature of Gormenghast and (quoting Peake's widow) notes the 'duress' which seems inexplicably part of the entire work.

> Peake wrote most of the first volume of the Gormenghast trilogy, *Titus Groan* (1946), while he was in the army: as his widow says, 'it was a book that grew under duress'. Gormenghast is ancient, unchanging, absolutely self-sufficient; a place nobody has either left or come to, a place around which are no other places; home for ages of the Groans and their unalterable Ritual. It is reasonable to deduce that the castle was in part an unconscious consolation and compensation for its author, that its character would not have been so static if Peake's life had not been so much in flux and uncertainty. (*Modern Fantasy*, 208)

Colin touches on several important areas of worldbuilding, but few (if any) scholars have explicitly dealt with the storyworld in Gormenghast. There is great potential for understanding the novel from original perspectives by focusing on the role worldbuilding plays, and why the castle and its surroundings are as much part of the potential reading experience as the characters and their behavior. While commenting on the castle itself is not a new angle, considering it in light of recent theoretical worldbuilding terminology is. Another brief quote by Manlove highlights a point that is also important throughout my analysis — that the castle as well as the inhabitants are significant.

> The castle's nature exists not only in the building itself but in its inhabitants, the line of Groans who built and extended it through time. Its dark spread mass, now lunging skywards, now brooding in a huddle of gloom, was originally the expression in stone of the gaunt psyches of its first earls, and down the line of descendants the influence has also worked in the opposite direction, until the people and the place are a continuum. To the society of Gormenghast the castle is as much a part of them as a limb [...]. (Manlove, *Modern Fantasy*, 220)

Until now it has been hard to articulate why *Gormenghast* remains alluring, and I am confident that combining worldbuilding and atmosphere will in this case yield valuable insight. This 'dark spread

mass' that has attached itself to the entire ensemble 'as a limb' must be understood both as an entity crucial for the plot but also as an actor vital for the production of storyworld atmosphere. Specific inventions, such as the mysterious Rituals, impact the narrative and storyworld; the lack of background information impacts the degree of completeness but not necessarily in a negative way; and the issue of storyworld consistency is ever-present in a large trilogy with a complex storyworld.

The Spiderweb Narrative

In this section, I argue that *Titus Groan* and its particular literary atmosphere is reliant on a narrative construction of small interconnected actions and situations that drive the narrative and its mood. This stands in contrast to storyworlds that are explored via an overarching plotline in which a given narrative (typically) follows an inexperienced main character whose point-of-view guides readers through both story and storyworld[84]. The novel *A Wizard of Earthsea* is a prime example of this. Farah Mendlesohn refers to these narratives as Portal-Quest Fantasy (Mendlesohn, 2008, 28), a broad but generally useful way of understanding a significant portion of fantasy narratives. Many texts employ the strategy of placing the reader in a companion-audience role, where both main character(s) as well as reader(s) rely on information from other characters — in this way, readers and characters learn information at approximately the same rate, which is useful for plot pacing and ease of understanding the storyworld. Unsurprisingly, this narrative structure is often found in children's literature such as *The Hobbit*, *Narnia*, and *Harry Potter*. Using an inexperienced or ignorant main character is common in conventional quest-structure narratives. While this type of storyworld exploration is useful, *Titus Groan* employs strategies that rely on specific aspects and personalities of individual characters as well as descriptions that aim to capture a certain mood. This is noteworthy because conventional narratives focus on two areas: transition, and exploration (ibid, 29). In texts like *The Hobbit* and *Narnia*, there is a clear transition from the safe and familiar to the new and potentially dangerous. This also carries with it a necessary element of exploration that (most often) alleviates a large degree of ignorance on the part of readers and characters because information is presented at a steady and logical pace.

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84 Michael D.C Drout has explored this phenomenon in his lecture "Lord of the Rings: How to Read J.R.R. Tolkien", Carnegie Mellon University's Dietrich College, 2013, available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lXAvF9p8nmM Last accessed 19.20.2021

There is little reader-guidance in *Titus Groan* but vivid descriptions and inhabitants, who with their Dickensian names, mannerisms, and actions, produce a gloomy and weird atmosphere remain compelling because there is a fundamental coherence to their actions, dialogue, and motivations as well as the descriptions of these characters, the scenes in which we find them, and the general environment of Gormenghast. Character names like Nettel, Rottcodd, Flay, Swelter, Steerpike, Mrs. Slagg, and Prunesquallor — these may seem almost ridiculous and belong to a more colorful novel with a less dark tone and mood. However, they encapsulate the dark humor that permeates Peake's novels. Despite the comical names, there is little jovial laughter in Gormenghast castle, and the magnificent quality of the structure itself also drives home its bleak ambitions from the very beginning of the novel: "Gormenghast, that is, the main massing of the original stone, taken by itself would have displayed a certain ponderous architectural quality" (Peake, 1). This is immediately followed by a more mysterious description of the Tower of Flints, creating an environment of gothic anticipation and dark atmosphere: "This tower, patched unevenly with black ivy, arose like a mutilated finger from among the fists of knuckled masonry and pointed blasphemously at heaven" (ibid, 1). It is my argument that a combination of these powerful descriptions that showcase Peake's style, with descriptions such as 'uneven', 'black ivy', 'mutilated finger' that points 'blasphemously' cooperate with the characters and dialogue in what I propose to think of as a spiderweb narrative. The fundamental driving force in *Titus Groan* is as such entirely different from most narratives also placed in the fantasy genre because of the lack of guidance, the reliance on atmosphere as a dominant aesthetic aspect, and the abysmal pace of the plot. Anthony Burgess touches somewhat on these issues in his introduction to the trilogy and makes clear that the Titus novels are multilayered, difficult, and may as such result in various responses or, as I argue with regards to postcriticism, various potential experiences:

> It is a complex book in that it evokes many layers of response: the sophisticated pleasure in consummate artifice, the more naïve enjoyment proper to a rather archaic romance, horror which is qualified by disbelief, a kind of 'camp' titillation, self-indulgence in 'Gothic' atmosphere, a genuine aesthetic elation induced by language fine used. (Burgess, 4)

All these small moving parts, which together propel the plot forward, constitute a grand narrative spiderweb which readers must navigate. Although the connections between certain events and characters at first may seem hard to discern, the individual spiderweb strands are always revealed to be linked and the inter-character relationships remain profoundly important throughout the novel. I propose to think of *Titus Groan* in terms of this structural analogy since it helps explain the

construction of the narrative; the spiderweb narrative simultaneously serves as a metaphor for the novel's composition since it includes considerations of characters, events, and atmospheres.

The first major part of this puzzle concerns the characters themselves. The ensemble is a strange mix of mostly introverted eccentrics who exist in the spiderweb structure often in relation to a specific counterpart. While I want to highlight two of the main characters and their function, it is noteworthy that almost all the characters have an 'opposite' whose position in the narrative web plays a vital role in their individual journeys and the overall narrative design. In *Modern Fantasy* (1975), Colin N. Manlove touches on this when he observes that, "Elsewhere Peake seems to have thought largely in terms of pairs of opposite characters where there is little or no social relationship but rather a metaphoric unity of polar unlikes" (Manlove, 221). I want to take this a step further. The primary physical conflict in *Titus Groan* is between the skinny, proud Flay, who ends up fighting and killing the fat, obstreperous Swelter. Apathetic Gertrude stands in opposition to melancholic Sepulchrave. Their union is based neither on love nor mutual respect. Sourdust's opposite is revealed only after his tragic death with the emergence of Barquentine, his son. Clever Steerpike weaves his way around Fuchsia, creating a drama and the tiniest bit of romantic tension before the eventual tragic outcome. The twins, Cora and Clarice, a strange two-headed beast – social isolation and bitterness have compromised their mental faculties. Finally, the loquacious and scientific Prunesquallor, linked to his sexually repressed sister, Irma. She is primarily occupied with inconsequential thoughts of her social standing. This shows that tension in the novel is reliant on inter-character movement and relations, and while all characters in major or minor ways play a role, nobody's effect on the strings in the spiderweb is more profound than Steerpike and the infant Titus Groan himself.

The power struggle between Titus and Steerpike is not clear from the beginning. However, they remain the most important 'opposite' pair because of their significance to the plot and storyworld. Gormenghast Castle is an ancient structure with slow traditions that are even slower to change, and the birth of Titus Groan and the emergence of an ambitious social climbing Steerpike forces the narrative forward and sends shockwaves through the storyworld. Steerpike is an active change agent; his presence and interactions set several important events in motion. His direct involvement with many characters and locations in Gormenghast Castle has consequences for the entire ensemble. Titus, on the other hand, is a passive agent of change. Unsurprisingly, since Titus is an infant, his birth as the 77th Earl of Groan,

rather than his actions, makes him a significant character. All characters connected to the web are in some way(s) influenced by the birth of Titus, which has significant implications for the story. While the remaining characters all play important roles at various points in the narrative, none of them provide the driving force of Titus and Steerpike.

Turning first to Steerpike, his role in the narrative is important for many reasons beyond his function as an active agent of change. Through Steerpike, readers, together with Steerpike himself, explore much of the castle. Although this may seem reminiscent of the portal-quest structure mentioned above, the difference is lack of understanding for Steerpike (and thus readers), as well as the mysteriousness of multiple locations and events that *remain* unexplained. Steerpike's traversing of the castle early in the novel is also an important part of portraying the immensity and silent danger of Gormenghast. After Steerpike has fled the kitchen and is climbing outside trying to find shelter, we are afforded a broader view: "Indeed, all the various roof structures - parapet, turret and cornice - proved themselves to be of greater dimensions than he had anticipated" (Peake, 99-100). Furthermore, Steerpike's relentless quest for improved social standing and influence draws in several other characters. His ambition is visible from the very beginning when he is a displeased kitchen boy in Abiatha Swelter's merciless and grim kitchen. The scene is set, and there is revelry because the birth of Titus has been officially announced:

> As he stood below Mr Swelter, he had nothing but contempt for the man who had but yesterday struck him across the head. He could do nothing, however, except stay where he was, prodded and nudged from behind by the excited minions, and wait. (Peake, 27)

Although readers learn nothing of Steerpike's background and how he ended up as a kitchen boy, it is immediately clear that his impotence in this situation, especially as it concerns the ruthless chef Swelter, is to Steerpike a severe loss of dignity and entirely unacceptable. He decides to wait, but quickly finds a means of escape as he follows Mr. Flay through an open door and thus kickstarts multiple events. It is through early conversations between Steerpike and Flay that the style of the novel becomes evident. Peter Winnington touches on what I want to argue here, namely that characters seem "free" to roam the landscape of the storyworld and act according to their proclivities and self-defined motivations as opposed to being involuntarily compelled into action by external forces

> Having no preconception of the plot of *Titus Groan* […], Peake granted independence to his characters, allowing them to evolve as they would. Created with this attitude, uncensored works of art inevitably depict good and evil alike. Thus the foul Steerpike rose from the shadow regions of Peake's imagination. (Winnington, 2006, 174)

This independence that Peake granted his characters is unlike the worldbuilding strategy that other authors employ. For example, Tolkien famously did not have the entirety of *The Lord of the Rings* planned out beforehand and was for a very long time stuck in both the village of Bree and in front of the Mines of Moria. A few important characters changed along the way, such as Aragorn who originally was a hobbit, and Frodo, whose original name was Bingo. My point is that while neither Peake nor Tolkien had their entire *plots* mapped out, the worldbuilding strategies are still quite different and this is shown via the narrative spiderweb that characterizes Peake much more than Tolkien or Tolkienian fantasy. Tolkien had several locations in his imagination and his mythology, and he had specific ideas for what members of certain groups and cultures were like (such as the generally unremarkable hobbits; noble and brave men; mysterious but wise elves, and so on); Peake did not, nor did he include fantastical races or other overtly magical inventions. Interestingly, we get a glimpse into Peake's thought process from a note that originated around 1946 where he mused over the challenges of writing the story he had envisioned:

> 1) No initial conception of plot
> 2) The characters 'took their way'.
> 3) On the qui vive which writing for opportunities for the imagination to take its own course - as long as that course didn't hurt the mood of the book.
> 4) Hard to make the characters talk on the same scale that they look.
> 5) The scale of the book - its slow pace - & its fantasy give me the chance to say practically anything, or make the characters *do* practically anything - a kind of pantechnicum.
> 6) A third was cut out. Typed five times - each copy blackened. (Brogan, *The Gutters of Gormenghast*, 1046)

We might consider this list alongside parts of a letter Peake sent in which he describes his desire to create an 'imaginative world':

> What was I after anyway? I suppose, to create a world of my own in which those who belong to it and move in it come to life and never step outside into either this world of bus queues, ration-books, or even the Upper Ganges — or into another imaginative world[85] (Daniel, 2000, 41).

These two provide some insight into the thoughts that went into his worldbuilding, and, unsurprisingly, it was a time-consuming and difficult task. Peake's characterization is borne out of a different tradition and relies on a "poetic character" (Winnington, 174) rather than Tolkien's mythic characters. As such, the Machiavellian evil of Steerpike differs from Tolkienian evil and takes on the form of a ruthless

[85] Quoted in Estelle Daniel, *The Art of Gormenghast: The Making of a Television Fantasy*, London, England: HarperCollins, 2000, page 41.

social climber rather than a force of nature that seeks domination and control. The scale may therefore not seem epic, but for Gormenghast the effects of pulling on the narrative strings are felt strongly.

All characters have unusual mannerisms either pertaining to speech, movement, appearance (or, indeed, all these areas), and despite the generally Gothic tone of the novel there is much humor as well. Flay, an old servant, is hard of hearing, dreary, and profoundly laconic. Content to use as few words as possible, Flay tries to learn more about the strange youth who followed him from the kitchen, showcasing both Steerpike and Flay:

> ‘Name?’ said Mr Flay.
> ‘My name?’ asked Steerpike.
> ‘Your name, yes, your name. I know what my name is.’ Mr Flay put a knuckly hand on the banisters preparatory to mounting the stairs again, but waited, frowning over his shoulder, for the reply.
> ‘Steerpike sir,’ said the boy.
> ‘Queerpike, eh? eh?' said Flay.
> ‘No, Steerpike.’
> ‘What?’
> ‘Steerpike. Steerpike.’
> ‘What for?’
> ‘I beg your pardon?’
> ‘What for, eh? Two Squeertikes, two of you. Twice over. What for? One’s enough for a Swelter’s boy.’ (Peake, 34)

The strangeness of Flay’s thought and speech is illustrated by his unwillingness to produce more words than absolutely necessary. Often his breviloquent style makes Flay difficult for others to understand, but that is of little importance to Flay himself. Steerpike, being quick-witted and adaptable, is swiftly able to decipher what Flay is getting at after a few conversations such as the one quoted. Although Steerpike’s ruthlessness is not evident from the beginning of the novel, he progresses through interactions, exploration, and the storyworld – the spiderweb – in what becomes a characteristically deft manner, enabling him to identify choices which will aid him in his quest for power. As we follow Steerpike’s journey, we are afforded glances at the castle and some of its inner workings. For example, as Steerpike and Flay navigate the dark halls of Gormenghast, they happen upon a spy-hole through which Steerpike is able to spy on an intimate scene in which Lord Sepulchrave, Titus’ father and the current Earl, is talking with Doctor Prunesquallor who just helped deliver Titus.

> Young Steerpike glued his eye to the hole, keeping the heavy gold frame from swinging back with his shoulder. All at once he found himself contemplating a narrow-chested man with a shock of gray hair and glasses which magnified his eyes so that they filled the lenses up to their gold rims, when the central

> door opened, and a dark figure stole forth, closing the door behind him quietly, and with an air of the deepest dejection. (Peake, 35)

This section serves several purposes. It helps illustrate how the gloomy castle has numerous secrets and hidden mechanisms that produce a Gothic atmosphere. It also establishes Steerpike as knowledge-hungry, as well as offers an early glimpse of two major characters, Sepulchrave and Prunesquallor, who communicate in what they assume is a private setting. And thus the spiderweb functions – the web has been there all along, but now the strands are being pulled by Titus (passively), who is the object of Sepulchrave and Prunesquallor's conversation, and by Steerpike (actively), who greedily overhears their conversation and quickly tries to find a way to turn the situation to his advantage. In fact, it is here we first identify the insidious nature of Steerpike, and can trace his progress up the social hierarchy: from this octagonal room where he spies, up to Fuchsia's room where he ensnares and fascinates her, to Prunesquallor's apprentice, then on to Barquentine's apprentice, and eventually he becomes Master of Ritual. That is the path of Steerpike, the active agent of change, who forcefully drives the narrative forward by introducing conflict and change into Gormenghast. Although I have presented Steerpike as an antagonist, it is easy to identify him as a sympathetic hero initially, or at least not an evil character. Through the development of his character, we learn that his ambition is blind and ruthless and, as suggested by Rob Hindle, we turn to those who oppose him as the actual heroes:

> Ironically, as we see more of the world through his eyes, our admiration for him wanes. We observe his ambition, and the vulnerability of the castle and its inhabitants. The oppositions developed within the first two novels are principally drawn against Steerpike; and his role, as antagonist, means that, as his character grows darker, what he opposes - the castle, its tradition and its heir - become more acceptable. Though Steerpike is the initial heroic figure, he soon becomes too powerful; and the inhabitants of the castle, with their very human traits and failings, become the prey. As the resistance to Steerpike rises, those who resist become heroic: the Countess, Mr Flay, the Doctor and, of course, Titus. (Hindle, 10[86])

This is interesting because the development of Steerpike and his role within the web clearly influences multiple parts of the story and storyworld. When Steerpike is introduced as a suffering kitchen boy who is tormented by a brutish chef, sympathy is a natural response. When the scheming and manipulating starts, however, everything changes. It seems generous to characterize the Countess as heroic, but Hindle is correct that the weaker inhabitants in the castle (particularly Fuchsia and poor Sepulchrave who is driven mad by Steerpike's plots) become prey — an apt description for the spiderweb narrative analogy. The immersive potential of this narrative strategy hinges on both the atmosphere as well as the

[86] Hindle, R. (1996). Elysian Fields, Hadean Glooms: Titus Groan's mythical quest. *Peake Studies, 4*(4), 7-20.

characters themselves. It is a crucial element that these characters operate within this mysterious and vast castle landscape, and their operations and characteristics are continually influenced by their surroundings and the environments which enable their efforts.

Turning to Titus, this passive agent of change is a powerful force within the spiderweb narrative, but as an infant he has no agency; just his name, status, and the profound role he plays in the history and Rituals of Gormenghast. The Rituals play a significant role in the traditions and machinations of the castle, its consciousness, and its culture (more on this in the 'Worldbuilding' section), and it seems to me that the spiderweb in many ways is held together via the all-important Rituals. These ancient Rituals seem almost like an unseen hand of god, and no character, not even Steerpike, dares resist or counter them. The Rituals demand a strange allegiance and a significant part of Titus' role as a passive agent of change is explained via his importance in the Rituals. Furthermore, another function of these Rituals is that they serve as the connecting factor between characters. The few social events that occur are always linked to the Rituals, and a concrete example of the change that Titus brings to Gormenghast is Sepulchrave's surprising decision to have a breakfast in honor of Titus' birth. This breakfast will serve as one of the few occasions that will bring most of the castle's inhabitants into the same room. Sepulchrave announces his decision to old Nanny Slagg while in his library:

> 'Firstly', he said, 'I have had you come this way to tell you that I have decided upon a family gathering here in a week's time. I want you to inform those concerned. They will be surprised. That does not matter. They will come. You will tell the Countess. You will tell Fuchsia. You will also inform their Ladyships Cora and Clarice.' (Peake, 177)

This new event, a breakfast in honor of his son, is a new Ritual forced into being by the birth of Titus. While it is Sepulchrave who orders the actual event, in terms of the narrative spiderweb it is Titus who has disturbed the web and forced motion into the stillness of Gormenghast. It is a peculiar situation but narratively quite interesting. The incredible link between the Groans and Gormenghast is hinted at by Sepulchrave himself when he says that, "Without Titus the castle would have no future when I am gone" (ibid, 178). This seems a peculiar phrase; when juxtaposed with many of the problems driving, for example, George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, or other fantasy stories concerned with royalty, heirs, and power, ownerships may change and power balance may be shifted. Castles can easily change owners. Based on Sepulchrave's comment here, however, and from what we can discern

through other characters and the storyworld, Gormenghast is inextricably linked to the Groan line and vice versa.

Turning to the end of the novel, Titus has had relatively few appearances, but Sepulchrave is dead after Steerpike's evil plots, and Rottcodd observes a procession of people who have gathered for the official 'Earling' of Titus as the 77th Earl of Gormenghast. Rottcodd seems to quite literally feel the change that Titus has brought about, and which has resulted in a noticeable change in atmosphere as well as a general shift in narrative tone.

> And then, as he stood quite still, his hands clasped about the handle of the feather duster, the air about him quickened, and there was *another* change, *another* presence in the atmosphere. Somewhere, something had been shattered - something heavy as a great globe and brittle like glass; and it had been shattered, for the air swam freely and the tense, aching weight of the emptiness with its insistent drumming had lifted. He had heard nothing but he knew that he was no longer alone. The castle hand drawn breath." (Peake, 395, emphasis original)

Rarely has the castle seemed more alive and personified than in this instance where it draws breath, and it reflects the importance of Titus officially becoming Earl despite still being a baby. Once again Peake utilizes Gothic anticipation to enhance the literary atmosphere which is so crucial for the narrative to function and for immersion to take place. Titus is the main character, although this may seem a strange thing; however, Titus always exists either at the center or close to the center of events and thus directs the narrative spiderweb despite a lack of agency. This is a rare occurrence in fantasy literature, and to me underlines the fact that immersion in *Titus Groan* does not and cannot rely on a main character alone, but rather needs all elements of the web to function.

The characters must be able to carry the story and storyworld forward exactly because the plot is quite simple. In fact, very little usually happens, but through a combination of vivid characters and an atmosphere evoked in the text we are left with a gloomy, dark storyworld with strong potential for immersion precisely *because* of the atmosphere. Immersion also hinges on the success of the interplay between description, action, and atmosphere, and an evocative example is found in the confrontation between Flay and Swelter; their animosity is evident from the beginning of the novel and reaches a crescendo much later. The build-up to this moment has been slow, with the first encounter between Flay and Swelter taking place very early in the novel in a chapter aptly titled "First Blood". Swelter is mockingly introducing Flay to his kitchen boys and is intentionally mispronouncing Flay's name:

> That he [Flay], the first servant of Gormenghast - Lord Sepulchrave's confidant - should be introduced to Swelter's ten-a-penny kitchen boys was trying him too hard, and as he suddenly strode past the chef towards the door (for he was in any event due back with his lordship), he pulled the chain over his head and slashed the heavy brass links across the face of his taunter. (Peake, 80).

This damages their already strenuous relationship too much, and from this moment on, Swelter graduates from open mockery and taunting to silently planning and practicing for Flay's murder. Peake never allows fast-paced combat. Instead, the slow dramatic events are underscored by the scenes in which the conflict reaches its conclusion, and the beginning of the chapter "Blood at Midnight" provides exactly the kind of atmospheric stage-setting that we at this point have come to expect.

> Tonight the atmosphere was alive - a kind of life made even more palpable by the torpor of the air - and the ghastly summer air of Gormenghast. By day, the heat of the dead light; by darkness, the vomitings of the sick room. There was no escaping. The season had come down. (Peake, 328)

The noticeable effect of the adjectives once again proves important for the scene and the stylistics. The eerie connotations 'ghastly summer air', 'dead light', 'vomitings of the sick room', and 'no escaping' create a mood of anticipation entirely appropriate for a deathly climax. As such, it is a combination of the fact of the fight as well as the atmosphere in the worldbuilding that produce this unsettling scene. Atmosphere, violence, and anticipation are mixed together in a potent narrative concoction of immersive power. The weird and unsettling aspects of Flay and Swelter's hunt for each other and eventual combat is accentuated through dialogue as well, though the first instances of spoken words do not happen between characters; rather, it is Swelter who talks lovingly to his murderous cleaver with which he hopes to kill Flay and thus sate both his own but also the cleaver's hunger for blood.

> 'And I'll make you red and wet, my pretty thing,' he saw the dim bulk half turn with difficulty in the constricted space of the passageway and he caught the gleam of steel, and a moment later a portion of the shaft and the entire murderous head of the doubled-headed cleaver. Mr Swelter was nursing it in his arms as though he was suckling it. (ibid 330)

As Flay stalks and overhears what Swelter says to his weapon, the relationship between the cleaver and the man takes a strange turn. The absurdity of Swelter's nursing the weapon produces an atmosphere of madness and bloodlust, which affects Flay as well as the reader. Swelter continues his uncanny and bizarre soliloquy with the weapon in hand:

> 'Oh, so red and wet,' came the moss-soft voice again, 'and then we'll wipe you dry with a nice clean handkerchief. Would you like a silk one, my pretty? Would you? Before we polish you and tuck you up?' What, no answer? But you know what Papa's saying, don't you now? Of course, you do - after all

> that he has taught you. And why? Because you're such a quick, sharp baby - oh, such a sharp baby'. (ibid, 330)

Focalization is interesting here; while the situation is observed from Flay's point of view, Swelter's conversation clearly carries the dual purpose of portraying the menacing bloodlust of the chef as well as exploiting his spoken words (which may have been simply thought quietly were Swelter a more level-headed murderer) to present a scene with not only dark aesthetics but also grim, bizarre, and alien conversation. Swelter, it seems, has imbued his weapon with a personality, and exactly that phenomenon is characteristic of Peake, and an important part of the strange quality of Gormenghast. There is no overt magic but rather a sense of an *uncertain* magical presence or aura that permeates situations like this. Gertrude's relationship with the birds is similar in style, tone and structure, as well as Cora and Clarice's odd tree, and the entirely unexplained aging of the mysterious Bright Carvers.

Turning back to Flay and Swelter, Peake's dark storyworld offers a memorable moment where the spiderweb narrative has moved the two combatants into the wonderfully named Hall of Spiders. Here, the languid pace of the plot again serves to let readers immerse themselves in a situation where the eventual outcome of the fight takes a backseat. However, the scene's dark tone and strange aesthetics are an important part of the worldbuilding and narrative construction. Arguably, this shows Peake the painter and illustrator; the immovability of most scenes requires silent observation of a still image and getting lost in the colors, movements, and aesthetics of an exact point in time.

> The Hall itself had the effect of a drawing in black, dove-gray and silver ink. It had long been derelict. Fallen and half-fallen beams were leaning or lying at all angles and between these beams, joining one to another, hanging from the ceiling of the floor above (for most of the immediate welkin had fallen in), spreading in every direction taut or sagging, plunged in black shadow, glimmering in half-light, or flaming exquisitely with a kind of filigree and leprous brilliance where the moon fell unopposed upon them, the innumerable webs of the spiders filled the air. (Peake, 336)

First, we must note the deliberate use of colors, and even a direct mention of the scene having the effect 'of a drawing' — underscoring an earlier point about Peake's worldbuilding relying heavily on scenes that paint pictures and often have little movement in them. As in a Gothic drawing, Peake uses 'black', 'dove-gray', 'silver ink', and subsequent descriptions of the ruined and seemingly-abandoned room to create an effective backdrop for the drama that is about to unfold between Flay and Swelter. It is profoundly expressive, but with little movement. As is pointed out a few moments later, "These were the features of Death's battleground" (ibid, 336). Atmosphere continues to play a remarkable role, and I

want to highlight another quote from the same scene because it shows an awareness of the importance of spatiality as opposed to temporality, and the intangible quality of atmosphere is here almost within reach because we get a glimpse into Flay's perception of the room and of Swelter as the two navigate the terrifying Hall of Spiders in search of each other's blood:

> The spacial depths between the glittering threads of the web and the chef seemed abysmic and prodigious. He might have belonged to another realm. The Hall of Spiders yawned and shrank, the threads deceiving the eye, the distances, shifting, surging forward or crumbling away, or the illusory reflectings of the moon. (ibid, 336)

It is almost impossible to get a clear mental image of what is going on, and what the Hall of Spiders *actually* looks like; this seems a defining trait of Peake's atmosphere and is a recurring part of the novel's aesthetic quality. Rarely are we afforded great understanding of any infrastructure or the relationship between locations. It is clear that Gormenghast is huge, but just like the dark quality of the Hall of Spiders that seems hard to grasp with the mind's eye, so is the entirety of Gormenghast a ghostly shape that is carried by the feelings it evokes as readers are immersed. This is different from locations in novels, where readers must have a fairly precise understanding of how certain things look to grasp the plot and engage with the narrative.

The grotesque and bizarre continues with a tinge of humor as the Gothic scene moves slowly towards its conclusion. Swelter seems to have the upper hand in the Hall of Spiders, while Flay continually flees. In a fateful moment, with Swelter quite covered in cobweb which obscures his vision and hinders his movement somewhat, two spiders wander across his face, one of them positioning itself on one of his eyes. As Swelter is momentarily distracted by this unpleasantness, Flay sees his opportunity and severs Swelter's ear and stabs him in his behind with the sword he is carrying. The grotesque imagery characterizes both the fight, the setting, and Swelter himself as Peake continues:

> He wheeled about, and as he did so he experienced a white-hot pain in his left buttock and a swearing sensation at the side of his head. Screaming like a pig, he wheeled about, raising his finger to where his ear should have been. It had gone. Flay had swiped it off [...]. (ibid 340)

This is an example of Peake imbuing his storyworld with humorous grotesque: the combination of the horrific fight in a disturbing environment that nevertheless has Swelter suffer a wound to his behind and has him scream 'like a pig'; effective characterization that aptly gives us a reaction from Swelter as well as underlines his almost otherworldliness and monstrosity. The worldbuilding is thus influenced by the nightmarish quality of many scenes, and the fact that the plot works despite an abysmal pace is

explained via considerations of atmosphere. Instead of relying on empathy, where reader-reactions necessarily mirror those of the characters, *Titus Groan* employs the unusual (in the context of fantasy literature) strategy of relying on the singularity of specific scenes instead. To exemplify, I will again draw on conventional quest fantasy narratives. In these stories, when a main character experiences new events, locations, or meets new people, their reactions become a blueprint for how readers are also supposed to feel. When Harry Potter is astonished at certain magical shops, so are we; when Frodo and Sam are mesmerized after beholding Lóthlorien for the first time, so are we; when Paul Atreides is stunned at the sight of enormous sandworms, so are we. As such, Peake's narrative style is immersive (cf. Mendlesohn's immersive fantasy category), but with more reliance on atmosphere because characters seldom react very much to their immediate environment. Steerpike is the obvious exception but even he does not dwell on new experiences much, and is instead focused on his own goals.

The final moments of Swelter's life deserve a lengthy citation. The following illustrates the drawn-out conclusion where Peake affords us no dialogue but a confused and uncanny sequence of events where two opposites have struggled in the spiderweb (both literally and in my structural analogy):

> And then the horror happened. Swelter, following at high speed, had caught his toe at the raised lip of the opening, and unable to check his momentum, had avalanched himself into warm water. The cleaver sailed from his grasp and, circling in the moonlight, fell with a fluke of flame in the far, golden silence of the lake. As Swelter, face down and floundering like a sea-monster, struggled to find his feet, Flay reached him. [...] For a moment he [Swelter] was able to breathe, but whether this advantage was outbalanced by his having to see, towering above him, the dark, unpreaching body of his foe - with the hilt of the sword raised high over his head, both hands grasping it and the point directed at the base of his ribs, only he could know. The water about him was reddening and his eyes, like marbles of gristle, rolled in the moonlight as the sword plunged deeply. Flay did not trouble to withdraw it. (ibid, 343)

I have highlighted this sequence between Flay and Swelter because it touches on all the areas of the spiderweb narrative that I want to illustrate. Their animosity is old, and from the beginning of *Titus Groan* their hatred supplies a murderous tone that amplifies and supports the dark workings of Steerpike and the general mysteriousness of the castle as a whole. The quoted excerpts are meant to provide insight into how Peake's writing creates an atmosphere of dark aesthetic, and characters, their motivations, their dialogue and soliloquy, influence both worldbuilding and atmosphere creation by the strangeness and otherworldly tone of their very beings. Swelter, the mad 'sea-monster', is bested by Flay, and their violent conflict is one of the only openly murderous events in *Titus Groan*.

As the last example, I want to problematize characterization through mannerism and dialogue via Doctor Prunesquallor who plays an important, if peripheral, role in the story. He engages with all major characters, and his distinct personality contributes to the bizarre aesthetic of Gormenghast. However, unlike the Flay and Swelter conflict, Prunesquallor's main contribution is his dialogue. Prunesquallor's conversation with Sepulchrave in the scene where Steerpike observes them from his spy-hole, for instance, introduces Prunesquallor's unique speech pattern and distinctive mannerisms. First, we see it in a piece of illustrative dialogue:

> 'Prunesquallor,' he said.
> 'My Lord?' said the doctor, inclining his gray hayrick to the left.
> 'Satisfactory, Prunesquallor?'
> The doctor placed the tips of his fingers together. 'I am exceptionally gratified my lord, exceptionally. Indeed I am. Very, very much so; ha, ha, ha. Very, very much so.'
> [...]
> 'professionally, my lord, I am unspeakably satisfied, ha, ha, ha, ha, and socially, that is to say, er, as a gesture, ha, ha, I am over-awed. I am a proud fellow, my lord, ha, ha, ha, a very proud fellow.' (Peake, 36)

It is my argument that the peculiar and weird aspects of each single character contributes meaningfully to the success of the spiderweb narrative. The primary goal of such a narrative is constructing a storyworld where main characters help produce atmosphere by their navigation of the storyworld. This is markedly different from a story where an established storyworld is explored via characters with little knowledge who have a specific quest to complete. In the spiderweb narrative, both characters and storyworld carry affective qualities and potential whereas conventional fantasy can more readily rely on either depth of character(s) or depth and level of detail in the storyworld. Notable examples from *Titus Groan* include Rottcodd, the curator in the Hall of Bright Carvings, whose primary contribution is to the novel's atmosphere and general feel since he contributes rather little to any advancement of the plot itself.

The novel itself provides help with establishing Prunesquallor's character (as also happens for the other major characters), and though dialogue is the forefront of my current interest in Prunesquallor, his overall character needs to be taken into account. A man of science and well-regarded in Gormenghast society, he seems to exert a certain power despite his oddities.

> The laugh of Doctor Prunesquallor was part of his conversation and quite alarming when heard for the first time. It appeared to be out of control as though it were a part of his voice, a top-storey of his vocal range that only came into its own when the doctor laughed. There was something about it of wind

> whistling through high rafters and there was a good deal of the horse's whinny, with a touch of the curlew. When giving vent to it, the doctor's mouth would be practically immobile like the door of a cabinet left ajar. [...] The laugh was not necessarily connected with humour at all. It was simply a part of his conversation. (Peake, 36)

The eerie strangeness of Prunesquallor is mirrored in the descriptions and actions of the other characters. Some are more grounded, such as the pathetic Nanny Slagg, while others appear even stranger and more far-removed, like the ominous twin sisters Ladies Cora and Clarice or the imposing figure of Titus' mother, Gertrude. Many storyworlds aim for a high degree of clarity regarding their characters, but descriptions such as Prunesquallor's laugh having 'something about it of wind whistling through high rafters and there was a good deal of the horse's whinny' create an imaginative distance due to the sheer absurdity of the mannerism itself (with a strange laugh as part of his everyday conversation) and the quality of the whistling wind. Furthermore, Prunesquallor becomes Steerpike's employer after Steerpike has left the kitchen, and this new employment happens through Steerpike's ingenious conversation and manipulation of Prunesquallor's sister. As for Prunesquallor, he remains cautious about Steerpike, but is also fascinated. And, borrowing Kurt Vonnegut's immortal words: so it goes. The narrative spiderweb thus relies on description of scenes, dark atmosphere, and dialogue that with Peake's characteristic stylistics produce a narrative where character relations and their navigation of an eerily 'alive' environment serve as the very foundation of *Titus Groan*. These have been small examples of what I want to highlight as the endogenous nature of the spiderweb narrative construction. Since the spiderweb narrative relies so heavily on the production of atmosphere, I will now focus on this particular issue. Although it is quite intangible, I am confident that an examination of atmosphere will prove invaluable in the quest to understand the aesthetic quality and immersive potential of *Titus Groan*.

Atmosphere as Aesthetic Experience

The following section presents an analysis of the literary and immersive quality of Titus Groan by focusing on the atmosphere that the storyworld evokes. Conventional fantasy narratives focus on story, worldbuilding, or both, but often that leaves areas such as atmosphere ignored. There is a strong degree of literariness (both in the colloquial and formalist sense) in Gormenghast and Peake used adjective-laden, colorful, and eloquent language to imbue scenes with atmosphere that assists and influences the

overall storyworld, events, and characters. Titus Groan stands as a preeminent example of a storyworld that relies on its atmosphere to a very high degree. As such, it will showcase that atmospheres matter in worldbuilding and that atmospheres are a central immersive quality.

In Peter Winnington's "Introduction: The Critical Reception of Mervyn Peake's Titus Books[87]" from 1995, *Titus Groan* was criticized and lauded for its strange Gothic tone, fantastical elements and grotesque aesthetics. This is a central topic with *Titus Groan*. As an examination of critical works on Peake reveals, *Gormenghast* is quite resistant to ideological readings and political interpretations. That is because such readings focus on the 'what' instead of the 'how'. The postcritical focus on dispensing with the hermeneutics of suspicion is entirely relevant in this context and *Titus Groan* is a prime example of the types of texts that postcriticism may explore in rewarding ways. It would not be impossible to employ an ideological or suspicious lense and read Peake's work with certain political or cultural themes and topics in mind, but the Titus novels are not in any overt way concerned with probing issues like race, class, and sexuality; nor are the novels an obvious allegory, or an imaginative re-telling. For the sake of perspective, I consider Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) an example of imaginative storytelling set within an evocative and well-realized storyworld. A major aspect of the novel, which influences both the narrative and its worldbuilding, concerns the androgynous populace of the planet Gethen. Most readings of *The Left Hand of Darkness* would as a consequence necessarily have to address this gender-related topic. Peake's work seems to deal with only itself and does not engage in matters normally examined in literary scholarship. I do not in any way want to discount the validity and great importance of political readings generally, but my argument is that the narrative function and form of Peake's novels are most usefully explored via readings that focus on affective aspects and qualities. This is in line with what Gumbrecht argues, namely that atmospheres "affect the 'inner feelings' of readers in the way that weather and music do." (Gumbrecht, 2012, 5). These 'inner feelings' are a phenomenon connected to the idea of literary enchantment in Felski's work and important in contemporary scholarship on the effects of literature and the potential experiences of reading.

Writing about atmospheres in texts, Steen Christiansen argues that atmospheres are environmental, and that through atmospheres, "an entire aesthetic environment is evoked and made present for the reader."

[87] In Collected Articles on Mervyn Peake (2016)

(Christiansen, 2019, 21[88]) This is crucial in *Titus Groan* for a number of reasons. For example, the novel features a deceptively simple story. The eponymous main character is an infant, and the central conflicts revolve around inhabitants of the castle and not, as is often seen in fantasy literature, epic tales and quests that span and alter entire worlds. Drawing on Christiansen's argument (although he focuses on science fiction in his article), I want to further explore the weird and unsettling quality of the novel which reaches beyond the story and plot; here, Terence Cave's idea about the 'affordances of literature' (Cave, 2016) are helpful especially when considered alongside of what Tonino Griffero calls the 'cognitive unconscious' – which readers unconsciously attune to (Griffero, 2010, 48). This attunement (cf. Felski and postcriticism) is important because it deals with an area of reading experiences that can be difficult to articulate and belongs to a somewhat different category than reading for (phenomenological/experimental/factual) knowledge or reading for pleasure. As Christiansen identifies:

> There are many different terms currently used that cluster around this idea of atmosphere: mood, ambience, *stimmung*, resonance, and background feeling. A brief look at these different terms indicate that they all attempt at pointing towards the non-intentional, non-immediate aspects of experience (Christiansen, "Atmospheres", 4)

These notions generally point in the same direction, and since *Titus Groan* is not a plot driven novel, the idea of atmosphere helps identify the novel's immersive properties and style of worldbuilding. Juxtaposing Peake and Tolkien yet again proves an interesting experiment; Tolkien's background as a philologist with an interest in mythology significantly impacted his worldbuilding. Peake, on the other hand, was an artist and illustrator, and the tendency to paint literary scenes with a degree of purple eloquence, verbosity, and a fondness for adjectives helps Peake (excuse the tired cliché) 'paint a picture' of his scenes rather than letting external forces drive the narrative by forcing characters into specific or even unwanted situations. As such, *Titus Groan* differs markedly from the quest narrative tradition, as I have noted before. There are numerous examples of Peake writing scenes that seem taken out of a canvas; one such instance is the description of Fuchsia's bedroom and its windows, through which part of the surrounding landscape can be seen:

> The two triangular windows in the opposite wall gave upon the battlements where the master sculptors from the mud huts moved in silhouette across the sunset at the full moon of alternate months. Beyond

[88] Christiansen, S. L. Atmospheres and science fiction. Cogent Arts & Humanities, 6(1), 1-12. 2019

> the battlements the flat pastures spread and beyond the pastures were the Twisted Woods of thorn that climbed the ever steepening sides of Gormenghast mountain. (Peake, 51)

It remains difficult to capture the essence of *Titus Groan* with a few examples, and part of the trouble is that atmosphere, as noted, must be *experienced*. It is submerging oneself in the text that ideally results in the kind of necessary self-loss and immersion which makes *Titus Groan* work. Gumbrecht offers possible ways of articulating this special mode of engaging with texts and argues that reading for atmosphere means, "discovering sources of energy in artifacts and giving oneself over to them affectively and bodily – yielding to them and gesturing toward them" (Gumbrecht, 18). The process with which this happens in *Titus Groan* is interesting because there is no clear uniting storyline; rather, the novel itself and its atmosphere relies on the characters interacting with one another in sequence, and (re)acting to the world that exists. I dealt with this matter in greater detail in the "The Spiderweb Narrative" section of this chapter. Characters who are introduced early, such as Sourdust and Mr. Flay, have a strong emotional connection to Gormenghast castle because they have been there for a long time and, according to themselves, are important figures in the life of the castle. As such, what we experience through these characters is different compared to what we experience through the ambitious and machiavellian antagonist Steerpike whose origin remains unexplained. His inner dialogue, his ambitions, and his exploration of the castle offers greater insight into the workings, intricacies, look and feel of the immense castle and his particular reactions and explorations help develop an atmosphere by showcasing the strangeness of the storyworld. We feel the grandeur and complexity when Steerpike has escaped the kitchens and is trying to find a new place to hide:

> Arriving at last at the opposite side of the cluster, faint and dizzy with fatigue and emptiness and with the heat of the strengthening sun, he saw spread out before him in mountainous facades a crumbling panorama, a roofscape of Gormenghast, its crags and its stark walls of cliff pocked with nameless windows. Steerpike for a moment lost heart, finding himself in a region as barren as the moon, and he became suddenly desperate in his weakness, and falling on his knees retched violently. (Peake, 104)

Through the use of melancholic and somber descriptions that rely on words such as 'emptiness', 'crumbling panorama', 'nameless windows','barren', and 'desperate', Peake produces the Gothic feel that is often attributed to *Gormenghast*. It hardly needs mentioning that a dark, mostly-empty castle with strange inhabitants is also often found in the Gothic tradition, a topic I return to in the "Worldbuilding" section of this chapter. It seems evident that Peake's generous use of especially adjectives (which has also been noted by scholars such as Hugh Brogan, Ronald Binns, and Peter

Winnington) creates an evocative atmosphere. We see an example of this at the beginning of the "A Gold Ring for Titus" chapter, where Nannie Slagg carries infant Titus in her arms.

> Nannie Slagg entered, bearing in her arms the heir to the miles of rambling stone and mortar; to the Tower of Flints and the stagnant moat; to the angular mountains and the lime-green river where twelve years later he would be angling for the hideous fishes of his inheritance. (Peake, 43)

Not only are plenty of nouns accompanied by colorful adjectives, but it is in the expressiveness and aesthetics of these adjectives that we find part of the evocative power that creates the peculiar atmosphere I am trying to describe. More concerned with vivid scenes and depth of character than pace of plot, Peake uses rich vocabulary and descriptions like 'rambling stone', 'stagnant moat', 'angular mountains', 'lime-green rivers' and 'hideous fishes' to express aesthetics through stylistics. It is the same technique applied when describing characters like the Earl, where numerous situations, thoughts, and even movements, are described as 'melancholic', 'sad', or in similar fashion. In fact, we see this in the very first sentence where the Earl is briefly introduced as seen from Steerpike's point-of-view through the spy-hole early in the novel: "[…] the central door opened, and a dark figure stole forth, closing the door behind him quietly, and with an air of the deepest dejection" (Peake, 35). This 'deepest dejection', for example, thus influences character (personality, mannerisms), the storyworld (due to the prevalence of such expressive phrases), and atmosphere as the bridge between reader and storyworld. Manlove briefly touches on the same topic when he notes the effect of extreme attention to detail and description in *Titus Groan*:

> The slow-moving, dense character of the book is also produced by the enormous and painstaking detail, the proportion of description to action. Lengthy and leisured description of people's appearance, the weather, Sepulchrave's library (202-5), Pentecost the gardener's apple-trees (99-100), Fuchsia's rooms (77-85), the roofs of the castle (129-45), Sourdust's beribboned skeleton (888) or Sepulchrave's breakfast table (62-3): description meant solely to thicken our sense of Gormenghast, and in so doing to add to the feeling of the stasis which Steerpike and change are challenging. (*Modern Fantasy*, 229)

The two mentions of Sepulchrave are fitting because most of the descriptions around Sepulchrave exemplify how production of atmosphere relies on dialogue, description of character and environment, and even character progression. Manlove's comment concerning how the listed elements 'thicken our sense' of Gormenghast is a central issue; in part because of the storyworld itself, and in part because of how the action and progression of the characters in the narrative spiderweb produces atmosphere. In the previous section, I highlighted the grim development of Flay and Swelter's bad blood and hostility in

order to show how the spiderweb narrative functions, and what role the environment plays. Sepulchrave's character, on the other hand, showcases the importance of atmosphere within the storyworld by adding a gruesome outcome to the actions of Steerpike who manipulated twins Cora and Clarice into burning down Sepulchrave's library, which leads him inevitably and quickly towards madness. As I have commented on already, adjectives such as 'dejected' and 'melancholic' follow Sepulchrave and add an evocative depth to both character and storyworld. This is a vital point to note because atmosphere may inaccurately be thought of to *only* influence the overall narrative while in fact atmosphere has significance for several elements of a story and storyworld construction. To clarify, atmosphere functions on multiple levels in a narrative and may be captured in brief *moments* in the narrative. A macro level describes the overall atmospheric feel and tone of a novel; on a micro level atmosphere influences single scenes and moments, and as such the effect of atmosphere may vary depending on level. This is also why single words may cause a reaction or association that produces atmosphere just as entire (sub)genres may rely on specific and recognizable atmospheres. For example, evocative words like 'ichor' may produce an atmosphere often associated with grim fantasy, while Lovecraftian cosmic horror narratives show commonalities in storyworld atmospheres across many texts in the genre.

Sepulchrave's mental faculties are in severe decline after the loss of his library; indeed, we can almost pinpoint the precise moment when the Earl is lost and his decline starts. Surrounded by fire, he realizes that his beloved library is vanishing before his eyes and his mind struggles to handle the sheer level of despair that now seems all but certain:

> His home of books was on fire. His life was threatened, and he stood quite still. His sensitive mind had ceased to function, for it had played so long in a world of abstract philosophies that this other world of practical and sudden action had deranged its structure. The ritual which his body had had to perform for fifty years had been no preparation for the unexpected. (Peake, 248-9)

This invasive change in Sepulchrave's circumstances results in major consequences for the storyworld and Sepulchrave's character. Later, the grimness becomes apparent in an unsettling scene between the Earl and his daughter, Fuchsia. The following offers insight into how atmosphere invariably becomes part of a scene and consequently part of the storyworld as Fuchsia is drawn into Sepulchrave's madness and tries to navigate these new circumstances. Although the Earl is now more of a father than he has been before, the scene is not happy; the mad Sepulchrave is 'rebuilding' his library with sticks and pine

cones with help from Fuchsia who empathetically humors him. In this next passage, we understand and empathize with Fuchsia's confusion and aversion but at the same time appreciate the connection she nevertheless feels with her father.

> 'That's it, that's it,' came the melancholy voice. 'Now we have space for the Sonian Poets. Have you the books ready - little daughter?'
> Fuchsia swung her head up, and her eyes fastened upon her father. He had never spoken to her in that way - she had never before heard that tone of love in his voice. Chilled by the horror of his growing madness, she had yet been filled with a compassion she had never known, but now there was more than compassion within her, there was released, of a sudden, a warm jet of love for the huddled figure whose long pale hand rested upon his knees, whose voice sounded so quiet and so thoughtful. 'Yes, father, I've got the books ready' [...] (Peake, 270)

Sepulchrave is 'rebuilding' the library in his mind, and playing with a few insignificant branches is seemingly enough for him to believe that everything is in good order. Peake's use of humor to underscore the Gothic tone of *Titus Groan* and to add another atmospheric level to the current scene is illustrated beautifully when it is revealed that simple pine cones have replaced books in his mind.

> [...] 'do you want me to put them on the shelves?'
> She turned a heap of pine cones which had been gathered. 'Yes, I am ready,' he replied after a pause that was filled with the silence of the wood. 'But one by one. One by one. We shall stock three shelves tonight. Three of my long, rare shelves.'
> 'Yes, father'.
> The silence of the high pines drugged the air. (ibid, 271)

The typical Peake style where action is portrayed (or narrated) as a single painting-like scene is evident here. Describing it as grotesque seems appropriate given the focus on madness, the odd pine cones, and Fuchsia's reaction and incomprehension concerning her father. As Fuchsia and Sepulchrave share one of their rare moments in the story, we can use atmosphere to explain and understand the workings of this scene, and the effect is enhanced as we learn more about the Earl's sad fate later in the novel. First, however, a crucial moment occurs after the pinecones have been pushed around; Sepulchrave finally succumbs, and Fuchsia seems unable to get her father's attention. As she notices that his eyes have lost focus we are afforded a strange piece of dialogue:

> 'What is it,' she said. 'Oh father! father! what is it?'
> 'I am not your father,' he replied. 'Have you no knowledge of me?' And as he grinned his black eyes widened and in either eye there burned a star, and as the stars grew greater his fingers curled. 'I live in the Tower of Flints,' he cried. 'I am the death-owl.' (ibid, 272)

This unexplained death-owl persona foreshadows events to come, and the fact that nothing further is explained about the owls enhances the unsettling atmosphere of this new identity. The narrative

function of Sepulchrave's descent is not uncommon or surprising; casualties are necessary to underline the evil nature of Steerpike. However, the form it takes is crucial because Sepulchrave's life does not merely end in madness and death but continually influences the storyworld atmosphere throughout his decline. In the following, I will highlight several important sections that detail the Earl's path to show examples of atmospheric and evocative areas in the novel.

The following passage is taken from the latter part of *Titus Groan* and shows the final stages of Sepulchrave's journey. The scene starts, quite appropriately, close to the Hall of Spiders and occurs during "Blood at Midnight", the chapter in which Flay and Swelter fight. As in the rest of the spiderweb narrative, Sepulchrave is here on the fringes of the action but appears in the scene to add a dimension of strange drama. His madness is progressing after the loss of his library and his dialogue seems grim and barely comprehensible. Flay overhears a voice of 'unutterable mournfulness', and Sepulchrave's pitiful and tragic fate seems all but certain.

> The eyes stared through Mr Flay and through the dark wall beyond and on and on through a world of endless rain. 'Good-bye,' said the voice. 'It is all one. Why break the heart that never beat from love? We do not know, sweet girl; the arras hangs: it is so far; so far away, dark daughter. Ah no - not that long shelf - not that long shelf: it is his lifework that the fires are eating. All's one. Good-bye… good-bye'. (Ibid, 334)

A world of 'endless rain' is an expression of such profound despair and anguish that it can only denote a man at the precipice of destruction. Sepulchrave's bleak voice has given up, and the references to the fire leave no doubt as to the cause of his decline. As we have learned after the fateful fire in the library, Sepulchrave has assumed the identity of a 'death owl'. The strange atmosphere of the above quote is stressed when considered in light of his stream-of-consciousness in "The Reveries" chapter where he is consumed with odd thoughts:

> [...] all my thoughts in a shroud of numberless feathers for they have been there so long and so long in the cold hollow throat of the Tower and they will be there for ever for there can be no ending to the owls whose child I am to the great owls whose infant and disciple I shall be so that I am forgetting all things and will be taken into the immemorial darkness far away among the shadows of the Groans and my heartache will be no more and my dreams and thoughts no more [...]. (Ibid, 314)

As I have stressed in the spiderweb narrative section, dialogue, descriptions, and action all serve the purpose of evoking atmosphere and driving the story forward. This stream-of-consciousness adds a new element to the narrative technique that contributes to the novel's density but also, in the case of Sepulchrave, effectively showcases his thought process and madness. Stream-of-consciousness is

meant to provide insight into a character's inner life, but what I am interested in here is how both narrative and atmosphere are suddenly changed by adding a new storytelling technique; the life and character of Sepulchrave have taken on a new function that focuses on a devolution of his mental faculties that fits well with the general gloomy aesthetics of *Titus Groan* at this point.

We are afforded a deeply evocative soliloquy that touches on the important interaction between atmosphere and storyworld, influencing aesthetics and storyworld tone. In the following passage, Sepulchrave is in his final moments and the combination of his speech and its ominous contents make his exit a somber affair.

> His accents were infinitely melancholy as he whispered: 'Blood, blood, and blood and blood, for you, the muffled, all, all for you and I am on my way, with broken branches. She was not mine. Her hair is red as ferns. She was not mine. Mice, mice; the towers crumble - flames are swarmers. There is no swarmer like the nimble flame; and all is over. Good-bye… good-bye. It is all one, for ever, ice and fever. Oh, weariest lover - it will not come again. Be quiet now. Hush, then, and do your will. The moon is always; and you will find them at the mouths of warrens. Great wings shall come, great silent, silent wings… good-bye, All's one. All's one. All's one. (ibid, 334-5)

As Gumbrecht argues, "the objective is to follow configurations of atmosphere and mood in order to encounter otherness in intense and intimate ways" (Gumbrecht, 13). A melancholic Earl, unloved by his wife, burdened by arbitrary Rituals whose significance nobody remembers, who lost his beloved library, was driven to madness, and replaced his own personality with that of an owl is certainly an intense encounter with 'otherness', and this is where both Peake and speculative fiction shine. Human emotions are varied and complicated enough on their own, which is presumably part of the reason why Gumbrecht does not deal with speculative fiction[89], but I argue that the perspective gained through these intense encounters placed in a strange and foreign environment simply enhances the atmosphere that Gumbrecht also highlights. Additionally, atmosphere graduates from being a tool for encountering otherness to also shaping and influencing storyworld construction and aesthetics. This, in turn, helps us understand the immersive potential of speculative fiction by pinpointing an intangible but important element of literature that drives immersion in narratives that rely on atmosphere and worldbuilding more than a plot.

Next, Sepulchrave's owl-fate becomes clear sometime later as Flay encounters the Earl and shudders as he "remembered the cry of an owl" (Peake, 344) in place of the Earl's voice. Sepulchrave seemingly

[89] Gumbrecht is primarily concerned with the notions of presence, immediacy, and objectivity

wants to offer Swelter's dead body to the owls as a sort of gift. The gruesome fact of the bloody murder is combined with the Earl's madness in a dark conclusion that introduces another quasi-Gothic element in the shape of terrifying owls.

> 'This is my hour, Flay. You must go from here, Mr Flay. You must go away. This is the hour of my reincarnation. I must be alone with him. That you killed him is your glory. That I can take him to *them* is mine. [...] When he [Flay] stopped, the Earl was dragging the glistening thing behind him and was at the time-eaten opening at the base of the Tower. [...] Everything was moving round and round - the Tower, the pines, the corpse, the moon, and even the inhuman cry of pain that leapt from the Tower's throat into the night - the cry, not of an owl, but of a man about to die. As it echoed and echoed, the lank and exhausted servant fell fainting in his tracks, while the sky about the Tower became white with the lit bodies of circling owls, and the entrance to the Tower filled with a great weight of feathers, beaks and talons as the devouring of the two incongruous remains proceeded. (ibid 345)

Sepulchrave's reincarnation is meant quite literally as he never returns to his former being; the unsettling and Gothic is combined to enable Sepulchrave to transform in the narrative because of his madness. The whole scene is shrouded in a dark and surprisingly violent atmosphere of death and despair. The pace of the quoted scene is quite rapid, which is noteworthy because this rapidity is rare with Peake, and Sepulchrave's death is final as we perceive the change in his cry 'not of an owl, but of a man about to die' — and this marks the end of the Earl and consequently a new chapter for Titus as he now has to take on the mantle as the 77th Earl of Groan despite the fact that he is still an infant.

I have highlighted parts of Sepulchrave's descent into madness. First, I chose to focus on Sepulchrave because the combination of his unsettling scenes, through both stylistics and narrative events, produce an atmosphere that for *Titus Groan* impacts the storyworld in a profound manner that is representative of how atmosphere production also generally works in the novel. Next, the function within the narrative is itself important because the Earl remains a critical character despite the fact that he exists on the fringes of the spiderweb narrative. The spiderweb narrative is useful for explaining character movement and the spatial dimension of the novel, but the added element of atmosphere helps establish that speculative fiction may rely on a number of literary devices and techniques in order to create a particular storyworld with a unique aesthetic quality which enhances or promotes immersion. What exactly drives immersion may differ greatly between novels, but it is my contention that *Titus Groan* is a story where immersion in the storyworld more than the story is a factor and this is precisely possible because of its atmosphere. In the next section, I will delve into the worldbuilding aspect of *Titus Groan*; this area is also impacted by atmosphere, but unlike conventional fantasy stories where

immersion into the storyworld itself is entirely possible without considerations about atmosphere, the situation in *Titus Groan* is somewhat different. Highlighting how (parts of the) worldbuilding functions will thus complement the preceding sections by focusing on narrative construction and the building blocks of the storyworld.

Worldbuilding in *Titus Groan*

In this section, I will present an analysis of Peake's worldbuilding and focus primarily on Mark J. P. Wolf's concepts of invention, completeness, and consistency. This should prove a useful endeavor for two reasons. Firstly, Wolf's terms are generally helpful for describing underlying mechanisms of a storyworld and analyzing some of a storyworld's narrative building blocks. Secondly, Wolf's terms offer a starting point that, when juxtaposed with atmosphere, form a more well-rounded worldbuilding analysis than a focus on *only* Wolf's term would otherwise have yielded. An argument could be made for the case that invention, completeness and consistency within a storyworld should simply be *expected* to be fulfilled, i.e. all successful invented worlds will satisfy the requirements proposed within these categories to some degree. However, I find Wolf's terms effective because understanding the foundation of a storyworld in turn makes understanding more abstract concepts like atmosphere easier since they are put into context, and both atmosphere and worldbuilding remain important for the storyworld and the narrative individually as well as together. There are still plenty of worldbuilding areas and techniques that *Building Imaginary Worlds* does not account for, and as such this section of my chapter, especially because I focus on an unconventional storyworld, will put Wolf's term to the test, show their limits, and unravel how multiple parts of worldbuilding interact in a storyworld.

Gormenghast is a closed storyworld. This simple observation will drive much of the following analysis and is a significant part of the reason why *Gormenghast* is both challenging but also interesting in the context of fantasy literature. I have pointed out the Gothic tone and aesthetic of the novel several times, and the point is further stressed when considering *Titus Groan* as similar in storyworld style to Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) where an almost sentient Gothic structure and style drives the narrative. Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) exists in the same tradition, as well as Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) in which Castle Dracula fulfils almost the same narrative and

storyworld function as Gormenghast does in *Titus Groan*, i.e. it contains the narrative and serves as the backdrop to every important event in the plot. We may also briefly consider the characters in light of the Gothic tradition. Gormenghast inhabitants live and die in isolation — willingly or not. This, it seems to me, casts a shadow over their existence; Gormenghast, the single unifying factor in the lives of all the characters, *must* go on and *will* endure. The castle is a fixed stature in both the lives and minds of all the characters, and only in the second and third books, *Gormenghast* and *Titus Alone*, does Titus venture beyond the walls of Gormenghast castle. In *Titus Groan*, none of the characters envision a world beyond the crumbling towers and gray walls. Benjamin J. Robertson briefly deals with Gormenghast in his article "Backstory" in *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* and touches on why the characters are unable to comment on their world but also why they do not feel the need to. "Because Sepulchrave and most of the other characters in the novel cannot distance themselves from their surroundings, they are never able to explain their world to anyone (or even capable of contemplating doing so) (Robertson, *Routledge Companion,* 41). The observation that the characters cannot 'distance themselves', both physically and emotionally, is apt and best understood when considering the fantasy genre in a broad sense. In the quest-structure narrative, characters necessarily reflect on their surroundings because these often change. Often readers will follow characters into unexplored territory; this does not happen in *Gormenghast*. Only Steerpike, arguably, navigates the castle in an exploratory manner, but even he is 'of' the castle in the sense that, as far as readers know, he has never been anywhere else. The rest of the ensemble seem to consider Gormenghast their entire world, with its unshakable traditions and facts of life that are as true and unchangeable as the grim setting of the sun, physical hunger, and the inevitability of death. It bears mentioning that Peake's novel is not a conventional Gothic text; the modernist qualities preclude such a grouping. However, the Gothic aesthetic and permeating sense of unsettling anticipation, as well as the general uncertainty concerning the castle itself, impacts the landscape of the narrative as well as the plot itself and is a relevant reason why considering worldbuilding more specifically is crucial for unlocking the inner worldbuilding workings and qualities of the novel.

Titus Groan exemplifies how the storyworld and its characters act in the storyworld as if everything in it is normal and natural. Because our real world remains the prototype for fantasy worlds, which Marie-Laure Ryan identified as the principle of minimal departure, the Gormenghast storyworld necessarily

retains features that are recognizable. As Ryan argues, the storyworld must be assumed to function as our real world unless otherwise specified in the text[90] (Ryan, 51). Interestingly, several parts of the Gormenghast storyworld do indeed function as our own; for example, the storyworld employs the same calendar months as the primary world, and while its fictional elements are Gothic, grotesque, and weird, they rarely venture into the purely magical. This is a significant reason why Peake's novels are often described with terms from other genres (grotesque, weird, unsettling, Gothic) while also being labeled a fantasy story — multiple textual and generic elements are necessary in order to explain Peake in any satisfactory manner. I do not argue that placing Peake in a textual tradition is a fruitful endeavor in and of itself, but in the context of aesthetics and storyworld construction it is useful to contextualize for the sake of perspective. While not entirely exhaustive, Wolf's terms (invention, completeness, consistency) help analyze most storyworlds and are useful for identifying the foundations of a given storyworld. As is hopefully clear at this stage, it is my position that atmosphere and potential experiences — both areas that Wolf does not include in his book — are crucial factors when trying to understand *Titus Groan*. In order to provide a comprehensive picture of the entirety of *Titus Groan*, the following section will provide considerations about invention, completeness, and consistency while focusing on specific parts of *Titus Groan*. All three, together with the spiderweb narrative and atmosphere, have profound impact on the immersive potential of both *Titus Groan* specifically and storyworld texts generally and as such serve the purpose of clarifying the underlying textual strategies that drive immersion.

Invention

While identifying the areas that an author has invented in their storyworld is usually not difficult, *Titus Groan* proves resistant and subversive. In fact, one of the major reasons why it is possible to argue that the *Gormenghast* novels are not fantasy novels is exactly because of the relatively low degree of pure invention. The distance (cf. Ryan's principle of minimal departure) is small, and while Gormenghast castle and its surrounding environment are naturally fictitious inventions, they are not comparable in form, style, or scale to other fantasy novels that invent entire continents, land masses, magic systems, new species and other creatures. Indeed, Peake may be more easily grouped with modernist writers whose narratives have little momentum and a spatial rather than a temporal form. For example, texts

[90] A common example is gravity. Unless otherwise noted, readers can safely assume that gravity functions in the storyworld as it does in our real world

such as Joyce's *Ulysses* (1920) and Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) are narratives comparable in style where little time passes in quite lengthy books. In the *Gormenghast* trilogy, there exists some temporal dimension between the three books as Titus ages significantly in the interim; however, the narrative form of *Titus Groan* still marks it as a unique fantasy text not least because Peake seemingly has no interest in time, but rather spends page upon page on establishing visual content. Earlier, I highlighted how many of Peake's scenes in the Titus novels are constructed almost like a painting; specific scenes are 'painted' in the textual landscape until we move on to the next scene. This spatial element is a narrative strategy that sets Peake apart from other fantasy authors, and significantly influences worldbuilding as well because the strategies and techniques generally defined by Wolf and other theorists often do not quite capture this component. Narrative momentum via the temporal dimension commonly found in conventional fantasy narratives are a driving force that positively influences both plot progression and storyworld exploration. *Titus Groan* deviates from that style, and the spatial aspect is an important reason why; it arguably even causes an unfavorable reaction that I want to explore via Felski's notion of *shock.*

It may seem somewhat out of place to connect Felski's ideas on literary shock in a section devoted to inventions in worldbuilding, but it is my (perhaps experimental) argument that the inventions in the storyworld, as well as the inventions in the narrative technique, result in a form of shock that Felski is interested in as well. In *Uses of Literature* (2008), the idea of shock takes on a more tangible nature and Felski seems mostly concerned with visceral experiences evoked via violence. Some of her primary examples include Witold Gombrowicz's *Pornografia* (1960), Yukio Mishima's *The Sailor Who Fell From Grace With the Sea* (1963), and the Greek tragedy *The Bacchae* (405 BC). These texts, for Felski, evoke particular reactions and she tries to define shock as unique from similar terms with long scholarly traditions such as transgression, trauma, defamiliarization, dislocation, self-shattering, and the romantic sublime.

> Shock, then, names a reaction to what is startling, painful, even horrifying. Applied to literary texts, it connotes something more brusque and brutal than, for example, the idea of *Stoss* advanced by Heidegger: the claim that what defines an artwork is its blow to consciousness, its rupturing of familiar frames of reference. (Felski, 105).

I propose to add another dimension to this idea of shock. I agree entirely with her arguments concerning art's ability to disturb via use of explosive and violent depictions, but there may be a

'softer' side to shock that enables us to describe shocking moments in a narrative's development or construction that disturb our ideas of what, in the context of narratives, is familiar. I consider this idea useful because it explains partly why *Titus Groan* is a unique fantasy novel while *remaining* a fantasy novel. It shocks our expectations of what we are 'supposed' to find in such a work, and this may cause an involuntary reaction in readers. There is a degree of inventiveness in the narrative construction (cf. the spiderweb narrative and focus on atmosphere) that creates tension within the fantasy tradition. This tension may enrapture, but the 'shock' value also potentially results in negative defamiliarization that never recovers. By negative defamiliarization, I refer specifically to genre expectations and assumptions that are countered, and this may prove detrimental to some readers — which might explain part of the reason(s) why Peake has not enjoyed popular success on the same level as other authors. The idea of shock in this context goes beyond mere subversion of expectations (although subversion is often relevant when discussing Peake). The modernist aspects of Peake's work contribute to the narrative-shock, and in fantasy literature this may have adverse consequences. In her conclusion, Felski rightly notes how this idea of shock is a matter of balance; too little shock will be harmless or unnoticeable; too much may cause irreparable harm:

> Conversely, if shock-effects are ratcheted up too high, they are likely to trigger intense waves of revulsion or indignation that drive audiences out of theaters or cause them to slam shut their books, cutting off all further engagement with the work of art. (Felski, *Uses*, 130)

Although the topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation, Felski's description fits the general reactions to the third Titus book, *Titus Alone*. In this book there are numerous things that clash with usual genre expectations and cause an often unexpected surprise with unfortunate consequences for immersion. This, then, becomes one example of what Felski is arguing; the shock effect is indeed perhaps 'ratcheted up too high' in *Titus Alone*. In both *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*, however, this is not the case and the intensity of the shock does not cause any such breaks.

Some of the most interesting inventions in *Titus Groan* are the strange cultural traditions that influence the enigmatic rituals which lord Sepulchrave must adhere to. Mark J. P. Wolf divided his invention-category into smaller sub-categories, and one of them concerns exactly the cultural realm: "The most changes to be found are in the next level, the *cultural* realm, which consists of all things made by humans (or other creatures), and in which new objects, artifacts, technologies, customs, institutions, ideas, and so forth appear" (Wolf, 35). Additionally, it is in this cultural realm of invention that *Titus*

Groan employs an immersive worldbuilding strategy that consists of not divulging the origin, purpose, requirements, or anything else related to these rituals. I argue that this strategy is immersive because it enhances the atmosphere of the novel, and enables the storyworld to present what almost appears as a mystery. This mystery functions in a different way than allusions and references often do in fantasy worldbuilding; typically, in an attempt to artificially broaden the scope of a storyworld, a common worldbuilding strategy includes briefly mentioning ages/events from a distant past and using these as either points of references, or as explanations for *current* events. Notable examples include the Age of Legends from Jordan's *Wheel of Time;* the Age of Heroes and the Long Night from Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*; and the First and Second Ages in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. The degree of invention in these areas, as well as their role in the narrative, naturally differs significantly. Turning to the rituals in *Titus Groan*, we must also note that it is not the rituals themselves that are important per se, but rather the fact that they exist and what role they play for specifically Sepulchrave and Titus. The rituals are part of both the invented (cultural) realm of the novel but also a part in the spiderweb narrative as they influence the characters and their mood as well as atmosphere. It is clear from the beginning that the weight and monotony of the rituals are a burden for Sepulchrave which contribute to his despondent and melancholic manner. The weirdness and almost arbitrary rigidness of the inventions in the cultural realm in *Gormenghast* is presented in an early chapter where Sepulchrave himself is introduced. In this particular situation, Sepulchrave is attended by Sourdust, the Master of Ritual, who oversees that the rituals are carried out in accordance with unexplained rules and tradition:

> The second tome [of rituals] was full of blank pages and was entirely symbolic, while the third was a mass of cross references. If, for instance, his lordship, Sepulchrave, the present Earl of Groan, had been three inches shorter, the costumes, gestures and even the routes would have differed from the ones described in the first tome, and from the enormous library, another volume would have had to have been chosen which would have applied. (Peake, 50)

Melancholic Sepulchrave is weighed down by the responsibilities that come with his station, and while it is made clear that these traditions are extremely important — not a single character throughout the novel dares disturb or question them — we are never afforded to learn why they are important or how it all started, nor what would happen in the presumably disastrous event that protocol is broken and a ritual not carried out according to hidden rules and firm tradition whose origins appear long forgotten.

A beautiful passage early in *Titus Groan* captures the imaginative descriptions of Sepulchrave. These also impact both worldbuilding and atmosphere. Peake cleverly uses character descriptions to portray

the tone of a scene and characters. In other words, readers are often afforded very little information about what certain characters look like beyond fairly superficial descriptions. It does not tell us a lot, for example, that the Countess is fat or that Steerpike is young. Similarly, the following reveals more about Sepulchrave's character and the mood surrounding him than anything else:

> How could he *love* this place? He was a part of it. He could not imagine a world outside it; and the idea of loving Gormenghast would have shocked him. To have asked him of his feelings for his hereditary home would be like asking a man what his feelings were towards his own hand or his own throat. But his lordship remembered the cherubs in the ceiling. (Peake, 46, emphasis original)

As we can see, Sepulchrave being 'part of' the castle is not a role or an unhappy job but a fixed part of his identity that he has not thought to question. Questioning Gormenghast Castle and its workings does not even occur to any of the characters. In scenes like these, the unchangeability and fixed nature of Gormenghast becomes evident, and it illustrates the importance of the castle within the storyworld. It is not uncommon that certain places within a storyworld are important for characters, plot, or both, but the degree to which it happens in *Titus Groan* is noteworthy. The castle becomes more of an actor and a vital element of the storyworld itself.

As per my earlier comments about how *Gormenghast* is a closed world in which most of the inhabitants cannot imagine a different world, the above quote shows the level of confusion that Sepulchrave feels at the mere notion of life outside of Gormenghast. This unexplained and inherent allegiance or connection to Gormenghast binds the characters together in this self-enclosed storyworld. The importance of traditions and law is stressed in a conversation between the new Master of Rituals, Barquentine, and young Steerpike, who is currying favor.

> 'What are those books, boy?' shouted Barquentine, returning the handle of his crutch to his armpit. 'By my head of skin, boy, what are they?'
> 'They are the Law,' said Steerpike.
> With four stumps of the crutch the old man was below him again and sluicing him with his hot wet eyes. 'By the blind powers, it's the truth,' he said. He cleared his throat. 'Don't stand there staring. What is Law? Answer me, curse you!'
> Steerpike replied without a moment's consideration but with the worm of his guile like a bait on the hook of his brain: 'Destiny, sir. Destiny.' Vacant, trite and nebulous as was the reply, it was of the right kind. Steerpike knew this. The old man was aware of only one virtue - Obedience to Tradition. The destiny of the Groans. The law of Gormenghast. (Peake, 354)

This section is representative of similar instances where the importance of tradition and the Groan line is stressed by other characters, and these traditions, then, fulfill a role in the narrative that in other

fantasy stories may be occupied by magic or external forces. Having laws and traditions is not unique to the storyworld of *Gormenghast*, but the role these play, the vagueness with which they are described, the arbitrariness of their nature, and the sense of history and time they evoke are all important factors in establishing Gormenghast as not just a castle, but a castle inextricably linked with the Groan line.

It is remarkable that almost the entire storyworld and the inventions therein exist in a single castle, and its significance for the characters, their lives and identity is further stressed when Flay is banished by the Countess Gertrude. The situation occurs after Peake shows his particular brand of humor; Flay, after being angered by Steerpike who mocked the Earl, throws a cat at him.

> With a hoarse, broken cry, Flay, his head reddening with wrath at this insult to his master, staggers to the divan and, shooting out a gaunt hand, plucks a cat by its head from the snowy hill and hurls it at his tormentor. As this happens a cloaked and heavy woman enters the room. (Peake, 295)

The Countess, who loves her cats and birds more than she loves any living human, reacts strongly and immediately deploys the most savage punishment she can think of: banishment from Gormenghast. Note Flay's reaction and his certain knowledge that he has crossed a line and made a mistake that he cannot recover from.

> Her big head has coloured to a dim and dreadful madder. Her eyes are completely remorseless. [...] Flay waits as she approaches. His bony head is quite still. His loose hands hang gawkily at his sides. He realizes the crime he has committed, and as he waits his world of Gormenghast - his security, his love, his faith in the House, his devotion - is all crumbling into fragments. (ibid, 295)

The Countess' swift retribution as well as the evident idea that there can exist no life worth living outside the castle illustrates the impressive position that Gormenghast occupies in the mind of its inhabitants. Gormenghast castle thus becomes both a cultural force within the storyworld as well as an invention comparable to other fictional elements in fantasy literature. This is partly shown in the following where I want to highlight that the Countess, who assumes the authority of one who speaks *for* the castle, says that not only is she personally finished with Flay after his mistreatment of her cats, but the castle is finished with him as well.

> Her hand, as it moves gently over the body of the white cat, is trembling uncontrollably. 'I have finished with you,' she says. 'Gormenghast has finished with you,' It is hard for her to draw the words from her great throat. 'You are over… over.' Suddenly she raises her voice. 'Crude fool!' she cries. 'Crude, broken fool and brute. Out! Out! The Castle throws you. Go!' she roars, her hands upon the cat's breast. 'Your long bones sicken me.' (Peake, 296, emphasis original).

Understandably, Flay is distraught because the castle holds the only life he has ever known, and as far as he is aware, the only life that is even possible. As Wolf notes in his section on cultural invention, "fictional cultures are often modeled after real cultures, using different combinations of their traits that an audience might find familiar, but in new configurations, some of which play with stereotypes and audience expectations in interesting ways [...]" (36). In conventional fantasy, a hierarchical structure with a feudal system in a quasi-medieval setting will surprise few readers, but the way in which this system manifests itself is where the heart of the matter lies, and what will typically drive interest and immersion. Wolf is mostly talking about primary world stereotypes and cultures that may be used as inspiration in the secondary world, but it seems an important point that *genre* stereotypes and expectations may be used as well. Newer and more experimental genres, like the New Weird which I delve into in chapter 5, exploit and subvert genre conventions more overtly, but *Titus Groan* relies more on the spiderweb and its small (cultural) inventions such as the rituals and the fervent allegiance to the castle. The storyworld inventions in *Titus Groan* are as such relatively minor but it works because of the depth of the spiderweb narrative and the importance of atmosphere which complements the sections I have highlighted. The actual invented world of *Gormenghast*, and the fictional castle and the fictional landscape, naturally play a role on the 'ground level' of worldbuilding, but these are not the elements that as such carry the narrative. They are, rather, the framework.

Completeness

The issue of storyworld 'completeness' is complicated in *Titus Groan*. In conventional storyworlds, we may more easily identify the degree to which the storyworld is complete, or aims for completeness. However, Peake deliberately withholds much background information in his self-enclosed storyworld and as such the novel exists as a fringe-example of a storyworld that concerns itself rather little with being, or seeming, complete. Part of the explanation is that *Titus Groan* is an immersive fantasy narrative (cf. Mendlesohn categories), but that does not quite explain Peake's approach. In *Building Imaginary Worlds,* Wolf asserts that completeness, "refers to the degree to which the world contains explanations and details covering all the various aspects of its characters' experiences, as well as background details which together suggest a feasible, practical world" (Wolf, 38). Even cursory examination of *Titus Groan* will reveal that few background details are offered and few of the practical workings that are required for a society to function are explained. For example, the castle seems to

exist solely by itself, and the only other culture, which nevertheless remains tied to Gormenghast castle, is that of the Bright Carvers. As part of the Bright Carvers we also have one of the stranger characters, Keda. This character certainly is not strange because of her behavior or demeanor (*not* being strange is what would make a character stand out in this world), but rather because we through Keda are afforded an emotional journey that takes us a few steps outside of the castle as well, and her journey includes a dramatic and classic battle between her two lovers which ends tragically. Through Keda we see a slightly larger, slightly more complete world where events outside the castle still transpire.

Examinations of storyworlds, particularly contemporary ones, will reveal that many of them place great focus on impenetrability of their structural composition; political systems and various cultures are often explained in great depth. In *Titus Groan* this is not the case, but what Peake *does* focus on, however, are the 'background details' that Wolf mentions, and this is closely related to my arguments about the spiderweb narrative. While the workings of the storyworld itself remain a mystery, character motivation and character experience do not; this area is where Peake places his focus. This, arguably, makes *Titus Groan* an immersive fantasy narrative where *in*completeness more so than completeness is analytically relevant precisely because the level of storyworld incompleteness drives immersion via its atmosphere (cf my previous section) and active reader participation because Gormenghast has to be 'figured out', or perhaps more precisely: experienced — it is not neatly explained or logically presented. Instead, the life of the castle is presented which necessarily leaves a great number of storyworld gaps that readers can ponder. Ryan and Bell, drawing on Doležel, observe that, "It would take a text of infinite length to construct a complete fictional world… incompleteness is a universal extensional property of the fictional-world structuring" (Bell and Ryan, 2019, 74). Regardless of how expansive and detailed a storyworld is, *in*completeness remains an inevitable feature. This inevitability, however, may be exploited in order to create the types of mysterious and atmospheric storyworlds that are immersive in great part due to their incompleteness. Alice Mills addresses some of the issues I am raising by commenting on practical areas that remain unexplained. She is not specifically interested in worldbuilding, but the issues are nevertheless at the heart of worldbuilding:

> Gormenghast's economy and the ruling family's marital arrangements remain mysterious. Where does the castle's food supply come from, when there is so little evidence of either external trade or surrounding farmland? What are the castle's sources of energy, of building materials, of manufactured goods? Who are the non-Groan women that generations of Groan lords have presumably found to marry? (Mills, "Inspiration and Astonishment", 20)

There are two major points to make here. First, it is noteworthy that Mill's article focuses on Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000) since Miéville was heavily inspired and influenced by Peake. As I note in chapter 5 and my analysis of Miéville's *The City & The City*, certain Marxist readings of Miéville appreciate his efforts at explaining the political and economic realities of his worlds — something Tolkien and other fantasy authors rarely do to the same extent. It is partly for these reasons that Mills also highlights that certain practical areas, such as food supply and building materials, are unexplained in *Titus Groan* which can cause some confusion or even spark an unfortunate sense of incompleteness in the storyworld. Even Wolf argues in the same vein, stating that:

> To begin with, characters must have some source of food, clothing, and shelter to survive, and come from some kind of culture. On a larger scale, communities will likely need some form of governance, an economy, food production, a shared form of communication, defense against outsiders, and other such things. (Wolf, 39).

Wolf does go on to acknowledge that not all these areas are necessarily central to a story and that the crux of the matter is whether questions are *answerable* based on available information from the narrative about the storyworld. Few things are directly answered in *Titus Groan*, and few things prompt the need to be answerable because the ontological status of the storyworld does not cause issues. The quasi-medieval setting results in genre-specific assumptions about the text which can be used to explain missing information. In other words, what the storyworld itself cannot or does not answer, the genre may be able to answer instead. Narratologically, *Titus Groan* is quite unconventional, but it still exists within a genre tradition that relies on a quasi-medieval setting and from that we can infer some of the inner workings of the storyworld. For example, that the Groans are a ruling family who own land lets us assume that food and other items may be provided by serf, or serf-like, citizens even if this is never mentioned, explained, or even hinted at in the story.

The second point concerning Mill's quote is that *Gormenghast* does not *want* or *need* to explain these matters in detail. Because incompleteness is not an issue, and because narratives may rely on atmosphere or the spiderweb narrative to drive immersion, practical issues, and issues concerning governance, economy, culture, and geography may fade into the background without immersive potential being lost, and without the narrative or storyworld suffering unduly. It has no influence on storyworld effect or reader immersion whether the Earl of Groan has a reasonable tax policy; what *does* matter is that his emotional attachment to his library and his books results in a devastating loss of

faculties that ultimately drives him mad to a degree where he considers himself a death-owl. As such, the problem of completeness is in *Titus Groan* largely a non-issue. Anything that actively breaks the storyworld, such as sudden inclusion of modern weaponry, would have been a different matter[91].

Finally, I want to stress that reader proclivities vary greatly (a hopeless truism), which also means that what specific part(s) of a storyworld a reader may become interested in will vary. There are multiple questions that Peake's storyworld cannot answer (cf. Doležel), but it never tries to either — it presents facts about Gormenghast and its characters and Peake rarely contextualizes this information. There are important and open questions about the rituals; what are they, when did they start, what is their function, what happens when they are not adhered to, and so on. The Bright Carvers produce art, but when did that start, what role do they play in the castle, what is their culture like beyond the carvings, and more. For characters, we may highlight the Countess who is incredibly attached to her cats and birds, but we do not learn any background information as to how that happened, or what role it really plays in her psychology, nor why her relationship with the Earl seems so strenuous. With all these areas though, we *do* learn the fact that the rituals are extremely important, that the Bright Carvers produce art, and that the Countess loves her animals — that precise information, and how it is being presented, is what Peake offers and thus counters fantasy genre conventions by providing quite a low degree of background detail which may be interpreted as a form of incompleteness, but may in fact be a conscious choice and deliberate narrative strategy.

Consistency

The last central area from Wolf's book I want to address concerns consistency. In any work, and particularly in lengthy and multi-volume works, the issue of consistency becomes increasingly relevant. As I have commented on in chapter 1, consistency is one way for readers to engage with and immerse themselves in a storyworld. As per my point about storyworld completeness arguing that (in)completeness is only an issue when questions or occurrences in the narrative or the storyworld become unanswerable, the situation is similar in the context of consistency. Readers can expect a reasonable degree of consistency, and that the major world details are, per Wolf's definition,

91 I must note that in the third book of the trilogy, *Titus Alone*, Titus leaves the castle and ends up exploring what seems to be a modern culture. Were this dissertation to focus exclusively on the entire Gormenghast trilogy then this disconnect would have been interesting in the context of storyworld completeness and consistency, but *Titus Alone* is beyond the scope of this chapter and this dissertation.

"plausible, feasible, and without contradiction (Wolf, 43). It does seem to me, however, that an analysis of consistency mostly becomes relevant when there are major issues — a situation which surely is rare. This is also reflected in both *Building Imaginary Worlds* and *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* where texts with fairly major (or even deliberate) inconsistencies are highlighted such as TV shows like *South Park* (1997-present), *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), and *Lost* (2004-2010).

It is reasonable to simply expect a text that takes itself seriously[92] to aim for a high degree of consistency. The major question is whether any issues with consistency cause major damage to the storyworld and immersion. For example, early in *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844), it is revealed that the main character, Edmond Dantès, speaks Spanish because of his travels; later we learn that he knows Spanish because he was taught while imprisoned. This is a minor problem which will cause little trouble even if a reader notices it. Wolf argues in the same vein when he states that, "[...] it is also important to note *where* inconsistencies occur when they do, to determine how damaging to credibility they will be" (Wolf, 43). I find the idea of thinking about consistency in terms of genre expectations and conventions more fruitful than hunting for (minor or major) errors in the text. Even should there be inconsistencies present in the text, quite little might hinge on pointing this out. For example, Dr. Alfred Prunesquallor is erroneously called Bernard several times in the text (pages 179, 277, 282, 283, 286), and while this is clearly a mistake which happened because Peake must have had both names in mind for the character, the overall impact on the story and the storyworld remains minimal and is unlikely to change neither enjoyment nor scholarly readings and interpretations.

Once again a brief mention of the third book in the trilogy, *Titus Alone*, is necessary because that book significantly departs from the structure of both *Titus Groan* and *Gormenghast*. In *Titus Alone*, Titus departs from his familiar surroundings and explores the wider world. That in itself does not cause any issues with storyworld consistency, but certain elements of what he discovers, such as inclusions of a helicopter and a factory, raises questions about its structure and the storyworld's overall coherence. These points must be kept in mind when critically considering *Titus Groan* because many of the analytical points one might make based on *Titus Groan* alone would be challenged or contradicted by events in *Titus Alone*.

92 Wolf uses *South Park* and *The Simpsons* as examples of texts with playful inconsistency that does not hurt the overall quality mainly because the inconsistency is deliberate. Inconsistency in texts like these occurs because these texts do not aim for a high degree of consistency, and partly because of the format.

I have outlined the theoretical background for an analysis of consistency earlier, and will again here highlight the Leibnizian philosophical concept of *compossibility* which posits that if two entities are to coexist in the same world then these must not be mutually exclusive (Lessa and Araúja, *Routledge Companion*, 90). Any occurrence which upsets this balance would negatively impact the storyworld, and while critical questions about the entirety of the *Gormenghast* trilogy could be raised, it does seem like the small size of the storyworld in *Titus Groan* has lowered consistency-related narrative pitfalls. The vision Peake had for all Titus novels perhaps got out of hand when genre expectations and assumptions were challenged to a severe degree in *Titus Alone*. Whether Peake deliberately tried to conform to any literary tradition is uncertain, but in the context of *Titus Groan* specifically, the framework he establishes for his story and storyworld are not shaken by moments of immersion-scattering faults.

In their article "World Consistency", Lessa and Araújo propose thinking about consistency in three dimensions: one regarding singular entities (such as characters) and events; one concerning compossibility of world elements; and one concerning the world's conformity to (genre) expectations (Lessa and Araúja, 93). Peake, consciously or not, counters genre conventions by not adhering to a narrative structure that many would find consistent with fantasy stories. That being said, the Titus novels were written before the age of Tolkien (*Titus Groan* was published in 1946; *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954-55) which has since dictated and influenced the fantasy genre significantly. My point is that the biggest factor concerning consistency in *Titus Groan* is as such more related to the issue of genre and expectations because the structure of the narrative and the profound importance of the characters leave little room for the types of consistency errors that Wolf talks about in *Building Imaginary Worlds*. A complicating factor is the size of Peake's storyworld since there is a relationship between a world's size and the chance(s) of inconsistencies. Analysis based on consistency alone, then, seems unlikely to yield any insight that goes beyond descriptive pointing-out of errors. I remain convinced that we may reasonably expect a storyworld to aim for consistency, and it is only in the shattering of this expectation that a closer look will yield noteworthy results. This stands in contrast to both completeness and especially invention which are useful for understanding the functions of most storyworlds.

Talking about *Memorial de Aires* (2006) by Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis, Gumbrecht offers an explanation that I might borrow for *Titus Groan* as well. He writes that, "[...] readers, almost in mute admiration, were convinced of its conspicuous merits. The secret of the novel's greatness - one of the secrets that remain secret because they are so obvious - lies precisely in its design [...]" (Gumbrecht, 84). The not-quite-obvious secret behind the potential behind *Titus Groan* is, just like *Memorial de Aires*, tied inextricably to its world design and atmosphere. The very design of the novel produces and ensures immersive potential, and the multiple parts of the novel — the spiderweb narrative, the atmosphere, and the worldbuilding — constitute a difficult but worthwhile fantasy story that structurally exists on the fringes of the genre, but because of this, it has pushed the very potential of fantasy in new directions. This, it seems to me, is evidenced by the number of books that *Gormenghast* has influenced, but the vanishingly small number of books that have tried to emulate Peake's storyworld construction strategies.

I have in the previous sections tried to explain parts of Peake's work that have been either neglected in the past (especially since interest in Peake sadly dwindled again), and parts that are of scholarly interest not only in the context of *Titus Groan* but for other types of stories as well. The narrative construction that I have attempted to explain via the spiderweb might serve as a stepping stone for further considerations about the nature and structure of fringe narratives. This aspect is closely related to my exploration of the atmosphere in *Titus Groan* which is a new way of thinking about both literature and storyworlds. It remains true that analyzing storyworlds based on atmosphere and its associated terminology is problematic but the type of immersion that arises as a consequence of attuning to atmosphere, and how it affects worldbuilding, makes it too important to ignore even if critical approaches are still works-in-progress. By showcasing how *Titus Groan* produces and is reliant on atmosphere, I have tried to point out specific moments that illustrate the particular atmosphere that the novel evokes and as such the analysis has not focused only on stylistics or one a biographical reading, but rather considered the overall textual aesthetics and resultant mood of the novel.

Lastly I have given considerations to worldbuilding in *Titus Groan* and based my arguments on Mark J. P. Wolf's considerable contribution to the field. Peake's story does indeed exist on the fringes and it is not an easy novel, which puts contemporary worldbuilding terminology to the test. Many storyworlds can be understood to an adequate level by considering the narrative building blocks that make up the

world (invention, completeness, consistency), but these would not be enough to explain *Titus Groan* and similar novels. I am therefore convinced that the combination between the spiderweb narrative, atmosphere, and worldbuilding has unlocked new aspects of *Titus Groan* and underlined how a difficult and atmospheric novel functions on a narrative structural level as well as an affective and immersive one.

4. Genre Fusion, Dual-Worlds, and Atmospheres in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*

> I couldn't shake the feeling that things weren't normal.
>
> — Haruki Murakami, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (75-76)

Including Japanese author Haruki Murakami in this dissertation may seem a surprising choice given that the other chapters deal with Anglophone literature. However, since I want to explore the importance of worldbuilding and atmosphere I could not resist including Murakami, whose texts embody a unique literary style that produces a particular atmosphere distinctly different from much Western literature. His type of worldbuilding, most noticeable in his magical realism, also makes his texts worthy of further attention since relatively little Western literature seems to deal with this particular genre[93].As I will show, Murakami's fictional worlds play an entirely different role than the fictional worlds in generic fantasy. I will return to the issue of magical realism later in this chapter. First, a bit of context: Murakami is a difficult writer to tackle in the context of this dissertation (and perhaps also generally) because of his complicated history with Japanese and Western societies and the diversity within his literary oeuvre. Murakami is often criticized within Japan for being 'too Western', and he has struggled with the Bundan, the literary guild (or system) in Japan: "I was kind of an odd man out compared with other writers, and was almost totally shut out by the Bundan system in Japan… The world of literary arts saw no value in me, and disliked me… They said I would destroy the traditions of Japanese literature."[94] One can imagine how a conservative Japanese critic or reader may not look favorably upon an author whose inspiration in many ways is Western, particularly with regard to jazz music, classic Hollywood movies, literature (although his love for Russian literature is as evident as his love for Western literature[95]), and whiskey. Murakami's literature seems to exist

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93 Arguably the most well-known example of magical realism is Colombian author Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* from 1967, and Latin-America generally has a very rich history with magical realism.

94 Murakami, "Yume no naka kara sekinin wa hajimaru," interview with *The George Review*, Autumn 2005. Cited here from Murakami, *Yume o miru tame ni maiasa Boku wa mezameru no desu*, 333.

95 For example, in *Hard-boiled Wonderland*, the protagonist muses over Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880): "I closed my eyes and tried to remember the names of the Karamazov brothers. Mitya, Ivan, and Alyosha—and then here was the bastard Smerdyakov. How many people in Tokyo knew the names of all these guys?" (*Hard-boiled Wonderland*, 390)

somewhere between the *jun bungaku*, "pure literature", and *taishū*, "mass literature", with aesthetic and purely literary elements that one would expect to find in stereotypical high-brow writing, as well as the captivating and page-turning entertainment typically expected of mass-marked books. Rebecca Suter writes in "Critical Engagement Through Fantasy in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World"* that Murakami's, "in-between position, straddling highbrow and lowbrow, Japanese and foreign, is what makes his literature entertaining as well as thought provoking"[96] — a sentiment I agree with. I will explore the reasons for Murakami's successful worldbuilding and its allure which relies on a minimalistic but profoundly evocative style, an often enigmatic and nostalgic atmosphere that draws on the mundane, and introspection (typically by male characters). These areas characterize all of Murakami's novels, including *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and must be taken into account in an investigation of worldbuilding and atmosphere.

Roughly speaking, Murakami's creative writing can be divided into two categories: text that contain otherworldly and fictional elements (his magical realism), and texts that do not. Interesting outliers exist, such as *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* (2007) and *Underground* (1997), but these are in the minority. *Norwegian Wood* (1987) and *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* (2013) contain none of the strangeness that characterizes many of Murakami's novels and remain realistic[97], while *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982), *Kafka On the Shore* (2002), *Killing Commendatore* (2017), and *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985) all contain aspects of magical realism and bizarre events that are important for both structure, plot, aesthetics, and atmosphere. *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* was published between the successful *A Wild Sheep Chase*, a novel for which Murakami won the Noma Literary Newcomer Prize, and the extremely successful *Norwegian Wood* that played a significant role in Murakami's domestic and international fame. *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is an elaborated version of an earlier text, "Machi to sono futashika na kabe" (The town and its uncertain walls, 1980). It won the prestigious Tanizaki Literary Prize. Expanding short stories into large novels was a strategy Murakami

96 In Strecher, M., & In Thomas, P. L. (2016). *Haruki Murakami: Challenging authors*. 59–71

97 This may be a somewhat contentious point; books like *Norwegian Wood* and *South of the Border, West of the Sun* do not feature explicit magical realism, but an argument could be made for the existence of otherworldly aspects; for example, in *South of the Border, West of the Sun* it remains unclear whether Shimamoto is a figment of the main character's imagination or not. Such pseudo-magical and ambiguous elements are not uncommon in Murakami's 'realistic' texts.

was to repeat. For example, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (1994) started as "Nejimakidori to kayōbi no onnatachi" (The Wind-Up Bird and Tuesday's Women, 1986).

It is worth touching briefly on magical realism and its role in the context of Murakami's writing. Famously, Franz Roh used the term magical realism in 1925 to describe the German painting movement Magischer Realismus. However, it has since morphed into a literary mode with a particular aesthetic that continues to enchant readers. Magical realism blends the mundane with the fantastical but exists as an entity not connected to fantasy literature. *The Palgrave Handbook of Magical Realism in the Twenty-First Century* (2020) provides a helpful definition:

> [C]ontemporary magical realism engages, without organizing or annulling, the density of experience where even the most quotidian boundaries of the self are crossed by strange and dynamic encounters. (Perez and Chevalier, *The Palgrave Handbook of Magical Realism in the Twenty-First Century*, 2)

At first glance the separation between fantasy and magical realism may seem arbitrary, and there is *some* overlap, but magical realism exists as a mode and a tradition which nevertheless has remained special. Wendy Faris proposes five primary characteristics of magical realism:

> As a basis for investigating the nature and cultural work of magical realism, I suggest five primary characteristics of the mode. First, the text contains an 'irreducible element' of magic; second, the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world; third, the reader may experience some unsettling doubts in the effort to reconcile two contradictory understandings of events; fourth, the narrative merges different realms; and, finally, magical realism disturbs received ideas about time, space, and identity. (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments, Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*, 7)

As we shall see in my analysis, several of these points are relevant. *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and many of Murakami's other books, merge these different realms and disturb ideas about time, space, and identity that Faris identifies. While little magic exists, as we know it in the Anglosphere, Murakami's writing houses multiple instances of unexplained or otherworldly phenomena.a. Additionally, a staple of Murakami's fiction is the preoccupation with borders (more on this later). In *Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community* (1995), Faris and Zamora note the importance and prevalence of boundaries:

> [...] magical realism is a mode suited to exploring—and transgressing—boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic. Magical realism often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. (*Magical Realism, Theory, History, Community*, 5)

This immediately creates a close connection to worldbuilding and underscores why considering texts with storyworlds from the perspective of worldbuilding is useful. The characters drive the plot, but immersion and textual engagement is often directly connected to the magical and strange worlds that are created. Matthew Carl Strecher in *The Forbidden Worlds of Haruki Murakami* (2014) also spends considerable time on the issue of boundaries and metaphysical worlds:

> Murakami's metaphysical other world stands outside the boundaries of what we think of as reality, can (usually) be reached only unconsciously, by accident or chance (much, in fact, like entering the state of sleep); it contains no actual fixed boundaries (though this is not always evident to visitors); it is seldom found the same way twice; and when 'time' exists there at all, it seems to run unpredictably, in all directions, quite unlike the linear, mono-directional tool we have constructed in the conscious, physical world. (Strecher, 71-72)

There are important boundaries in both worlds in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and I focus on their function and construction later in this chapter. Maggie Ann Bowers considers the combination between the realist tones of magical realism in conjunction with its magical aspects core features: "'Magical realism', which of all the terms has had the most critical consideration, relies most of all upon the matter-of-fact, realist tone of its narrative when presenting magical happenings" (*Magic(al) Realism, The New Critical Idiom*, 3). This is where I see a strong connection to Murakami's writing. He makes use of the mundane and fuses ordinary and unremarkable situations with a sense of otherworldliness that throws his central characters into unexpected situations. As we shall see, this matter-of-fact tone exists in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, but the novel is not purely magical realism. It combines several genres and mixes tropes to create a complicated storyworld. Other critical texts that touch on these issues include Susan J. Napier's "The Magic of Identity: Magic Realism in Modern Japanese Fiction" (1995), and Robert R. Wilson's "The Metamorphoses of Space: Magic Realism" (1995).

Strecher writes in *Forbidden Worlds* that Murakami prefers the term *fiction* to *literature* (4). I am, needless to say, very concerned with fiction, and Murakami occupies an important space and fills a void that Miéville, Le Guin, and Peake do not touch. The strange other-world that Murakami often employs, which Strecher calls the metaphysical realm (16), is a defining trait of Murakami's writing

and often linked to either dreams or the unconsciouss[98]. Strecher explains why engaging with the metaphysical realm in Murakami's work is so important:

> Whatever our terminology, this 'other world' or "metaphysical realm" [...] is in my view the most recognizable and critical aspect of Murakami Haruki's fiction, for the simple reason that it leads us to what the author has termed the inner *monogatari*, or "narrative," a key part of the inner "core self" that grounds and informs the conscious self, while simultaneously tapping into *the* collective Narrative, with a capital *N*, that results from the entire history—even the prehistory—of human experience. (Strecher, 2014, 16)

Acknowledging this realm is crucial to understanding Murakami's worldbuilding and its effects on the narrative because it influences a number of areas, including the position and role of the Narrative (capital N) and the inner self. This makes Murakami's writing different from generic fantasy, in which the world must be explored for its own sake and for characters and readers. In *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the inner lives of the unnamed protagonists are central (a typical Murakami strategy), but especially the inner life of the character trapped in the Town is deeply connected to the metaphysical realm since he is literally and metaphorically trapped. As we shall see, the two characters are connected more closely than what first appears to be the case.

Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World consists of two separate and alternating narratives that follow two unnamed protagonists. In Japanese, the two narrators are differentiated through Murakami's use of first-person pronouns. Translator Jay Rubin writes in *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* (2012) that:

> [t]he words "Watashi" and "Boku" give very different impressions in Japanese, such that the Japanese reader can open the book at any point and know immediately which narrative is spread out on the page. Unfortunately, for the translator, the only word that can be used to translate either "Watashi" or "Boku" into English is "I". Alfred Birnbaum solved this problem by translating the "End of the World" sections into the present tense, thereby making a distinction between the two narrators' worlds that is natural in English. It also imparts a timeless quality that may be more appropriate than the normal past-tense narration of the original. (Ruben, 117)

While I deliberately do not want to focus too much on the angle of Japanese *language* in this chapter, I feel that it is important to point out this particular curiosity in the differences between English and Japanese because it speaks to a layer within the Japanese language that presents a challenge. The

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98 The Professor in *Hard-boiled Wonderland* even mentions two of the most famous psychologists who dealt with dreams and the unconscious as he is explaining memory to the protagonist: "Nobody's got the keys t'the elephant factory inside us. Freud and Jung and all the rest of them published their theories, but all they did was t'invent a lot of jargon t'get people talkin'. Gave mental phenomena a little scholastic color" (Murakami, 257).

importance of the "Watashi" and "Boku" distinction is necessarily going to influence the atmosphere of the novel which means that the translation will also impact the atmosphere and the reading experience. While I cannot speak with authority to the validity of the translation, the issue is relevant because it significantly impacts the reading experience, how worldbuilding is experienced, and how the atmosphere of the novel is evoked. It does seem, however, that using the present-tense, as Birnbaum did, proved a good idea, and Danish translator Mette Holm ended up doing the same when she translated the novel into Danish in 2014[99].

"Watashi" narrates the story in Hard-boiled Wonderland (the reality most like our own), while "Boku" narrates The End of the World (the secondary realm with several fantasy elements). The Hard-boiled Wonderland sections are set in a futuristic cyberpunk-esque Tokyo. Murakami employs tropes from hard-boiled detective fiction (see also chapter 5: Miéville in *The City & The City*): the somewhat blasé main character meets a beautiful woman and a mysterious scientist, the woman's grandfather; a top-secret mission, ruthless thugs who work for a faceless and nefarious corporation; a second beautiful woman, the librarian, who assists the main character, and the typically-Murakami elements of whiskey, jazz, and food. Although the setting in The End of the World is rarely explored explicitly, it carries multiple aspects of dystopian science fiction, especially regarding information warfare. Two warring factions deal in technology that alters and manipulates perception and reality. These two factions are the Factory and the System; the narrator is employed at the System as:

> a *keisanshi* (an invented word meaning someone who calculates, translated by Birnbaum as "calcutec"), a person whose brain has been surgically enhanced to encrypt information and thus prevent it from being stolen by the Factory's *kigōshi* (literally "decoders," translated by Birnbaum as "semiotecs"). (Suter, 66)

The "Watashi" protagonist is hired by a somewhat mysterious and eccentric Professor. "Watashi" is a Calcutec, people able to conduct complex calculations in their heads because their brains have effectively been split. Using these Calcutecs is advantageous in the context of the novel and its warring factions because information within a Calcutec's mind is kept safe — safer than it otherwise would have been since brains, unlike computers, cannot be 'tapped into'. Semiotecs, however, keep trying to access the information that Calcutecs work with and consequently the "Watashi" protagonist is in danger because of what he is able to do. The Professor not only used to work for the System but created the very programme that enabled the splitting of the brain that allows Calcutecs to function. The

[99] Holm, M. (2015). Translating Murakami Haruki as a multilingual experience. *Japanese Language and Literature*, 49(1), 123-142

Professor is now a neutral force who is interested in science for its own sake and wants to keep out of the information war. He has built an underground lair and laboratory with elaborate defense mechanisms in an attempt at keeping both Calcutecs and Semiotics away, but this lair is also situated close to the dangerous and largely unexplained INKlings, whom he manages to keep at bay by controlling sound. We learn that the Professor has muted his granddaughter and forgotten to turn her sound back on again. This causes some confusion for "Watashi" in his first interaction with the granddaughter — the same initial confusion that readers have to navigate through as well.

The "Watashi" chapters alternate with the "Boku" chapters. The strange world that the "Boku" narrates houses many conventional fantasy elements. These include a map that looks like a brain and even unicorns. The "Boku" chapters, i.e., the End of the World sections that run parallel to "Watashi's" Hard-boiled Wonderland, are chiefly concerned with the issue of memory and (re)discovery of music, love, the self, and personal identity. At first, the storyworld seems like a medieval fantasy, with its walled city and a Gatekeeper. However, later references to electricity, old army officers, and even abandoned factories dispel this and instead evoke a sense that something has been lost or changed dramatically. In the End of the World sections, "Boku" is 'employed' as a Dream Reader. This happens after the ominous Gatekeeper has cut "Boku's" shadow from him, and the loss of this shadow seems to kickstart the loss of his individuality. We learn throughout the End of the World chapters, loss of individuality is a prerequisite for living peacefully in the Town. The narrator and his shadow remain in contact, although the shadow is fading and struggling with the separation from the narrator's physical body. None of the Town's inhabitants have a shadow, and if "Boku" remains there, his shadow will die, and he will become like the inhabitants of the Town: passionless, shells, mindlessly content.

"Boku's" appointed task of Dream Reader is confusing initially – for him and for readers of the novel, both in terms of the process and the outcome. He gains the ability to read dreams after the Gatekeeper cuts slits in his eyeballs; this happens painlessly, although it does make him sensitive to sunlight. The dreams are read via old unicorn skulls that the Dream Reader must touch. This produces disconnected and strange images whose meaning not even the Dream Reader seems to fathom. He must nevertheless continue with the task in a Sisyphean manner. The Librarian with whom he develops an important but seemingly passionless relation assists him in this task. As both "Boku" and readers eventually learn, the price for eternal and peaceful life for the townsfolk in The End of the World is their hearts and minds:

the Dream Reader is releasing personality and memory into the Town's atmosphere. It explains why inhabitants in the Town seem passionless and especially why the Librarian cannot love the narrator in a fulfilling or stereotypical-romantic way. An illustrative example occurs when the narrator feels morose and ill during winter. While she wants to comfort him, The Librarian's attempt is bereft of personality and emotional depth:

> "Is there nothing else I can do for you?" she says, looking up unexpectedly.
> "You do so much for me already," I say.
> She stays her hand and sits facing me. "I mean something else. Perhaps you wish to sleep with me."
> I shake my head.
> "I do not understand," she implores. (Murakami, 225)

These types of conversations, with a style reflected in the tone and description of the Town and everything in it, contribute meaningfully to the eerie and melancholic atmosphere that characterizes the End of the World. The fact that she 'implores' may seem a touch passionate, but she quickly and without fuss returns to what she was doing: "She says nothing and at length returns to polishing the skull" (225). This bleak tone is reflected in much of the Town, including the numerous conversations "Boku" has with the old army officer.

"Boku" and his shadow conspire to flee the Town since the shadow knows he cannot survive for long. Part of their plan involves "Boku" creating a map of the town — the one readers are shown — which the shadow uses to deduce where the only possible exit must be. However, he realizes that the Town is his own self and develops a sense of complex responsibility towards the Town and its inhabitants. Instead of fleeing with the shadow into what we can presume to be the 'real' world, "Boku" decides to stay behind and remain in the Town regardless of the cost to his personality and his memories.

Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World is a deeply complex novel in terms of plot and worldbuilding. Part of the enjoyment (and the challenge) of reading this book is figuring out exactly how the two worlds are linked and constructed. This is not an easy task, but Murakami does provide numerous instances of reused materials or metaphors. Often an element found in Hard-boiled Wonderland seems to have a similar (or opposite) element in The End of the World. For example, "Watashi" becomes involved with a librarian who helps him find books on unicorns; "Boku" becomes involved with the Librarian who assists his dream reading. The chubby girl in pink is 17 years old; the Librarian in The End of the World lost her shadow when she was 17. "Boku" struggles with memory

and recalling his pre-Town existence. Part of this is explored via his quest to find a musical instrument, and he vaguely remembers a song that turns out to be Danny Boy:

> It is a melody. Not a complete song, but the first phrase of one. I play the three chords and twelve notes, also, over and over again. It is a song, I realize, that I know. Danny Boy. The title brings back the song: chords, notes, harmonies now flow naturally from my fingertips. I play the melody again. (Murakami, 368).

"Watashi" tries to remember this exact song in chapter 1: "I tried whistling *Danny Boy*, but it came out like a dog wheezing with asthma" (Murakami, 3), and he eventually sings along to the song by the end of the novel after having made love to the librarian. Murakami himself explained the structure of the book in a lecture and touched on the close relationship between the two different storyworlds:

> The double title reflects the fact that there are two separate stories in the novel, one called "Hard-boiled Wonderland" and the other called "The End of the World", told in alternating chapters. In the end, these two totally different stories overlap and become one. This is a technique often used in mystery stories or science fiction. Ken Follett, for example, is a writer who often uses this approach. I wanted to write a large-scale novel using this method (Una's Lecture, 1992).

As we can see, the structure is a deliberate attempt at emulating other genres, and Murakami would in later novels often return to a dual-world structure where the mundane and the fantastical overlap through various types of portals. In this way, via these complicated and intricate strategies, we may reflect on identity and self through considerations of Felski's notion of knowledge. Murakami's introspective novels cause self-reflection and a gaining of phenomenological knowledge that seems unique compared to much conventional Western literature, not least due to its different approach to issues of identity, personality and responsibility.

Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World offers fascinating contrast and perspective in the context of storyworlds and their function. As we saw in chapter 3 on *Titus Groan*, Gormenghast Castle, in many ways, is an entity with its own character, and events within the narrative happen either in, around, or even *with* the castle. In chapter 2 on *Earthsea*, I showcased how the storyworld is 'classic' in the sense that it is an entire realm within which the story is set. The storyworld is important and interesting to explore, but there is still a distinction between the characters and the plot and the storyworld itself. In Murakami's storyworlds, then, and certainly including *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the storyworld is not *just* a storyworld but also an entity deeply and irrevocably connected to a specific character and his personality. This is a crucial difference between

Murakami's worldbuilding and storyworld importance and the other storyworlds I have examined. I argue that this is common in Murakami's writing because world-as-personality is a common theme and not unique to *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Strecher observes in his work that Murakami's storyworlds typically house a "this side" (*kochiragawa* in Japanese), i.e., the physical world; consciousness; the land of the living. (73) The physical world usually has some manner of entrance, or gateway, or special door to "over there" (somewhat connected to Mendlesohn's ideas on portal fantasy, cf. 2008; 28). This doorway takes many forms: a well (a Murakami-favorite), elevator shafts, subways, sewer, escape ladder, telephone line, subterranean cavern, hallways, and more. Murakami's "other side", or *achiragawa*, may be a metaphysical realm, the unconscious. It may be the land of the dead, forests, hotels, out-of-the-way cabins, mysterious buildings, isolated towns or villages (73).[100] It is clear that personality and the relationship between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind is central to Murakami's narratives and his worldbuilding. Linking the conscious and the unconscious is an effective way of exploring and employing the relationship between 'this side' and 'over there' and using this as a vehicle for delving into issues of personality, identity, and memory. This, too, illustrates how a spatial element (cf. Wolf) within the worldbuilding is used to further enhance relationships between the 'this side' and 'over there'.

The 'this side' and 'over there' dichotomy is a significant part of the structure in Murakami's books and what contributes to their magical realism. These magical realms (although magical or otherworldly events also occasionally happen in the 'real' world, such as the entirely unrealistic amount of food the librarian can eat in one sitting in Hard-boiled Wonderland) also contribute to the surreal and peculiar atmosphere that permeates the books. Whether elements are strange or downright unexplainable or illogical, they nevertheless produce a specific effect that is both distinctly Murakami and distinctly Japanese. The literary culture in Japan has normalized surrealism (oxymoronic as this may sound) and magical realism. In other words, realism is not the default literary mode, such as it is in Scandinavia, for example, which is why Murakami's atmosphere and worldbuilding almost automatically create an

100 I will reuse Strecher's illustrative examples to show how common this is. Several novels adhere to the structure I have described: *Hear the Wind Sing* (Martian underground); *Pinball, 1973* (warehouse, Rat's town); *A Wild Sheep Chase* ((Rat's mountain villa); *Norwegian Wood* (Naoko's sanatorium); *Dance Dance Dance* (Dolphin's Hotel/building in Honolulu); *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (hotel); *South of the Border, West of the Sun* (Hajime's cabin); *After Dark* (Asai Eri's room); *1Q84* ("1Q84 or alternative Tokyo); *Colorless Tsukuru and HIs Years of Pilgrimage* (Kuro's summer cottage in Haemeenlinn, Finland). (Strecher, 73). The most recent Murakami novel, *Killing Commendatore* (2017), is no exception: it uses a pit.

interesting contrast to most Anglophone literature. Murakami's worldbuilding has a casual tone and origin, whereas Western worldbuilding is often deliberate and well-thought-out. An illustrative example of surrealism occurs early in the novel when the girl-in-pink escorts the protagonist to the Professor's hiding place. Through a clothes closet, there appears to be a river:

> That was when she pulled open the closet door, led me by the hand, and shoved me in. [...] Inside, it was like any clothes closet - any clothes closet without clothes. Only coat hangers and mothballs. It probably wasn't even a clothes closet. Otherwise, what reason could there be for me getting all mummied up and squeezed into a closet? The woman jiggled a metal fitting in the corner, and presently a portion of the facing wall began to open inward, lifting up like the door of the trunk of a compact car. Through the opening it was pitch black, but I could feel a chill, damp air blowing. There was also the deep rumble of water. "There's a river in there," she appeared to say. The sound of the water made it seem as if her speaking were simply drowned out. Somehow I found myself understanding what she was saying. Odd. (Murakami, 20).

I find this section a representative example of the mundane mixed with the otherworldly strangeness that Murakami employs to create his particular interpretation of magical realism. Consistent with what I described above, there is a specific location, the closet, which leads to somewhere 'over there', and it is the river and the water-noises which cause the scene to become odd. The rhetorical question posed by the narrator portrays his own confusion, although he is not alarmed enough to react strongly. The confused atmosphere is enhanced via the lack of clarity conveyed through descriptions such as, 'she *appeared* to say', speaking that is 'drowned out', and the '*somehow* I found myself', all of which illustrate the narrator's lack of certainty. The words combined with the scene show how a 'portal' connects the 'this side' and 'over there', which even the narrator himself aptly calls odd.

For seemingly inexplicable reasons the narrator presses on, but the strangeness of these events is not lost on him. Before meeting the Professor, and after having been led through a bewildering environment by the girl in pink, he reflects on what he has been through so far:

> What was going on here? A closet in an office building with a river chasm at the bottom? And smack in the middle of Tokyo! The more I thought about it, the more disturbed I got. First that eerie elevator, then that woman who spoke without ever saying anything, and now this leisurely jaunt. Maybe I should have turned down the job and gone home. But no, here I was, descending into the abyss. And for what? Professional pride? Or was it the chubby woman in pink? Okay, I confess: she'd gotten to me, and now I had to go through with this nonsense. (Murakami, 22)

In Miéville's *The City & The City*, the difficult situation with two cities occupying the same physical space is a concept that mostly the *reader* has to tackle since the characters themselves accept the situation as normal (more or less). Consequently, the position of the reader is different from what we

see in Murakami (cf. Ryan's re-centering), and the contrast is useful because it highlights two differing strategies of worldbuilding and information conveyance. As we see in the Murakami passage, the reader occupies a companion-position and likely shares the narrator's confusion; an office with a river chasm in Tokyo? Clearly outrageous! But the blend between the surreal and the mundane is no accident considering the normalized state of surreal literature in Japanese culture. The narrator calls events up until this stage 'nonsense', echoing what readers might feel, despite events being captivating and nonsensical at the same time. Moreover, as is well-established, fiction is a useful vehicle to gain perspective on the real world by seeing one's own circumstances from a fresh viewpoint. The 'eerie elevator' that the narrator references is what begins the whole ordeal, and the novel's first paragraph throws us into not only a 'portal' to 'over there' but also immediately disturbs any sense of reality, direction, and time:

> The elevator continued its impossibly slow ascent. Or at least I imagined it was ascent. There was no telling for sure: it was so slow that all sense of direction simply vanished. It could have been going down for all I knew, or maybe it wasn't moved at all. But let's just assume it was going up. Merely a guess. Maybe I'd gone up twelve stories, then down three. Maybe I'd circled the globe. How would I know? (Murakami, 1)

As this quote shows, the novel immediately throws readers into almost a detective role where the goal is figuring out what is going on. The narrator's rhetorical question, 'How would I know?' captures his essence since he will remain perplexed and dragged along, mostly involuntarily, for most of the story. It is a luxury of Murakami's style of magical realism that it does not need to explain every minute detail; this marks an interesting point of departure from Mark J. P. Wolf's notions of invention, completeness, and consistency in *Building Imaginary Worlds*. Murakami does invent a number of things in his storyworld, but there is relatively little regard for the type of 'inner consistency' we might associate with generic fantasy literature. The narrator(s) casually accept strange events, and so, too, must readers. One small example of this occurs following the elevator-event; the protagonist is following the girl in pink and notices the strangeness of his surroundings:

> The interior was gloomy, featureless. Like the elevator. Quality materials throughout; no sign of wear. Marble floors buffed to a high luster; the walls a toasted off-white, like the muffins I eat for breakfast. Along either side of the corridor were tall wooden doors, each affixed with metal room numbers, but out of order. <936> was next to <1213> next to <26>. Something was screwy. (7)

As far as reasonable explanations go, 'Something was screwy' is hardly a valiant attempt, but the point is that this vagueness creates a mysterious and occasionally unsettling atmosphere because the real

world has been upset. It has not been upset to a degree where readers may brush off events as being science fiction or even magical, but enough has been changed that a reaction is inevitable and a reasonable explanation is not readily available. The further the narrator ventures the more we learn how the storyworld functions. Even in the Hard-boiled Wonderland sections, which may be futuristic and cyberpunk, there are almost magical occurrences that cannot be accounted for via a novum. The fantasy aspect of The End of the World negates the need for scientific explanations, but this, then, makes the relationship between the two worlds more complex and ultimately underpins the argument that a major component of the reading experience of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* is figuring out precisely how the two worlds and narratives are connected. The storyworlds, then, are a driving force of immersion and reader engagement more so than the narrators.

Suter reads *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World,* and fantasy generally, as a cultural artefact through which ideas about the Self and Other, as well as about cultural identity/difference/perspective, can be problematized and explored. This is based on Rosemary Jackson's work on fantasy literature; Jackson connects the rise of the fantastic genre to the secularization of culture in modern Europe[101], and Suter applies the same principle to Murakami and the Japanese context. This idea is supported by Strecher who also focuses on the Self and Other in Murakami's writing although he primarily discusses the inner- and outer mind:

> [...] Murakami played with the idea of the inner mind as a construct of language in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, the author's only quasi-science fiction novel to date. Its parallel narratives - one representing the outer mind, the other depicting the inner - create a powerful tension between the individual Will of the conscious world and the somnambulant repose of the unconscious state." (*Forbidden Worlds*, 49)

After the eventual revelation that the Town exists because of, and is created from, the protagonist's mind it becomes difficult to disagree with the assertion that consciousness and the problem of inner/outer mind are central themes. I argue that they are also foundational building blocks that Murakami used to structure his two parallel storyworlds. The two storyworlds influence each other. The tone, style, and atmosphere of one, which automatically becomes juxtaposed with the other, create a contrast that makes the unique qualities of each world more pronounced. This is a particularly fascinating aspect and a direct consequence of the parallel-world structure. Conventional storyworlds rely on stylistics and their own qualities in order to create an appropriate atmosphere. Murakami has

101 See Rosemary Jackson. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion.* New York, Routledge. 1981

the advantage of letting each world enhance the atmosphere of the other and thereby also create tension:

> Just as in the human psyche it is important to maintain a healthy contact between conscious and unconscious, then, it is important within the Murakami fictional universe to maintain a healthy flow of energy between the physical and metaphysical worlds. These two worlds, both before and following the author's shift to the collective metaphysical model, may be said to complement one another, to feed one another, and at the same time to exert tension or stress on one another. (*Forbidden Worlds*, 103)

This reinforces the argument that the two worlds support each other. and my assertion that they enhance each other's atmospheres and qualities is a part of this. The tension that Strecher mentions is evident in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* to an extremely high degree. Murakami's continued use of the dual-world structure in subsequent novels supports the argument that the complementary nature of the dual-world setup is a strategy he deemed effective. Murakami's storyworld(s) also provides an opportunity to problematize and develop our current understanding of generic portal-quest stories in which a protagonist enters an unknown world through a specific portal from the real world. As Farah Mendlesohn points out, portal-quest stories often, but not always, include quests (see 2008: 1). There are metaphorical or allegorical quests such as in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), as well as stories that explicitly deal with virtual reality, e.g., *The Matrix* (1999), or other well-known science fiction television, including *Stargate* (1994-2011), which literally centers on a portal that connects our world to other worlds. The relationship between two worlds and their worldbuilding is crucial for a reading experience. Jennifer Hardwood-Smith further supports this in the article "Portals" (2018): "At their core, portals inform the audience of the otherness of the fictional world, and a significant difference between its laws and the Primary World's, as currently there are no known natural or artificial portals to other worlds" (58). A great degree of otherness is present in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and a complex portal (consciousness) that linked futuristic-Tokyo with the enigmatic Town.

In the context of literature, and especially Western literature, portal-quest stories typically focus on exploration and travel with a naive or innocent protagonist. Famous examples include *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), and *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950). Even cursory examination or familiarity with these stories will quickly reveal that Murakami's text offers a different experience because of the world-as-personality aspect. I find this a central subversion because it directly shows how worldbuilding and world structure may be employed to alter narratives. A

commonality between these narratives is the disrupted nature of an otherwise realistic setting. Strecher described magical realism in his early work from 1999: "a realistic narrative setting is created, then disrupted, sometimes mildly, sometimes violently, by the bizarre or the magical"[102]. Not all the examples I mentioned are magical realism – but the structure is still largely the same in terms of disruption. Many narratives (particularly conventional portal-quest narratives) feature a *sudden* disruption, typically triggered by an unexpected discovery of a portal, Murakami, on the other hand, employs a *gradual* disruption where the strange and the magical suffuse slowly. This is partly evidenced by the narrator's casual acceptance of the uncanny events in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and the mix between reality and the magical. An unusual preoccupation with paperclips is one instance of this:

> Next to it [a book] were three well-sharpened pencils and some paperclips. Paperclips! Everywhere I went, paperclips! What was this? Perhaps some fluctuation in the gravitational field had suddenly inundated the world with paperclips. Perhaps it was mere coincidence. I couldn't shake the feeling that things weren't normal. Was I being staked out by paperclips? They were everywhere I went, always just a glance away. (Murakami, 75-76)

While there is nothing overtly magical here, the general atmosphere and sense of unreality characterize the narrator's experiences. Although it *might* be a stretch to call Murakami's work Weird Fiction in the same category as Miéville, there could still be aesthetic and structural overlaps worth pointing out. For instance, the reliance on atmosphere, such as the one evoked by my recent example, is important for both Murakami's brand of magical realism and weird literature. When we consider recent definitions of the weird, then the connection seems even stronger. Steen Christiansen focuses on weird atmospheres in his book *The Cinematic Weird: Atmospheres, Aesthetics, Worldings* (2021). He argues that: "[...] we can argue that the weird emerges as a function of complex and non-realistic narration, stylistic excess, and dense expression. [...] The weird, in any form, is a matter of strangeness, the inexplicability of the world." (Christiansen, 15). We certainly see "stylistic excess" in Murakami, and the non-realistic narration that gradually emerges is also a core aspect of the story and storyworld's strangeness. Connected to Murakami's style of fiction is confusion between varying levels of reality within a story. What is real and what is fictional within the text is muddied because the separation between the two is less clear-cut. For example, following the paperclip-incident above, the protagonist in Hard-boiled Wonderland is trying to figure out the mysterious skull that he has acquired from the Professor. The

[102] Strecher, M. (1999). Magical realism and the search for identity in the fiction of Murakami Haruki. Journal of Japanese Studies, 25(2), 263–298.)

skull occasionally produces a sound, and he eventually realizes that the skull looks as if it used to be a unicorn:

> I tapped again and again, and eventually located the exact position. The moaning issued from a shallow depression of about two centimeters in a diameter in the center of the forehead. I pressed my fingertip into the depression. It felt slightly rough. Almost as if something had been broken off. Something, say, like a horn… A horn? If it really were a horn, that'd make it a one-horned animal.
> [...]
> Okay. For convenience sake, I agreed to entertain the remote hypothesis that the owner of said skull might be, conceivably, a unicorn. What else did I have to go on? *I had a unicorn skull on my hands*. (Murakami, 79-80, emphasis original)

As per Christiansen's definition of the weird, there is something 'inexplicable' here, and the connection between the skull in Hard-boiled Wonderland and the fantastic animals in The End of the World might not be immediately apparent. The skull, as we learn, is a fake one created by the Professor, but it nevertheless serves as one of the more direct or literal links between the two storyworlds in the novel. A component from fiction, the unicorn skull, has seemingly crossed over to the 'real' world and complicated the relationship between the two.

The dual-worlds and Murakami's uncertain characters generate a tension between characters' and readers' experiences, and the role the storyworld itself plays in this scenario cannot be overstated. While tension is *communicated* through characters, it is *produced* via the storyworld. In light of Marie-Laure Ryan's principle of minimal departure, we may recognize that storyworlds are understood via constant reference to the real world. A reader's past experience and past interactions help piece together both the real world and storyworld. Murakami creates tension by upsetting what we think we know. This is amplified because one narrative track takes place in the real world — albeit a futuristic one.

Dual-World Atmospheres

A significant aspect of the reading experience and the worldbuilding in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* concerns its dual worlds and the atmosphere this structural phenomenon evokes. Not only does each storyworld produce a unique atmosphere, but also the complementary nature of the two enhances the unique features of both. The allure of Murakami's relatively somber style can, to a degree, be explained through the atmosphere that readers attune to while reading (cf. Gumbrect 2021; Böhme 2017). As we have seen, atmosphere is closely linked to worldbuilding since it is through worldbuilding that speculative fiction can evoke particular aesthetic features. In Hard-boiled Wonderland, I argue for the presence of a distinctly cyberpunk-esque atmosphere that does not exist in The End of the World-sections at all. Early and mid-twentieth century Japanese fantastic literature often portrayed technology as foreign, and Suter refers to this as "techno-orientalism" (64). In a predictable but ironic turn, American and European science fiction literature, particularly cyberpunk with its futuristic, bleak, and hyper-tech societies, adopted a Japanese aesthetic to capture a degree of foreignness or otherness (but one that remains recognizable if not understandable). In a Western context, cyberpunk is often associated with William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), which is set in Chiba city (Chiba being both a prefecture and a large city in Japan). Ridley Scott's movie *Blade Runner* from 1982, based on Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) has been phenomenally influential in dictating the aesthetic and stylistic direction of cyberpunk, and it, too, includes Japanese imagery. Michael Crichton's *Rising Sun* (1992) fits the same bill with a Los Angeles that has turned strangely Japanese. Neal Stephenson *Snow Crash* (1992) is another cyberpunk novel set in America but drawing heavily on Japanese aspects, including samurai swords and the main character's ironic name, Hiro Protagonist. Video games have also adopted the Japanese aesthetic to portray cyberpunk elements. Particularly *Cyberpunk 2077* (2020) by CD Projekt abounds with Japanese language, imagery, art, and style. This all points toward the strange relationship between Japan and the Western world, especially in narratives portraying the influence of big corporations in futuristic societies, as it is also reflected in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* in the two major factions: the Semiotics and the Calcutecs and the info-wars they engage in.

> A major theme in modern Japanese fantastic literature was the introduction of new technologies and scientific discoveries, which were identified with Western culture and presented as simultaneously fascinating and threatening. (Suter, 63)

These aspects have a profound impact on the atmosphere of the novel, and also contribute to the uniqueness of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* in Murakami's oeuvre. Ruben also notes the cyberpunk aspects of the novel and highlights the violent information warfare between the Semiotics and the Calcutecs:

> Once, in fact, they [the Semiotics] kidnapped five Calcutecs, sawed off the tops of their skulls, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to extract data directly from their brains. This "cyber-punk" aspect of Watashi's identity bears a striking resemblance to William Gibson's 1981 story, "Johnny Mnemonic", but Murakami denies that Gibson's work was a source for the novel. (Ruben, 121)

Although readers only hear of such violence, and although readers only experience the main character's point of view (which somewhat limits the scope), there is still potential for highlighting the somewhat bleak world of Hard-boiled Wonderland and the atmosphere it produces. The sawing of skulls, which Ruben references, is an apt starting point since it also provides insight into the potential danger and workings of the two warring factions. In the chapter titled "Frankfurt, Door, Independent Operants", the girl in pink is panicked, and communication between her and the protagonist is tense and fraught with anticipation. The girl in pink is asking "Watashi" for help, but he is reluctant:

> "Why don't you call the police or the authorities at the System? They've been trained for this sort of thing."
> "I can't call the police. I'd have to tell them everything. If Grandfather's research got out now, it'd be the end of the world." [...]
> "I can't explain over the phone. Just believe me. This is important. More than anything you've ever done. *Really!* For your own sake, act while you still can. Before it's too late." [...]
> I gave her directions to an all-night supermarket in Aoyama. "Wait for me at the snack bar. I'll be there by five-thirty."
> "I'm scared. Somehow it—"
> The sound just died. I shouted into the telephone, but there was no reply. Silence floated up from the receiver like smoke from the mouth of a gun. (128)

This shows what Böhme argued with regards to the *how* something is present in a text, and the manner in which this 'how' manifests through worldbuilding. The frantic nature of this conversation and the few but meaningful descriptions such as the 'smoke from the mouth of a gun' contribute to this cyberpunk-esque atmosphere. Although there may be little direct worldbuilding in this passage, the relationship between worldbuilding and atmosphere nevertheless becomes clear since both are necessary components of establishing and making real the type of storyworld Murakami is creating.

The fact that readers are never *shown* but only *hear* about many of the moving forces is significant because of the grim anticipation it produces:

> I'd seen every Semiotec trick in the book, and if they were up to something, they weren't subtle about it. They wouldn't hire some bungling gas inspector, they wouldn't forget a lookout. They chose the fastest, most surefire methods, and executed them without mercy. A couple of years ago, they captured five Calcutecs and trimmed off the tops of their crania with one buzz of a power saw. Five Calcutec bodies were found floating in Tokyo Bay minus their skullcaps. When Semiotecs meant business, they did business. (129)

This points at a larger scheme with more going on behind the scenes than what is shown in the narrative. This is an effective method of worldbuilding and of producing particular atmospheres since, in accordance with Ryan's arguments on immersion, it leaves room for the imagination to contribute and become involved. The reading experience becomes richer since the text encourages and requires a degree of participation. Although this particular quote highlights a specific instance of cruel violence, the Semiotecs for most of the narrative remain on the fringes; a constant dangerous factor, but rarely directly involved. Even the two violent goons who visit the main character are only a tiny portion of the Semiotec faction.

If we contrast this with how The End of the World-sections produces a particular atmosphere, their differences become immediately clear. Abandoning the bleak cyberpunk aesthetic, the Town instead relies on a static slowness and a feeling of unchangeability. The first section describing the Town provides an illustrative example that stands in stark contrast to the first chapter in Hard-boiled Wonderland, which had a lot of movement and mystery.

> When I first came to the Town—it was in the spring—the beasts had short fur of varying colors. Black and sandy gray, white and ruddy brown. Some were a piebald of shadow and bright. These beasts of every imaginable shade drifted quietly over the newly greening countryside as if wafted about on a breeze. Almost meditative in their stillness, their breathing hushed as morning mist, they nibbled at the young grass with not a song. Then, tiring of that, they folded their legs under them to take a short rest. (Murakami, 12)

The beasts drift 'slowly', a breeze is 'wafted', their movements are 'meditative', they simply 'nibble', and they take a short rest. The difference in tone, style, and atmosphere between the first two chapters is striking, and this is what produces the difference in effect. Without the dual-world context, readers (according to Böhme) would attune to an atmosphere, and the background feeling of the work would continue to permeate it entirely. However, as I have argued, the differences between the two worlds in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* highlight the particular features of the individual

storyworlds and thus underscore their strange and unique atmospheres. This becomes a critical part of the reading experience and the immersive potential of the text. In other words, while the narratives concerning the "two" main characters are crucial, the storyworld and the affective attunement to it plays a vital role. The lack of clarity and meaning behind what is going on in the Town becomes part of its eerie and still atmosphere. It is often exemplified by looking at conversations with the Gatekeeper who, more than anyone else, is interested in maintaining the status quo and thus becomes a peculiar type of antagonist. In the initial chapter, "Boku" asks why the beasts are forced into their particular routine, and the Gatekeeper's reaction is telling:

> The Gatekeeper stares at me without a trace of emotion.
> "We do it that way," he says, "and that is how it is. The same as the sun rising in the east and setting in the west." (Murakami, 15)

This shows the sentiment and tone in the Town, and the challenge to put the pieces together becomes more and more apparent. There is no hectic violence (cf. the Semiotecs and the skullcaps). Instead, the atmosphere is reminiscent of fantasy narratives with an unknowledgeable character trying to make sense of an entirely new environment. The Town's eeriness is shown often, and the need for recentering (cf. Ryan) is constant as readers switch between two different narratives. As the Boku narrator explores more of the Town and learns of its workings, his Shadow plots escape but needs Boku's help. The Gatekeeper, once again, proves to be an antagonistic force, wanting to maintain the status quo with a strange vigilance that always seems to carry the implicit threat of violence. This is shown vividly in a conversation between the Gatekeeper and Boku where both the Gatekeeper's words and actions (subtle as they may be) point in a grim direction.

> "This Wall has no mortar," the Gatekeeper states. "There is no need. The bricks fit perfect; not a hair-space between them. Nobody can put a dent in the Wall. And nobody can climb it. Because this Wall is perfect. So forget any ideas you have. Nobody leaves here."
> The Gatekeeper lays a giant hand on my back.
> "You have to endure. If you endure, everything will be fine. No worry, no suffering. It all disappears. Forget about the shadow. This is the End of the World. This is where the world ends. Nowhere further to go." (Murakami, 109)

We recognize here a portion of the social commentary that occurs in Murakami's writing; the Gatekeeper's insistence that if only a person endures then they will be fine is both entirely Japanese and, possibly, quite dystopian. The Gatekeeper exists to prevent (civil) unrest. This is supported by

Suter who also argues in the context of dystopia and utopia and points out the clear relationship between *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* and these two critical terms.

> Finally, a prolific tradition of fantastic literature that is of relevance to Murakami's use of fantasy as a basis for social and cultural critique is that of utopian and dystopian narratives. The term "utopia" comes from the Greek words ou, meaning "not," and topos, or "place," and thus the expression literally means "non-place." While supposedly neutral in connotation, simply indicating a fully fictional reality, the word was typically used in a positive sense, to describe an idealized yet unattainable social, political, and/or cultural order. The early modern usage of the word utopia later led to the coinage of the term "dystopia," referring to an imagined world which foregrounds the dark, bleak, and oppressive side of what might initially appear to be a "perfect" utopian system. (Suter, 62)

While the dystopian aspects are more evident in the Hard-boiled Wonderland sections than in The End of the World sections, there are strong undercurrents of dystopian elements in The End of the World. This is primarily shown through the dramatic sequences of plotting escape until Boku decides to stay and accept his fate in the Town. The relationship between the dystopian elements in both narratives within *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* complements and enhances the atmosphere that each storyworld creates. I will stress a final time how crucial the dual-narrative structure is for the novel's overall atmosphere. The point is further underscored when Murakami's novel is juxtaposed with the other novels in this dissertation. His strategy of evoking atmosphere through a particular kind of worldbuilding is thus a captivating phenomenon since it relies on so many interlocked and interrelated moving parts.

Murakami's Worldbuilding

Considering Murakami's worldbuilding in light of the terminology proposed by Mark J. P. Wolf is helpful in terms of identifying the narrative groundwork that makes the storyworld in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* immersive and engaging. I have already discussed several of the major aspects of Murakami's worldbuilding. However, the topic houses more potential since this particular novel is unique in the context of Murakami's oeuvre and fiction generally; few books combine a futuristic, dystopian, and cyberpunk narrative with a parallel narrative set in a fantasy world. The true complexity of the text and its worldbuilding results from the double-structure centering on two narrators in two worlds, and this complexity is intensified by the numerous shifts and oscillations caused by this duplication. In terms of Ryan's principle of minimal departure, one of the worlds might be 'closer' to our own reality than the other. However, both contain numerous impossible elements that disqualify them from being realist in any sense. Both storyworlds in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* require constant fictional recentering (see Ryan: 1991, 18, 21ff.), amplified by the progressive nature by which the two worlds influence each other. As such, there are what we might call macro-inventions (the two storyworlds themselves) and micro-inventions within each realm. Although both these categories of invention are arguably covered by Wolf's term (2012, 34), differentiating between the two is is helpful for an analysis of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* since it lets us acknowledge the various tiers of invention that constitute worldbuilding. For the sake of contrast, we might consider a generic portal-quest fantasy that also employs a dual-narrative structure. Despite the existence of two worlds in these narratives, there is little need to explain the real world, and only the fictional world has been invented. In Murakami's novel, both worlds are invented even if one of them more closely resembles the real world. The complicated structure is also of interest to Strecher: "Not until *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* does Murakami attempt a detailed and focused examination of the 'other world,' yet even in this instance he shies away from description of the actual inner mind; rather, 'the Town,' [...] is an artificially constructed approximation of the inner world" (*Forbidden Worlds*, 70). This 'artificially constructed approximation' is an important invention since it takes quasi-physical form with the Town and thus belongs to what Wolf calls an invention within the ontological realm. Parameters of the world's existence have been changed and expanded meaningfully, broadening the horizon of potential within the novel's worldbuilding.

In terms of a fitting analytical starting point, *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* presents some difficulty because of the interconnected nature of the two storyworlds and the uncertain boundaries between them. However, this is interesting since it highlights the uniqueness of Murakami's worldbuilding, and how it is employed. Consider, for example, how Wolf argues that boundaries between worlds *usually* are distinct:

> The boundaries between a secondary world and the Primary World are usually very distinct [...] and they are important, as they determine who comes and goes into the secondary world. Getting to the secondary world often takes some effort, and many secondary worlds have a kind of "no-man's-land" or area surrounding them which further separates the secondary world from the Primary World [...]. (Wolf, 2012, 62)

Murakami's boundaries are not distinct, but we can recognize the relevance of Wolf's arguments in terms of the effort it takes to travel between the two worlds. Although Wolf is writing in the context of the primary world through which a fictional world is entered, the general idea in Murakami's work is the same, including the distinctness of the world(s) and the difficulty in traveling from one world (Hard-boiled Wonderland) to the other world (End of the World). The difficulty arises due to the storyworld construction being centered on the main character's consciousness. Since The End of the World exists as a product of one person's consciousness, the link between the two worlds is more complex than generic dual-world narratives. The End of the World is peculiar in another sense, namely that it is a product of an 'individual mnemonic makeup'. This phrase is used to explain the appearance of the Town, and how it is linked to the main character's own consciousness and identity. The Professor tries to explain:

> Each individual behaves on the basis of his individual mnemonic makeup. No two human beings are alike; it's a question of identity. And what is identity? The cognitive system arisin' from the aggregate memories of that individual's past experiences. The layman's word for this is the mind. Not two human beings have the same mind. At the same time, human beings have almost no grasp of their own cognitive systems. I don't, you don't, nobody does. (Murakami, 255)

We see here how Murakami was chiefly concerned with issues of identity and consciousness. While this trend is not atypical in Murakami's writing, it takes a particular form in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, and it is the ontological and (to a degree) cultural inventions within the storyworld which inform and drive the narrative and its construction. Strecher also argues in the same vein, stating that, "the great majority of Murakami's characters concern themselves with preserving or recovering their threatened or lost individual identity" (*Forbidden Worlds*, 44). It is primarily through

conversations with the Professor that readers learn about the link between the two worlds and he thus serves as a conduit of information. He is also a source of frustration, however, since it is his research that has led to the main character's difficulties. After having learned the realities of his situation from the Professor, "Watashi" is angry and dejected.

> "Was my explanation enough for you?" inquired the Professor.
> "It'll do, thanks," I replied.
> "S'ppose you're still mad?"
> "Sure," I said. "Though I guess anger won't do much for me now, will it? Besides, I'm so blitzed, I still haven't swallowed the reality of it. Later on, when it hits me, I might get furious. But by then, of course, I'll be dead to this world." (287)

The road to acceptance was quite short in this case, and he accepts his fate and sets out to enjoy the rest of his conscious time as much as possible. Through these final talks with the Professor, the links between the two storyworlds are further elaborated and explored, and we learn their exact nature. Despite the Professor's insistence that "Watashi" will not actually die but exist in a different set of circumstances, "Watashi" notes that this comes down to the "Same difference" (287). His fate is sealed

The three basic elements necessary for a storyworld are *space*, *time*, and *character(s)*. Any fictional story needs a space in which events may happen; these events happen over a set period of time; and characters exist to represent the world and drive the story. Wolf is interested in these areas and calls it the "secondary world infrastructure" (see 2012; 154) and stresses a point I made earlier concerning worldbuilding complexity and enjoyment: "Learning the ways in which a secondary world differs from the Primary World, and learning how a world works, is often a large part of the enjoyment of experiencing an imaginary world" (155). In the context of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, space is a driving force exactly because there are two spaces (or storyworlds) and both of them include complicated machinations that must be carefully decoded. This is true in Hard-boiled Wonderland where Tokyo somehow includes strange geography, and it is true for The End of the World with its numerous mysteries and rules. In terms of time, there is a linearity within Hard-boiled Wonderland that does not exist in as clear a manner in The End of the World. For example, in the former, events progress more or less in a predictable manner; in the latter, however, there seems to be an aspect of static timelessness. After the eventual revelation that the Town exists as a point in time taken from the main character's consciousness this timelessness suddenly falls into place but continues to imbue the storyworld with a particular and somewhat eerie atmosphere. Although I argue for this

atmosphere of timelessness, the Town still experiences the four seasons with important events being tied to each season. An example of this occurs early, in the first End of the World-chapter. The main character has seemingly just arrived, or just (re)gained consciousness:

> Whenever I hear the horn, I close my eyes and let the gentle tones spread through me. They are like none other. Navigating the darkling streets like a pale transparent fish, down cobbled arcades, past the enclosures of houses and stone walls lining the walkways along the river, the call goes out. Everything is immersed in the call. It cuts through invisible airborne sediments of time, quietly penetrating the furthest reaches of the Town. (Murakami, 13)

This is a forceful start and an almost prescient aspect to the use of 'invisible airborne sediments of time', which early on provides a small hint to the nature of the Town. It is closely connected to the third area, character, since it is through characters' experiences that time is experienced and interpreted. I mention these areas partly because they figure prominently in Wolf's description of worldbuilding. However, in Wolf's application their purpose is primarily to unlock macro elements of generic or conventional storyworlds. They are useful, but it is clear that an analysis of somewhat unconventional storyworlds requires tools that account for the structural dimension and the aesthetic and atmospheric dimension. In other words, affective elements in worldbuilding rely on the use of an expanded critical vocabulary in order to analyze the topics that are relevant to postcriticism. Worldbuilding promotes immersion, and it is possible to become immersed in a storyworld; consequently, the various features that stimulate immersion must be included in any analysis of storyworlds, even if these are intangible or not as readily describable as other parts of the storyworld.

The author's conscious focus on worldbuilding becomes evident when taking a closer look at the conversations between "Watashi" and the Professor. As we have seen, the Professor plays a big role outside and inside of the narrative. Outside the narrative he conveys information to the reader, and inside the narrative, his actions and research led to the main character's situation. As the two are discussing and the Professor tries to clarify the situation, his explanations become abstract:

> "You heard correct. This very moment you're preparin' t'move to another world. So the world you see right now is changin' bit by bit t'match up. Changin' one percept at a time. The world here and now does exist. But on the phenomenological level, this world is only one out of countless possibilities. We're talkin' about whether you put your right foot or your left foot out - changes on that order. It's not so strange that when your memories change, the world changes."
> "Pretty academic if you ask me," I said. (Murakami, 283)

This line of argumentation is (very interestingly) completely in line with possible worlds theory, and it is unsurprising that "Watashi" is having a hard time wrapping his head around the situation. The Professor even mentions phenomenology directly and tries to provide a helpful example, but the situation remains complex for "Watashi" to follow. "Watashi" is an unwitting participant, dragged along by forces he does not understand. Murakami's main characters are often unwilling or reluctant participants in the story but are thrust into events that they often cannot explain or avoid. This is exemplified particularly well in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* since what led to the main character's difficulties was completely outside his control.

Murakami's worldbuilding features complex structures that combine aspects from several subgenres. I have highlighted that worldbuilding plays a central role in the novel and argued for the co-existence of unique and complementary storyworlds and atmospheres. With Murakami's Japanese perspectives, the magical realist tradition has resulted in a storyworld that aesthetically and in terms of atmosphere provides helpful contrast to Anglophone texts by showing that both worldbuilding strategies and their atmospheres vary considerably. As we have seen so far, storyworlds may exist as separate entities, as in *Gormenghast*, or be based on specific philosophies and schools of thought, as in *Earthsea*. However, Murakami instead lets consciousness and identity serve as the foundation for his worldbuilding and the structures therein. In the following chapter on the New Weird and China Miéville's *The City & The City*, I will investigate yet another form of worldbuilding that also creates two cities, but the underlying makeup of the storyworld is entirely different from Murakami's.

5. Into the Weird: *The City & The City*

China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) is a New Weird novel that expands the limits of speculative fiction by establishing a rich storyworld where a logical impossibility serves as the foundation for his worldbuilding. Making such a construction believable and immersive is no easy task, but Miéville's attempts, which are part of a larger literary tendency, constitute an important inclusion in this dissertation. The New Weird is arguably the most recent noteworthy trend in speculative fiction that consciously draws on established tropes and also deliberately strives to move beyond the forms and styles that by now are familiar and recognizable in the context of speculative fiction. Miéville has written numerous books, and while this chapter will reference or draw on other titles, the main focus is *The City & The City*.

This chapter contains an analysis of the particular style of worldbuilding in Miéville's writing and will offer necessary contextualization. *The City & The City* is uniquely positioned compared to other books in Miéville's oeuvre, especially the Bas-lag trilogy which features worldbuilding that is more recognizable within a speculative fiction framework. My overarching argument in this chapter is that worldbuilding has significant implications for immersion, and the driving force behind immersion is sensory stimulation evoked in the reader through characters and their reactions to the storyworld more so than through the narration itself. Through a postcritical analysis of *The City & The City*, this chapter shows how genre, expectations, and sensory engagement together emphasize the importance of a plausible storyworld even when weird and fantastical textual elements are part of the narrative. As we shall see, the atmospheres that are produced in the New Weird are a central aspect of this emerging mode of writing. I will employ concepts from both possible worlds theory as well as argue for the effects of sensory stimulants and how exactly the narratives stimulate immersive experiences. This is done in part using Rita Felski's ideas on the purpose and value of literature from *Uses of Literature* (2008), with particular focus on her ideas on literary shock. I will expand on the shock-idea, and analyze how speculative fiction makes use of affective responses to assist worldbuilding, and through worldbuilding ultimately assist and reinforce immersion. This is closely connected to postcriticism and its focus on emotions and intangible aspects of reading. The New Weird is particularly interesting in the context of postcriticism since the unexplained weirdness and the strange storyworlds that are

created cannot always be explained via conventional tools in the literary analysis arsenal. For example, there is rich potential for suspicious readings of New Weird texts but I argue the immersive potential of these storyworlds are more readily explored from a starting point that views these texts as deliberate attempts at pushing the textual envelopes. The chapter contains examples from *The City & The City* which show how the storyworld is constructed and the chapter will necessarily contain descriptions of important factions, characters, and storyworld mechanisms. These mechanisms significantly impact worldbuilding as well as the plot and are a regular part of speculative fiction. My focus on worldbuilding and its implications as well as the affective considerations will complement and bolster existing interpretations of both the New Weird generally and Miéville specifically. The role of atmosphere in the New Weird and Miéville's work will also be clarified. Similarly to Peake's *Titus Groan*, many texts in the New Weird rely on atmosphere to a high degree, and it is unsurprising that the Gormenghast novels heavily inspired Miéville.

Still more contemporary scholarship focuses exclusively on the New Weird. Miéville's work in particular seems to represent the New Weird movement, even though it is not a role he would have asked for. Recent examples of major works on Miéville include *China Miéville: Critical Essays* (2015) and *Art and Idea in the Novels of China Miéville* (2015). These have done a commendable job of presenting critical readings that offer convincing interpretations of *The City & The City* and, for example, draw obvious parallels between the phenomenon of *unseeing* in Miéville's book and the process of *doublethink* in Orwell's *1984*. Miéville's own political affiliation and interests are well-documented and he has never attempted to hide or downplay them. His academic efforts culminated in a PhD which was eventually published as *Between Equal Rights: A Marxist Theory of International Law* in 2005. However, Miéville has also been vocal that no attention to political aspects is necessary in order for a reader to engage with his work.

As observed in "UnIntroduction: China Miéville's Weird Universe", "Miéville's scholarly interest in international law can be traced in several of his novels" (Edwards & Venezia, 12) — for example jurisprudence in *Perdido Street Station* (2000), maritime law in *The Scar* (2002), the heavy focus on striking and its implications in *Kraken* (2010), numerous invoked laws in *Embassytown* (2011), and references to sea and land laws in *Railsea* (2012). This provides material for interpretations focused on the political landscape of Miévílle's texts. While my focus in this chapter is the construction and

plausibility of his storyworld, I fully acknowledge that part of the strength and beauty of Miéville's work lies in the blend between creative weirdness rooted in contemporary and recognizable political issues. Contemporary fiction is uniquely able to dissect, problematize, and discuss real-world problems despite the fact that it is fiction. Fiction is able to create a shared framework in which participants collectively use their imaginations and are thus able to deal with important issues from a helpful distance. Although speculative fiction is almost always grounded in real ideas or philosophical concepts, exploring these in a speculative framework allows us to reconsider problems from new perspectives without being weighed down by political realities or historical facts. This is a major part of what Felski argues concerning phenomenological knowledge and literature's power to reveal truths that we might not otherwise encounter, or to present situations or emotions that we otherwise would not seriously consider. For example, few people would place themselves in a situation where they empathize with a child predator, but Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) presents exactly such a situation and this stepping-into-the-shoes of a character is the strength of literature and other art. While *Lolita* might be an extreme example that highlights the potential for considering the perspectives of an unlikeable character, the same is true for very heroic and likable characters, however, and these stories also impart encouraging and useful perspectives.

In a 2005 interview with Believer Magazine[103], Miéville acknowledges the role of politics in his worldbuilding but stresses that it is not the sole pillar on which his writing rests:

> I've invented this world that I think is really cool and I have these really big stories to tell in it and one of the ways that I find to make that interesting is to think about it politically. If you want to do that too, that's fantastic. But if not, isn't this a cool monster? (Miéville, 2005)

I find here the duality inherent in much New Weird writing, namely that it houses both immense creative depth and also very often grand complexity in which complicated issues are explored. The politics that Miéville makes real in his fiction are a driving force that informs both his storyworld and the plots therein, but it is crucial that, as he argues, these stories can also be enjoyed by appreciating the weird and the monsters. This is largely in line with a postcritical perspective as well, particularly as concerns enchantment and self-loss. For the sake of immersion, it is less important whether enchantment happens as an effect of engaging with the text's politics or its monsters — if the result is

[103] Anders, Lou: "An Interview with China Miéville", The Believer, Issue 23, 2005.
Available online: https://believermag.com/an-interview-with-china-mieville/ Last accessed 20.12.2021

immersion and a well-realized storyworld then a reader will undoubtedly find something worth the time.

The City & The City takes place in the real world but with the city-states of Besźel and Ul Qoma as invented entities that are placed somewhere the reader cannot pinpoint exactly, although several textual clues suggest them to be somewhere in Eastern Europe. I will touch more on this later. The challenges inherent in creating a weird-fiction storyworld set in the real world are naturally different than when creating an independent secondary world without any direct references to the primary world. Placing *The City & The City* in a textual tradition may be more difficult than what one may first expect. There is a degree of vagueness and abstruseness in what constitutes the so-called New Weird with which Miéville is typically associated, and the impressive diversity in Miéville's novels makes it difficult to place him firmly within one single genre — unless the New Weird by itself is indeed considered a fully fledged genre. This is important because genres are typically connected to a specific range of expectations and assumptions. When we engage with either science fiction or fantasy, we allow for — or even expect — certain generic conventions to be present. Books with common features can usefully be grouped into a single genre which helps readers manage expectations. In the case of *The City & The City*, its worldbuilding deviates from what we normally expect in a generic police procedural narrative and that makes the worldbuilding denser exactly because we have no (or very few) established models to assist our frame of reference. When reading a fantasy quest narrative, readers are able to make reasonable assumptions when presented with events that in the context of the genre are familiar, but the New Weird's blend of multiple genres in *The City & The City* leaves no genre-map and is therefore through its worldbuilding able to evoke emotions and exploit sensory stimulants that allow for a more complex type of immersion in which the story needs to be decoded in conjunction with the complicated storyworld. This relates to emotional and affective reactions such as hesitation and shock when readers encounter new textual aspects that expand the storyworld. Learning to navigate the storyworld when new information is introduced is partly why reading is an interactive process and this is enhanced when outlandish occurrences become part of the narrative.

The New Weird has rightly gained significant scholarly attention in recent years although it remains a fringe field, similar to how the genre itself exists on the fringes. In *The New Cinematic Weird:*

Atmospheres and Worldings (2021), Steen Christiansen sees a direct link between atmosphere and the Weird and acknowledges how the two are inseparable and have been so ever since the Old Weird:

> Weird fiction, then, may be identifiable as working through atmosphere more than specific generic traits, devices, or conventions. Understanding weird fiction in terms of atmospheres is literally as old as weird fiction itself. Edgar Allan Poe understood atmosphere as the essence of literature in his 1846 essay "The Philosophy of Composition"; in 1934's "Notes on Writing Weird Fiction," H.P. Lovecraft explicitly wrote, "I always try very carefully to achieve the right mood and atmosphere." Let us take seriously what these writers and critics insist on — that the weird is a matter of atmosphere and feeling. (Christiansen, 16)

As we shall see, it is difficult to talk about the New Weird without juxtaposing it with the Old Weird, particularly Poe and Lovecraft. As Christiansen argues, feeling and atmosphere are key components but these are naturally intangible; given the history and development of the New Weird, a degree of intangibility is to be expected. However, attempts have been made at more clearly defining what constitutes the New Weird. Kate Marshall argues in "The Old Weird" (2016) that the New Weird is a blend of post-cyberpunk and transgressive horror: "The 'New Weird' is a genre category that has been adopted by a group of writers of post-cyberpunk speculative fiction and what they call "[t]ransgressive horror" (*The New Weird*, 636). Although numerous New Weird texts use what might be described as post-cyberpunk, several of the most significant New Weird texts, including *The City & The City*, borrow more heavily from other traditions, including cosmic horror and science fiction. This speaks to how difficult it is to grasp what the New Weird is. Roger Luckhurst argues in "The Weird: A Dis/orientation" (2017) that we must understand the 'elusiveness of the weird' as part of the genre:

> I want to acknowledge the difficulty and elusiveness of the weird, a genre that dissolves generic glue, a category that defies categorisation, and that by definition escapes the containment of the act of 'introduction'. The weird reveals the best iterations of itself in the way it disorients any simple route map through the territory (Luckhurst, 1042)

The disorientation that Luckhurst mentions seems an apt point of departure for further discussions since it pertains to both the genre itself and the notorious difficulty in defining it, and it is relevant for New Weird literature which itself seems to deliberately want to disorientate and make-new. When the Weird has been figured out, it morphs and weirds into something new once again. The Weird is a constantly evolving textual mode; one that is inherently resistant to clear-cut definitions and their limitations. This is also noticeable when looking at Lovecraft, a major figure in the retroactively-defined Old Weird. In his philosophy of writing, the idea of atmosphere and dread is treated with utmost seriousness to achieve emotional involvement and reactions:

> The true weird tale must have something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain – a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, 15)

Part of Lovecraft's goal here is to differentiate between the ghost tale (a popular genre in his time) and the pseudo-scientific and cosmic that Lovecraft was interested in. In many ways what made Lovecraft so impactful was taking a prevalent idea at the time, namely that humans were at the center of the universe, and turning that on its head by making the human race entirely insignificant and meaningless in a cosmic perspective. This, to a large extent, was achieved through the blend between atmosphere and the horrific creatures that Lovecraft placed at the center of the universe; these creatures existed long before mankind came into being and are beyond human comprehension. Luckhurst echoes the importance of atmosphere. He points out that Lovecraft "insisted that the weird was an effect of 'atmosphere', a 'vivid depiction of a certain type of human mood', it was never tied to a fixed typology and continually slipped category" (1043). Developing this line of argumentation further, Luckhurst is also a proponent of thinking of the Weird as a *mode*: "It is better to think of the weird as an inflection or tone, a *mode* rather than a *genre"* (1045, emphasis original). The same is argued in the 2015 article "American Weird" where he states that the Weird is "less a genre than a *mode*, far more expansive and supremely difficult to demarcate" (203, emphasis original). Genre categorizations seem dangerous or limiting perhaps because speculative fiction almost by definition expands genres and constantly both consciously and subconsciously seeks to subvert whatever genre assumptions, expectations, and conventions exist. In large part, these subversions occur through worldbuilding and the accompanying atmosphere, which is evoked through worldbuilding.

Jeff VanderMeer is famous for his contributions to both scholarly work on the Weird and his own creative work within the genre, including *The Southern Reach* trilogy (2014), *Borne* (2017), and *Dead Astronauts* (2019). Together with Ann VanderMeer, he edited *The New Weird* (2008), which is a helpful starting point since it attempts to tackle some of the major issues concerning the Weird, and it provides necessary background information and context. They identify that the Weird has existed for a

long time, but that Miéville's successful novel *Perdido Street Station* (2000) played a significant role in catapulting the Weird into new spheres of popularity[104].

> The publication of Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* in 2000 represented what might be termed the first commercially acceptable version of the New Weird, one that both coarsened and broadened the New Weird approach through techniques more common to writers like Charles Dickens, while adding a progressive political slant (VanderMeer, xi)

The political slant they reference is evident in almost all of Miéville's writing, but the political dimension in his writing is much more pronounced than what we might find in the work of other authors. In their Introduction to the book, they provide further background information concerning the Weird which touches on several important aspects including the development of the genre:

> Weird fiction — typified by magazines like Weird Tales and writers like H. P. Lovecraft or Clark Ashton Smith back in the glory days of the pulps — eventually morphed into modern-day traditional Horror. "Weird" refers to the sometimes supernatural or fantastical element of unease in many of these stories — an element that could take a blunt, literal form or more subtle and symbolic form and which was, as in the best of Lovecraft's work, combined with a visionary sensibility. These types of stories also often rose above their pulp or self-taught origins through the strength of the writer's imagination. (VanderMeer, ix)

There remains, it seems, a constant relationship between the Weird and horror. This partly has to do with the alien nature of the Weird, and the necessity of providing alienating elements which are able to produce this feeling and atmosphere of *weirdness*. Although *The City & The City* produces its weirdness in a different manner, namely by taking a logical impossibility to extreme heights, a significant portion of Weird stories nevertheless contain strong horror aspects. These aspects, particularly since they rarely rely on body horror, also establish an emotional connection which is a prerequisite for immersion. As per Wolf's arguments about the emotional component of worldbuilding even the most outlandish storyworlds must have recognizable emotional realism (see Wolf 2014: 55). This emotional realism in conjunction with other worldbuilding structures, including Wolf's ideas on invention, completeness, and consistency, remain central regardless of the other foundations on which a storyworld is built. In terms of borders and horror, consider, for example, the relationship between texts like Arkady and Boris Strugatsky *Roadside Picnic* (1972), Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* (2014), John Langan's *The Fisherman* (2016), B. Catling's *The Vorrh* (2012) and H. P. Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928) — their interest in borders and zones is evident and all of them include horror elements

[104] Although the New Weird might not be a *popular* genre as such, it has gained more attention and popularity in recent years.

to varying degrees. This interest, however, manifests itself in new ways and these are markedly different from texts like Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* despite their shared interest in borders and worlds. Another major difference occurs due to the horror-tradition that the former texts draw on.

One of the most interesting contributions in *The New Weird* (2008) is the definition of the mode; it is a helpful starting point and includes numerous aspects of the New Weird that are crucial for further analysis and study because it helps pinpoint how the New Weird departs from more established genres:

> New Weird is a type of urban, secondary-world fiction that subverts the romanticized ideas about place found in traditional fantasy, largely by choosing realistic, complex real-world models as the jumping off point for creation of settings that may combine elements of both science fiction and fantasy. New Weird has a visceral, in-the-moment quality that often uses elements of surreal or transgressive horror for its tone, style, and effects — in combination with the stimulus of influence from New Wave writers or their proxies (including also such forebears as Mervyn Peake and the French/English Decadents). New Weird fictions are acutely aware of the modern world, even if in disguise, but not always overtly political. As part of this awareness of the modern world, New Weird relies for its visionary power on a "surrender to the weird" that isn't, for example, hermetically sealed in a haunted house on the moors or in a cave in Antarctica. The "surrender" (or "belief") of the writer can take many forms, some of them even involving the use of postmodern techniques that do not undermine the surface reality of the text." (VanderMeer, xvi)

We must note, of course, the inclusion of Mervyn Peake in this important section. There are literary figures whose towering presence continues to be felt strongly in the New Weird, and many Weird texts harken back to them often in terms of style or construction. VanderMeer's explanation of the New Weird and the particular surrender it requires is vital in the context of immersion. What is also highlighted is the 'visceral' and 'in-the-moment' quality of the New Weird, which makes it immediately interesting in the context of postcritique, which explains literature in more or less the same way. There exists an immediateness to these types of storyworlds that, in the postcritical sense, must be experienced without a suspicious and pre-packaged starting point, not least since these texts are not always sure to provide clear-cut answers about either their content, form, or structure. As we saw earlier with regards to quest fantasy and Le Guin, there must be a reasonable level of information and coherence to establish a believable secondary world, which provides answers to questions about the storyworld and offers readers opportunities to deduce answers to questions concerning the storyworld. In several instances, this is not true in the New Weird. While New Weird texts still need to establish ontological and foundational rules that govern the storyworld, there is less need for overt exposition or

explanation. The Weird elements are justified by their very existence alone. In their article titled "Introduction: Old and New Weird" (2016), Benjamin Noys and Timothy S. Murphy touch on the same issues when they argue that Weird fiction 'generates its own distinctive conventions':

> […] weird fiction generates its own distinctive conventions and its own generic form, but it remains an unstable construction. This unsettling transnational hybrid of science fiction, horror, and fantasy was born in the hothouse of late-Victorian and Edwardian low culture and reached maturity in the "pulp modernism" of H. P. Lovecraft. (Noys & Murphy, 117)

They underscore an earlier point here too, namely that the Weird is an amalgamation of several existing genres that share relatively specific literary starting points. China Miéville himself has often contributed to discussions about literature. In his confusingly-titled article "From M.R. James and the Quantum Vampire: Weird; Hauntological: Versus and/or and and/or or?" (2008), he refers to the Weird as *ab*-canny rather than *un*canny:

> The Weird entities have waited in their catacombs, sunken cities and outer circles of space since aeons before humanity. If they remain it is from a pre-ancestral time. In its very unprecedentedness, paradoxically, Cthulhu is less a ghost than the arche-fossil-as-predator. The Weird is if anything ab-, not un-, canny. (113)

Although the abcanny is not defined clearly by Miéville here, it seems to refer to a realm outside of human perception; this would be consistent with Lovecraft's work and the ideas behind cosmic horror. The abcanny as such refers to something entirely non-human. This is contrasted with, for example, ghost stories, which are grounded in human experience vis-á-vis the necessity for ghosts to have once been living. The entities of the Weird, both locations and creatures, belong to a different category. As we shall see in the following, the weird location in *The City & The City* is a representative example of the types of experiments that the New Weird is fond of and which often result in complex storyworlds with vivid atmospheres.

The New Weird Worlds

The City & The City is a doppelgänger narrative that draws on multiple literary genres and makes use of ontological uncertainty in order to create a complex yet strangely plausible storyworld driven by a noir police procedural storyline. Partly inspired by Bruno Schulz's work in *The Street of Crocodiles* from 1663 that Miéville cites in the novel's epigraph, the textual doppelgänger is expanded and explored in the context of the post-Soviet probably-but-not-definitely Eastern European twin-cities of Ul Qoma and Beszél. The textual mechanism that drives *The City & The City* concerns these two city-states, which occupy the same geographical location but have their own distinct cultures and political systems. History is provided via references to an event labeled "the Cleavage", which split the cities but left a number of streets and locations that are shared by both cities. These shared locations — where the same street has one name in Ul Qoma and another in Beszél — are "crosshatched", and citizens must dutifully *unsee* inhabitants of the neighboring city. The surreal is combined with an urban Gothic aesthetic and an imaginative reconfiguration of the police procedural, but unlike similar narratives, Miéville places the surreal and weird in the material world often in the shape of grotesque characters or, in the case of *The City & The City*, in a logical impossibility made real. On a plot level, *The City & The City* follows Inspector Tyador Borlú, employed in Beszél's Extreme Crime Squad, who is tasked with investigating the murder of an international doctoral student, Mahalia Geary, whose body is found dumped in the streets of Beszél. Inspector Borlú's investigation reveals Mahalia Geary's affiliation with political factions in both Beszél and Ul Qoma, as well as her interest in the fabled third city, Orciny, that supposedly exists in the uncertain areas between Beszél and Ul Qoma. Inspector Borlú is a *walker* and much of the storyworld is experienced through his direct traversing through the streets of both cities, and thus he becomes both a participant in and an observer of the Gothic and weird urban landscape[105]. Not only his point of view, but also his opinions and subjective experiences shape the reading experience. As such, readers' emotional immersion hinges on Inspector Borlú's narration and the world he inhabits.

Thematic tension relies on the plausibility of the two cities, each one with a unique culture, people, language, style of dress, and architecture. The uncertainty concerning Orciny also creates tension for

[105] For more on the weird and its portals, see Mark Fisher's "The Weird and the Eerie" (2016)

both characters and the reader; characters unveil the history and theory of Orciny gradually, while readers have the additional challenge of comprehending the philosophical and political implications of the existence of the mysterious and controversial third city. The inhabitants of Besźel and Ul Qoma must consciously unsee inhabitants of the other city lest they commit Breach and thereby invoke the attention and harsh swift judgment of the mysterious and powerful police force also known as Breach. Unseeing is the both conscious and subconscious process of ignoring, or not even registering, people in the neighboring city; this is important because the two cities are considered separate and even international entities. Inhabitants must uphold the seemingly illogical but crucial status quo that preserves the autonomy of each city. For regular citizens, unseeing is mostly important in the crosshatched streets where citizens from both cities are bound to exist simultaneously. The crime of failing to unsee inhabitants of the other city is punished severely by Breach (although we never fully learn what exactly happens to offenders), and the Breach entity in itself has significant ontological implications for crossing particular boundaries in the novel. In a talk from 2016[106], Miéville refers to the making-real of the impossible situation in *The City & The City* as a 'social logic'; the characters take this social logic for granted, and readers must attune to it which happens through the characters and their perception of the two cities and the social logic which enables the impossible-possible situation of the two cities existing in the same space. Miéville stresses that this is not an 'impossible social logic' but merely an 'extrapolated social logic'. The situation is simultaneously absurd and surreal but also, for the inhabitants of the two cities, completely everyday.

The status of a storyworld is most easily discussed in terms of ontology. As far as a possible worlds perspective is concerned, invented storyworlds may be placed at variable distances from the real world. Because our point of reference is always in the real world, we can usefully think of storyworlds and distance (cf. Wolf and Ryan). For example, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) is a secondary world with many modifications and inventions compared to the actual world. In contrast, our current text, *The City & The City*, is quite similar to our reality cf. the principle of minimal departure. The size of the storyworld is another useful metric. Some storyworlds, particularly in science fiction and fantasy, are huge, potentially span many worlds and include numerous details about the inner

[106]ZVWS FICTION: "China Miéville", uploaded by Helen Zell Writers' Program Oct 2016 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBf28LBGsso&t=1584s minute 39:00. Last accessed 20.12.2021

workings of a storyworld; this information is not necessarily crucial to the plot but provides context and creates the opportunity for immersion.

Michael Moorcock has argued that Miéville draws on string theory in order to make plausible that two cities can exist in the exact same location: "Playing off the current theoretical physicists' notion that more than one object can occupy the same physical space, Miéville help[s] us to hang on to the idea that the city of Besźel exists in the same space as the city of Ul Qoma. Citizens of each city can dimly make out the other, but are forbidden on pain of severe penalties […] to notice it" (2009)[107]. It is an interesting idea, although the fact that the city-states are coterminous somewhat dilutes the argument. A recurring issue in *The City & The City* concerns how motorists must both unsee drivers from the other city and pay attention to them to avoid accidents. Additionally, the process of unseeing must be actively learned. While natives of both cities gain the skill early in their lives, tourists must be trained and pass an exam before they are allowed to visit, thus stressing the cultural, legal, and political importance of unseeing in the storyworld and the coterminous nature of the cities. The importance of unseeing being a learned skill is stressed several times in the novel:

> The early years of a Besź (and presumably an Ul Qoman) child are intense learnings of cues. We pick up styles of clothing, ways of walking and holding oneself, very fast. Before we were eight or so most of us could be trusted not to breach embarrassingly and illegally, though licence of course is granted children every moment they are in the street. (Miéville, 80)

Such information is necessary for the reader to appreciate the difficulty in actually unseeing since it is not an innate ability and because it is significant in the storyworld. It is hard to miss the commentary on social constructivism, both concerning the process of unseeing and borders. Such constructs may seem abstract and arbitrary, especially in situations where two cities are divided for reasons few people even seem to remember; the passing references to "the Cleavage" give readers nothing concrete to hold on to, but textually it leaves an important gap that readers can weave rationalizations around. On a long enough timeline, the details surrounding any event become murky. Therefore, it does not hurt the storyworld construction that Miéville is not explicit about how, when, and why the two cities were cleaved apart. As critical texts on the New Weird revealed, Miéville's interest in these constructions fits well with the overall conventions in the New Weird.

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[107] Moorcock, Michael: "The Space in Between", The Guardian, May 2009. Available online: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/may/30/china-mieville-fiction

Miéville uses instances of breach(ing) to also establish the two city cultures and to highlight their differences — including their differing atmosphere despite the shared physical space. In an early example of this, we see how a description of breach and the storyworld workings take on the equally important function of describing certain characteristics of inhabitants in the cities.

> Most of those around us were in Besźel so we saw them. Poverty deshaped the already staid, drab cuts and colours that enduringly characterise Besz clothes – what has been called the city's fashionless fashion. Of the exceptions, some we realised when we glanced were elsewhere, so unsaw, but the younger Besz were also more colourful, their clothes more pictured, than their parents. (Miéville, 21)

Descriptions containing phrases like "poverty deshaped", "staid, drab cuts", and "fashionless fashion" evoke an aesthetic that fuels the particular aesthetic immersion that at the same time conveys imagery of Besźel reminiscent of post-soviet Eastern Europe. It produces a vivid atmosphere that enables a clear differentiation between the two cities. It is easy to imagine the bleak, gray, multistory buildings, unadorned and devoid of charm in their utilitarian function; mental images that correlate with Anglophone perception of communist-era neighborhoods that stand in stark contrast to the capitalistic yankee-dollar wealth and color of Ul Qoma. The austerity of Besźel, particularly compared with Ul Qoma, drives immersion by placing it in a cultural, societal, but also aesthetic context that guides reader assumptions and enables the postcritical potential experiences that become important facets of the novel (cf. Wolf 2012). By linking Besźel closely to post-soviet societies, Miéville uses a pre-existing framework to assist his worldbuilding and is free to write more specifically about the particularities of each city (cf. Ryan's principle of minimal departure). This is different from other styles of secondary world creation where cities must be more carefully built from the ground up, such as New Crobuzon in Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000). Comparatively, few things need to be pointed out explicitly about the level of technology, society, culture, and community and so on because Besźel is rooted in our primary world, and Miéville can trust readers to automatically fill in storyworld gaps (cf. Doležel on gaps, in particular 2009).

Readers — just like inhabitants in the two cities — must learn that the only major similarity between the two cities is their location. This is further stressed when radical political factions, either in favor of unifying the two cities or keeping them separated, are introduced. Some of the major factions in *The City & The City* include the Extreme Crime Squad Inspector Borlú works for; the mysterious police force Breach; the so-called unifactionists, or 'unifs', who work to unite the two cities; the nationalists,

who want to further the interest of the individual city they belong to; and outside third parties that have a business interest in the cities (as is revealed late in the story). The influence of Breach is stressed multiple times, and its status even as a religion leaves no room for doubt about its power: "There is no theology so desperate that you can't find it. There is a sect in Beszél that worships Breach. It's scandalous but not completely surprising given the powers involved. There is no law against the congregation, though the nature of their religion makes everyone twitchy" (Miéville, 46). Although Breach is not a religion, it nevertheless speaks to its power that certain citizens worship it. Mysterious power breeds fear and a strange allegiance. Generally, shadowy underground factions with radical agendas are a recurring aspect in most Miéville novels, and the tension that arises from these factions attempting to further their agendas highlights the endogenous nature of the plot.

The endogenous plot is also a specific example of a textual driving force that differs markedly from much conventional fantasy where external events kick-start the plot and catapult hesitant or unwilling characters onto the path of Campbell's famous Hero's Journey. In most of Miéville's stories the plot arises from within; no sudden outside force compels characters into action. In other words, there is a stark difference between Inspector Borlú finding a body and seemingly continuing his regular job and the intrusive phenomenon often employed in other narratives where sudden disturbances kickstart narrative. While finding a dead body is a type of intrusion, it does not exist on the same scale as similar adventure-starting events, especially when we consider that Inspector Borlú quite probably deals with ghastly events often and as such it is not outside of the character's regular horizon of possibilities.

Miéville himself has stated that he considers the Weird a deliberate blend of science fiction, fantasy and horror[108]. This conscious awareness of the intersection of these genres is exactly what makes it an evolution of known genres. As Ryan has argued ("Ontological Rules", 74), we can talk of genre when several texts share the same ontological rules. However, Miéville's texts are different enough, with aspects and stylistic choices from some existing genres, that the relatively new category of New Weird ultimately gives us some direction. While his Bas-Lag novels, *Perdido Street Station, The Scar*, and *Iron Council*, all encompass elements from fantasy, science fiction, horror, and steampunk, *The City & The City* is less overt in its use of the fantastic. In fact, it may be argued that the novel carries no

108 "I always say that what I write is weird fiction, in that it is self-consciously at the intersection." cited from Gordon, Joan (2003), "Reveling in Genre: An Interview with China Miéville", *Science Fiction Studies.* Available online here: https://www.depauw.edu/sfs/interviews/mievilleinterview.htm Accessed 20.12.2021

element of speculative fiction at all because the dominant feature of the story, the issue concerning the two cities, relies exactly on a deliberate and conscious mental process on the part of the characters that is strange but not inconceivable. There is no magic, *novum*, uncanny suspense, the Romantic sublime or similar textual mechanics. In this way, *The City & The City* marks an interesting departure from Miéville's speculative fiction stories and deliberately ventures into crime fiction, noir, the police procedural and, significantly, the hard-boiled detective narrative. Miéville specifically thanks Raymond Chandler in the book's acknowledgements, and the influence of Dashiell Hammett, author of hard-boiled detective fiction, is palpable as well. Unsurprisingly, although his presence is notoriously difficult articulate, Kafka also inspired *The City & The City*, and these influences help illustrate how the narrative is not just a hard-boiled detective narrative or just a story with the unexplained and gruesome bureaucracy typically associated with Kafka, but rather a combination that draws on a multitude of sources. Although *The City & The City* is not overtly interested in (negative) societal development, we can usefully see how both Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) construct worlds similar to *The City & The City* in that they draw on potentialities (Doublethink and Soma) that significantly affect both storyworld and characters.

There is, then, a clear disjunction between Miéville's weird fiction and the crime narrative elements in *The City & The City*, and this also marks a differentiation from Miéville's other novels. Carl Freedman argues in "From Genre to Political Economy: *The City & The City* and Uneven Development" (2015) that Miéville's novel distinguishes itself from conventional hard-boiled detective narratives by expanding reality rather than limiting it. A generic textual mechanic in detective fiction is the assumption that there is *less* to reality than what appears in the plot, and therefore there are few entirely new elements and certainly nothing *weird*; here, naturally, is where Miéville turns the genre upside down. As Freedman argues, "[…] they [weird fiction] incline, in various ways, to suggest reality to be richer, bigger, stranger, more complex, more surprising – and, indeed, *weirder* – than common sense would suppose" (Freedman, 86). Although Freedman's perspective and starting point is overtly Marxist, while mine is postcritical, I nevertheless agree that Weird Fiction expands reality, or perhaps more precisely, expands the storyworld which then affects reality. In this way, the New Weird is able to infuse existing genres with an aesthetic feel and additional dimension that is distinct from science fiction and fantasy and thereby contribute with a creative invigoration.

It is characteristic of Miéville that his stories contain numerous details pertaining to general human activities and that he expands his storyworlds through explanations and explorations of economic, intellectual, political, artistic, sexual, and interpersonal situations and hereby creates not only a sense of depth and coherence, but also of relevance and applicability (should a reader choose to focus on these). The New Weird expands upon reality and existing genres; this highlights how speculative fiction is not merely escapist but subversive in its immersion strategies. Because Miéville draws on generic traditions and deliberately seeks to challenge existing tried-and-tested approaches to storytelling, it is somewhat difficult to appreciate his efforts without understanding existing generic traditions. For example, part of the appeal of *The City & The City* is how mystery and police procedural mix with logical impossibility and weirdness. Here, I understand logical impossibility as a narrative choice and generic convention that goes beyond more obvious examples, such as magic and faster-than-light travel. Jan Alber writes about this in "Logical Contradictions, Possible Worlds Theory, and the Embodied Mind" (2019), where narrative impossibilities drive interpretation. While we logically understand certain situations as contradictory or impossible[109], such as the city-spatial concept in *The City & The City*, they evoke emotions of uneasiness, confusion, fright, fear, joy, pleasure, and drive interpretation and narrative engagement. This also has significant implications for immersion since these emotions encourage participation and necessitate involvement on affective (postcritical) levels as well as logical levels that analyze and contextualize worldbuilding. In terms of possible worlds theory, the affective dimension is a central aspect of the making-real of the storyworld.

A textual logical contradiction is simply a starting point or not a constant or unchangeable element. In the context of the two cities, whose relationship at first seems strange, the impossibility becomes plausible in the narrative. It eventually no longer provokes a reaction because the impossible construction becomes accepted within the story's framework. Once we have familiarized ourselves with the idea of the overlap between the two different architectures and societies in more or less the same space, everything that is a result thereof, such as unseeing, crosshatched streets, breaching and Breach, all seem plausible and convincing once the given presuppositions have been accepted. As noted earlier, empirical experience of modern readers may well include other examples of such parallel or divided societies (for example Berlin before 1989), which then makes the concept in Miéville's book less far-

109 Alber uses Hermione's time-travel ability in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* as an example

fetched. While the use of borders in literature generally is very common, and especially fantasy literature makes use of tangible borders in the form of mountain chains, rivers, or even magical barriers, the pseudo-barrier in *The City & The City* is constructed based on ideology more than anything else. The spatial coexistence of the two cities works effectively exactly because the fictional setting and the two societies are well constructed and take the idea of their coexistence extremely seriously[110]. Alber argues that "our emotional reactions to logical contradictions serve as a first orientation or 'protointerpretation': it is because of our bodily reactions that we deal with logical impossibilities in the first place" (Alber, 2019). This creates an opportunity to consider the phenomenological knowledge from Felski's *Uses of Literature*, where her notion of literary shock is useful for analyzing *The City & The City*. At some unspecified point during a reading of Miéville's book (which may vary from reader to reader), readers will finally realize that the two cities are in fact not separate but occupy the same space, and this particular shock is linked to Alber's bodily reactions. Shock in literature does not necessarily have to deal with the gruesome or grotesque (although this is most common), and *The City & The City* is an example of this exactly because it is not particularly violent. Felski observes in her book that our contemporary culture no longer very easily gets shocked: "We are now immune to the shocking insofar shock itself has become routine; we inhabit a world of frenetic change and frantic rhythms, immersed in a culture that is driven by an insatiable demand for novelty and sensation" (Felski, 107). It is exactly here that *The City & The City* as well as the New Weird reveals part of its strength. Felski argues that a cultural hunger for explicit material progressively makes producing shock more difficult. Strange aesthetics, new configurations of existing modes of storyworld construction, and off-kilter worldbuilding are shocking because they challenge our relationship to a given text. Whether readers are immersed or absorbed, the pure weirdness provides an effective punch (or mode!) insofar that the storyworld does not fall flat.

Through tangible applicability or parallels that even the novel itself touches upon — when obvious comparisons between Besźel and Ul Qoma and East and West Berlin as well as with Jerusalem are made — the logical impossibility becomes an actual possibility less far-fetched than initial reactions may assume. Interestingly, Miéville makes use of what happened in Berlin to both stress the real-world potential of split cities as well as highlighting that Besźel and Ul Qoma are not merely divided-but-

[110] It must be noted that not all storyworlds strive for seriousness or even want to be taken seriously which then makes inconsistencies less impactful on the reading experience.

same, but actually entirely separate entities. As readers learn, Inspector Borlú once attended a conference on "Policing Split Cities" and talks about it with Corwi, his colleague:

> 'They had sessions on Budapest and Jerusalem and Berlin, and Besźel and Ul Qoma.' 'Fuck!' 'I know, I know. That's what we said at the time. Totally missing the point.' '*Split* cities? I'm surprised the acad let you go.' […] 'My super said it wasn't just a misunderstanding of our status it was *an insult to Beszel*.' (Miéville, 90-91, emphasis original)

There is no uncertainty concerning their perception of Besźel and Ul Qoma: they are not merely split, and operating based on an assumption that they are is failing to understand the political realities of the situation. Not considering Besźel and Ul Qoma as individual cities is considered not only factually incorrect but even insulting and this helps readers understand why unifactionists and nationalists are so intensely devoted to their respective causes; this, in turn, is influences how the novel challenges reader expectations with regards to structure and genre/mode.

Acknowledging the actual-world presence of situations comparable to that in *The City & The City* helps establish the cities as plausible, not least when an affective response is all but certain. While shock in Felski's theory mostly concerns violent and visceral moments in literature, I believe that the seemingly harmless hard-boiled narrative in *The City & The City* that suddenly becomes invaded by weird elements causes a kind of shock that engross readers in the narrative. It is not just a question of following the plot, but also of understanding the narrative in light of the storyworld with its implications and limitations.

The City & The City effectively challenges our perception of what may (become or be) real, or indeed of what has already happened in the past, and this shaking up of the psyche and evoking an affective response is, in my view, part of the potential. It is primarily through the uneasiness and anxiety evoked through the social and political context that a Gothic atmosphere is created. In contrast, the murders and deaths are less impactful and not particularly shocking given the preponderance of violence in texts and life. Although descriptions of Mahalia Geary's corpse are vivid, her death means little initially because there is no reader-relationship established yet. Geary's death is introduced at the very beginning of the novel, and she functions as a curiosity cue, delivering little shock despite her unpleasant state. Additionally, given the genre expectations connected to the conventional police procedural, some manner of mystery or murder early on is a common trope.

> She lay near the skate ramps. Nothing is still like the dead are still. The wind moves their hair, as it moved hers, and they don't respond at all. She was in an ugly pose, with legs crooked as if about to get up, her arms in a strange bend. Her face was to the ground. A young woman, brown hair pulled into pigtails poked p like plants. She was almost naked, and it was sad to see her skin smooth that cold morning, unbroken by gooseflesh. She wore only laddered stockings, one high heel on. (Miéville, 3-4)

It is noteworthy that this description does not fit Felski's ideas about literary shock. Instead, it sets the tone and scene for what is to come. When readers eventually uncover the realities of her murder and the social and political context, uneasiness and fantastical elements create a type of shock particular to weird fiction not found in generic whodunnit narratives. Baggage-laden notions such as defamiliarization, transgression, and dislocation do not quite capture the particular shocking sensory stimulant Felski references. In *The City & The City*, the mix of murder mystery and the progressive discovery of the storyworld peculiarities drive immersion. We may look at the first instance of unseeing in the novel to illustrate how the process is gradual and perhaps vague for outsiders.

> Rackhaus said something that I ignored. As I turned, I saw past the edges of the estate to the end of Gunterstrász, between the dirty brick buildings. Trash moved in the wind. It might be anywhere. An elderly woman was walking slowly away from me in a shambling sway. She turned her head and looked at me. I was struck by her motion, and I met her eyes. I wondered if she wanted to tell me something. In my glance I took in her clothes, her way of walking, of holding herself, and looking. With a hard start, I realized that she was not in Gunterstrász at all, and that I should not have seen her. Immediate and flustered I looked away, and she did the same, with the same speed. […] When after some seconds I looked back up, unnoticing the old woman stepping heavily away, I looked carefully instead of at her in her foreign street at the facades of the nearby and local Gunterstrász, that depressed zone. (Miéville, 14).

This is the first instance of *The City & The City* establishing that the differences between Besźel and Ul Qoman citizens can be noticed in their manner of walking, dressing, and holding themselves. This illuminates the differences between the two, although Miéville never elaborates on exactly how they walk and dress differently, and the severity of both Inspector Borlú and the old woman's reactions early on provide a tangible example of a process that at this point in the novel is still mysterious and unclear. This is an early example of the novel moving away from classic murder investigation to a narrative that also encompasses speculative and weird aspects. Felski seeks to valorize literature's power to disturb, and speculative fiction readily provides the kind of *Stoss* Heiddeger also talked about — the figurative blow to consciousness that texts are able to provide by challenging or shattering expectations and the taken-for-granted. This unique quality of storyworlds in this context is amplified by the existence of unique atmospheres that are evoked through worldbuilding. The creeping

realization that something is amiss in scenes like the one quoted underscore what Gumbrect and Böhme argue, namely that these moments must be *felt* and *experienced*.

Worldbuilding: Language and History

The few details pertaining to language in the novel serve the dual purpose of establishing the post-soviet eastern Europe aesthetic as well as giving the cities themselves an identity and increased depth. It would be less convincing if the cities spoke the same language and the divide might seem arbitrary; language is a vital part of culture, and Besź and Illitan being so different drives home how unique each city is despite their shared location. This is part of the cultural realm of worldbuilding (cf. Wolf 2014: 53). New languages and cultures are created in the storyworld. A reader can (and must) imagine the problems such a situation might create, and for this to be successful Miéville does not have to spend considerable effort on actually creating the languages; the illusion is enough.

> If you do not know much about them, Illitan and Besź sound very different. They are written, of course, in distinct alphabets. Besz is in Besz: thirty-four letters, left to right, all sounds renfered clear and phonetic, consonants, vowels and demivowels decorated with diacritics – it looks, one often hears, like Cyrillic (though that is a comparison likely to annoy a citizen of Besźel, true or not). Illitan uses Roman script. That is recent. (Miéville, 50)

As we learn early, Inspector Borlú does not narrate or communicate in English. When he meets Mahalia Geary's parents, we learn that he does know some English, but it is his second or third language, and this creates narrative distance to the storyworld that usefully establishes Besźel as foreign regardless of how similar it may be to existing countries or cities. Concerning the principle of minimal departure, the construction and descriptions of the languages illuminates both how similar they are to existing languages (unlike many languages in fantasy literature which are entirely foreign) and thus how minimally we have departed from the real world. Miéville uses both Besź and Illtian as well as brief comments about the cities and their shared history to establish a coherent storyworld that not only has its own rules and internal logic, but also a shared past; this provides context and guides readers towards important answers to questions such as how the two cities were split. Since Inspector Borlú is a police officer and not a historian, we cannot as readers expect him to provide exact information about historical matters. As such, the narrator usefully limits the type of information that

characters provide and (importantly) are expected to provide; this is usual for homodiegetic narrators in detective fiction. We are afforded a glimpse of history after the languages have been described:

> Besźel's dark ages were very dark. Sometime between two thousand and seventeen hundred years ago the city was founded, here in this curl of coastline. There are still remains from those times in the heart of the town, when it was a port hiding a few kilometres up the river to shelter from the pirates of the shore. The city's founding came at the same time as another's, of course. The ruins are surrounded now or in some places incorporated, antique foundations, into the substance of the city. There are older ruins too, like the mosaic remnants in Yozhel Park. These Romanesque remains predate Beszel, we think. We built Besźel on their bones, perhaps. (Miéville, 51)

The fact that Besźel and Ul Qoma are positioned in our world necessitates at least a degree of historical contextualization, otherwise the sheer impossibility of their existence would have a negative impact on immersion. There are plenty of historical and textual gaps here, but because *The City & The City* centers around a murder first and foremost, and because textual gaps are useful for activating reader participation, Borlú's uncertainty does not hurt storyworld coherence. We see the fact of his lacking knowledge and accuracy when he ends sentences with, "we think", and "perhaps". This trend continues and is even amplified in the next paragraph:

> It may or may not have been Besźel, that we built, back then, while others may have been building Ul Qoma on the same bones. Perhaps there was one thing back then that later schismed on the ruins, or perhaps our ancestral Besźel had not yet met and stand-offishly entwined with its neighbour. I am not a student of the Cleavage, but if I were I still would not know. (Miéville, 51)

The tendency continues with "may or may not", "may have been", "perhaps", and acknowledgment that he, Borlú, is not an expert. Generally speaking, worldbuilding in conventional fantasy takes more time because a higher degree of completion and cohesion is expected. Readers enthusiastically praise storyworlds that are fleshed-out and well-realized. However, withholding information may very well assist worldbuilding because it invites active participation on the reader's part as they attempt to fill gaps. Although Inspector Borlú may not be an expert, readers can use information from the narrative to learn about the storyworld and eventually try to answer complicated questions. Using historically similar examples from the real world, this would become an immersive exercise. There are, then, plenty of valid reasons why (parts of) storyworlds do not require a high degree of exposition, and using a narrator who is not omniscient can solve narrative problems and instead direct focus on storytelling and worldbuilding. We see further minor comments on history that help explain why Besźel and Ul Qoma have such a strained and complex relationship. As it turns out, there have been open wars in the past:

> It had not met, however, as I recalled from my lessons, during our two brief and disastrous open wars against each other. In any case, now our two nations were, in rather a stilted fashion, supposed to be effecting some sort of rapprochement. (Miéville, 74)

Again we have the element of uncertainty in our narrator, but more crucially we learn that there were two wars and they were disastrous. Readers can use this tidbit of information to put the current difficult political and social situation into context and explain or rationalize why the two cities remain split. The Cleavage may have been the first mysterious event that divided the cities, but avoiding unification for so many years would require conflict on a severe level. The political and cultural implications are profound. Although this information does not take up much room in the narrative, unlike stories with more self-conscious worldbuilding, it nevertheless has an important and influential effect on immersion and the reading experience. As noted earlier, the plot itself is secondary to the exercise of making *The City & The City* plausible. We may juxtapose *The City & The City* to a classic plot-driven narrative like Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844) where specific events in the narrative continually drive the story forward. While historical details are important, and even acknowledging the fictionality of the text, *The Count of Monte Cristo* can count on events instead of storyworld to provide immersive potential. The underlying driving force in *The City & The City* is ultimately different and relies on the storyworld and its atmosphere to a high degree.

A final example of this type of (cultural) worldbuilding concerns the naming conventions in *The City & The City*. The following shows a playfulness with language that is simultaneously contextually appropriate and fits the aesthetics of the storyworld. As Inspector Borlú follows the clues about Mahalia Geary's life and activities, he uncovers a fake name she used.

> It was an obvious, and elegantly punning, pseudonym. Byela is a unisex Besź name: Mar is at least plausible as a surname. Together their phonemes approximate the phrase *byé lai mar*, literally 'only the baitfish', a fishing phrase to say 'nothing worth noting.' (Miéville, 57)

Establishing a language culture beyond simply naming the fictional language(s) and giving them a degree of depth and detail significantly enhances storyworld completeness. It is again noteworthy that this is just a small detail. However, it gives weight to the language culture and thus underpins Besźel and Besź as unique entities alongside its neighboring city. Weaving worldbuilding and plot together is important, and many of the leads and clues that Inspector Borlú follows necessarily steer to situations where the geopolitical situation impacts his work.

Breaching The City & The City

Miéville's storyworlds typically feature societies and settings that are strongly works-in-progress and have none of the conservatism and unchangeability often found in fantasy literature. The constant political movements indicate a developing storyworld and is part of what enables readers to imagine could-be futures, especially in situations where the outlandish and weird elements, such as the Ul Qoma and Besźel relationship, suddenly seem closer to reality. Gary K. Wolfe (2011, 17[111]) refers to the "post-genre fantastic", and Miéville's narratives include divergent forms that consider alternative realities with different political outcomes. This fits with Wolfe's conceptualization of the post-genre fantastic. Using fiction to portray possible futures and speculate about cultural and political landscapes has long been a staple of particularly science fiction, and is one reason the genre is affectionately called the literature of ideas. The diversity in Miéville's writing is referred to as "generic overdetermination" by Miéville scholars (Birns, 2009: 208-209; Cooper, 2009: 213, 217[112]). It is difficult to ignore the parallels between the function of unseeing in Miéville's story and the "unseeing" of real-life political issues; a typical example is that of the Invisible People, i.e., the homeless, who remain in the crosshatch; there and physically present, but actively unseen. Inspector Borlú experiences the difficulties inherent in unseeing multiple times. The illogical and counterintuitive nature of actively ignoring what is in plain sight requires a mental process that combines cultural training, rationalization, and sheer force of will. The process often fails, unsurprisingly, and we see one example of the types of challenges inhabitants in Besźel and Ul Qoma encounter when Inspector Borlú walks streets of Besźel that are close to (or shared with) Ul Qoma.

> It was, not surprisingly that day perhaps, hard to observe borders, to see and unsee only what I should, on my way home. I was hemmed in by people not in my city, walking slowly through areas crowded but not crowded in Besźel. I focused on the stones really around me – cathedrals, bars, the brick flourishes of what had been a school – that I had grown up with. I ignored the rest or tried. (Miéville, 44)

The seamless description of Borlú's experiences does not, in this case, put particular focus on the complexities of *unseeing* and navigating the two cities, and thus through Borlú's casual observations,

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111 Wolfe, Gary K. (2011): *Evaporating Genres: Essays on Fantastic Literature*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press

112 Birns, Nicholas (2009), "From Cacotopias to Railroads: Rebellion and the Shaping of the Normal in the Bas-Lag Universe", *Extrapolition* 50(2): 200-11
Cooper, Rich Paul (2009), "Building Worlds: Dialectical Materialism as Method in China Miéville's Bas-Lag", *Extrapolition* 50(2): 212-23.

stress the normality of such day-to-day challenges. It is telling that Inspector Borlú only tries to ignore pedestrians belonging to the other city. He has to consciously focus on his surroundings. Borlú has to almost immerse himself in the correct city, which evokes an affective response in readers: we try to imagine Borlú's mental process. A similar instance is found when Inspector Borlú describes his occasional insomnia and one of his two lovers might find him sitting in his kitchen, "[…] looking over the night city and (inevitably, unseeing but touched by its light) the other city" (Miéville, 46). Like inhabitants and readers of the novel, Inspector Borlú is weirdly fascinated with the neighboring city, and the severe illegality of breaching amplifies its allure.

Concerning Breach, the social constructivism and the hypothetical and actual power of Breach have significant implications for worldbuilding. One telling example occurs when readers learn that outside forces have intervened in the politics between Besźel and Ul Qoma, and both readers and characters are reminded that the power of Breach is very much learned and local.

> "'Oh, we'll investigate. But these aren't citizens nor citizens, Tye. They don't have the...' A silence. 'The fear,' I said. That Breach freeze, that obedience reflex shared in Ul Qoma and Besźel. (Miéville, 326)

Although Breach has an almost mythical presence and power in both cities, outside forces have not been exposed to Breach, nor learned to fear Breach and therefore lack the experiences that make citizens of either city scared of breaching. As is eventually shown in the narrative, Breach is a powerful but ultimately very human and ordinary police force; fear is a tremendous part of their power, and they rely on culturally learned behavior. While citizens from Ul Qoma and Besźel are scared, outsiders do not hesitate to question Breach. An interesting parallel can be drawn to the infamous protests in China, 1989, at Tiananmen Square, where subsequent interviews reveal the unwillingness of Chinese citizens to talk about or acknowledge the event; a telling example is the film *A Day to Remember* (2005) by Liu Wei. In the 13-minute-long video filmed on the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Wei asks Chinese citizens "Do you know what day it is today?", and the unwillingness to answer and the obvious fear hauntingly illustrates the powerful influence governments can have when citizens are scared of their own government. Citizens from other countries are not averse to commenting on or investigating the Tiananmen Square events and exhibit the same forbidden-fruit fascination that outsiders in Besźel and Ul Qoma do. Fear, then, becomes part of an arsenal and (in a postcritical reading) is as effective at population control as any actual involvement, and this is exactly how Breach

in *The City & The City* operates as well. Whether or not Breach in the narrative is a force for good or evil depends on the ideological affiliation of a person or character; Inspector Borlú is eventually recruited by Breach, but characters intent on uniting the two cities would prefer if Breach crumbled altogether.

The formal connection between Breach in the narrative and the affective response it provokes is shown clearly when Inspector Borlú travels with Ashil, a Breach operative, between the cities at the end of the story.

> Sound and smell came in: the calls of Besźel; the ringing of its clocktowers; the clattering and old metal percussion of the trams; the chimney smell; the old smells; they came in a tide with the spice and Illitan yells of Ul Qoma, the clatter of militsya coptor, the gunning of German cars. The colours of Ul Qoma light and plastic window displays no longer effaced the ochres and stone of its neighbour, my home... We moved through the crosshatched morning crowd. "In Breach. No one knows if they're seeing you or unseeing you. Don't creep. You're not in neither: you're in both". (Miéville, 303-4)

Sounds, smells, lights, displays; Inspector Borlú is almost overwhelmed as he forces his system to perceive elements he had unseen and ignored until then. The narrative uses sensory stimulants to assist its worldbuilding and accentuate how significant it is that the other city, or both cities at once, is now perceived simultaneously. The repressed awareness of the other city is suddenly and violently blown open at this moment when Borlú is standing in neither one city nor the other. It reads like a strange mix between deja vú and Freud's *Umheimlich*, and Borlú tries to re-center his mind that he so long trained to ignore much input. The novel is allowed the freedom to toy with spatial reality and geography because its political and social realities are not fantastical or weird. In other words, important aspects of the novel are still grounded in reality and easily recognizable, granting a great degree of direction and coherence. This is related to consciousness-enactment, which is the "merging of readers' story-driven experience and the experience attributed to the character. The overlap of these experiences is, strictly speaking, the character's experience *as enacted* by interpreters" (Caracciolo, *Experientiality* 122-3, emphasis original). Inspector Borlú is an apt example of this type of consciousness-enactment because readers adopt his point of view and interpret and experience the twin cities through his eyes. The experience that readers have through Inspector Borlú is what Caracciolo calls 'story-driven experience', that is, an immersive experience that is likely to mirror the main character.

In *The City & The City*, the narrator provides context and necessary information that helps readers make sense of the complicated political and geographical situation between Besźel and Ul Qoma. At

the same time, it is through Inspector Borlú that many of the intricacies and complications are revealed. While Inspector Borlú understands the logical geographical impossibility and an inhabitant in either of the two cities, his reaction as he uncovers the truth about the Mahalia Geary case is what drives reader reaction. This does not make the Inspector unreliable but instead makes him a homodiegetic narrator. These are vehicles for information and narrative positioning that helps the reader recognize when something interesting is happening, such as the severity of Breach and the complications involved when anyone wants to travel between Besźel and Ul Qoma. Tamar Yakobi elaborates on this point and further shows how there is distance between reader and character, which inevitably affects the reader-character relationship exactly because readers depend on characters for information and contextualization.

> As concerns the immediacy of encounter with the narrated object, readers always find themselves in an inferior position vis-à-vis every speaker or subject within the fictional world. This holds true in comparison, not only with omniscient or authoritative reporters (e.g., the sleuth in the detective story) but with constrained and dubious sources of information as well (the Watson or the suspect in the detective story). After all, the reporter ("mediator") confronts the object directly or at least exists within the same world. His is, therefore, an eye-witness (or at least inside) account, and we readers depend on it for information – sometimes, as in a "first person" novel like *Moby Dick* or *Doctor Faustus*, exclusively so. Not only do we readers lack access to the object; we cannot count on an alternative representation, either. (Yakobi, 2015)

Inspector Borlú provides reliable information about the relationship between Ul Qoma and Besźel but his reactions to events in the plot guide reader-reactions. In other words, we accept the logical impossibility of unseeing and two cities in the same space partly because Inspector Borlú introduces these things as normal, and we understand the severity of Breach because Inspector Borlú reacts strongly when Breach is involved. Text-mechanically speaking, it is not uncommon to have a main character who learns new information at the same rate as the reader (cf. my points concerning *Earthsea*). In *The City & The City*, because the setting is not a completely foreign secondary world, insight is provided through exposition and from the main character. This is largely what makes the novel immersive, as per Mendlesohn's conceptualization. Furthermore, although Mendlesohn does not focus on this, these immersive novels often rely on atmospheres to a high degree, an aspect crucial for understanding the intangible immersive potential of these storyworlds

The information-learning strategies are usefully explored via Ryan's ideas about transportation or imaginative recentering: readers re-center themselves and place the storyworld in an alternative

position with new systems of actuality and possibility. This ability to re-center and consider conceptual perspectives seriously is an important part of human cognition and developmental psychology. It also relates to narrative competence where readers must understand the different perspectives of characters and their emotions in order to understand the narrative. I would expand this to include not only the emotional realm of the characters but also the storyworld itself and its atmosphere. Especially in narratives such as *The City & The City*, understanding the storyworld, both in terms of its complicated storyworld politics and logical impossibilities, is necessary in order to understand the plot. In speculative fiction, if immersion in the storyworld fails or if the storyworld is not made believable by taking itself seriously, then immersion in the plot is unlikely. My argument in the context of speculative fiction generally is that we must appreciate the relationship between reader and text without succumbing to hermeneutics of suspicion and making texts fit into predefined ideological boxes. The affective and stimulatory side of literature can usefully be combined with ideas about immersion. In my view, there is often a clear difference between being immersed in a plot and being immersed in a storyworld, even if both aspects often are important to the overall success of a story. As a storyworld grows larger, it becomes progressively more likely that a strong emotional connection to the storyworld is evoked; we can think of this in terms of Ryan's ideas about immersion where she posits that we are involved with narratives on three levels: spatial immersion, which focuses on the setting; temporal immersion, which focuses on the story; and emotional immersion, which focuses on characters[113]. In *The City & The City*, emotional immersion takes a backseat as Inspector Borlú is a vehicle for gradually unveiling the mystery of the plot. Immersion in and enjoyment of *The City & The City* is not contingent on positive identification with the main character because the storyworld drives spatial immersion.

Inspector Borlú's investigation is made significantly more complicated when it is revealed that the murder may be an "international" affair, i.e., the murder happened in Ul Qoma, but the body was disposed of (and then discovered) in Besźel. Speculative fiction is about ideas and potential, and arguably a degree of phenomenological experimentation; as such, speculative storyworlds with seemingly impossible elements must also be considered in light of what *could have* taken place and led

[113] Ryan, Marie-Laure. 2001. *Narrative as Virtual Reality: Immersion and Interactivity in Literature and Electronic Media*. Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press

to different events and outcomes. For *The City & The City*, many of the characters' difficulties happen because of the invented storyworld. They would have been entirely different were it not for the geographically and politically complex relationship between Ul Qoma and Besźel. It is not of utmost importance that Mahalia Geary was murdered, but it *is* crucially important that she was murdered in one city and left in another. As readers, we are outsiders and may have trouble understanding the process of unseeing and why, for example, one street can belong to two different cities. This is illustrated and accentuated when Mahalia Geary's parents, who are American, arrive in Besźel in order to identify their murdered daughter. Mr. Geary, exasperated with what he deems a ridiculous situation, invokes Breach when he crosses directly from Besźel to Ul Qoma and is immediately apprehended by Breach officers. In the following, we see Inspector Borlú reiterate the severity of the situation to Mrs. Geary after her husband has been taken away:

> 'Mrs. Geary, your husband just did something very serious. Very serious.' She was quiet but for heavy breaths. 'Do you understand me? Has there been some mistake here? Were we less than clear in our explanations of the system of checks and balances between Besźel and Ul Qoma? Do you understand that this deportation is nothing to do with us, but that we have absolutely no power to do anything about it, and that he is, listen to me, he is incredibly lucky that's all he's got?' (Miéville, 116)

While the parents' frustrations narratively and emotionally make sense, this incident showcases the seriousness of Breach and the difficulty of outsiders to properly understand. As such, spatial immersion drives narrative competence and understanding, highlighting the necessity of interpreting characters, plot, and storyworld. The additional immersive element we must consider is that the text has two curiosity cues: the plot and the storyworld. During the first part of the book, we hear numerous stories from Borlú, offhandedly illustrating the depth but also mysteriousness of Breach. At one point, he wants to act on a lead he received from an unknown source and reflects: "And much more serious, it would be far worse than illegal for me to pursue it [the lead], not only illegal according to Besź codes – I would be in breach" (Miéville, 45). In situations like these, readers are forced into active reflection and engagement with the text. The idea of certain actions transcending illegality may be difficult to grasp, but, as noted earlier, it is necessary to understand the storyworld, and its peculiarities to understand the narrative. Concerning legality, Breach exists in a space difficult to articulate and let alone understand — both for Inspector Borlú and for the reader. Breach is only evoked when people willfully ignore the sanctity of one of the two individual cities and cross between them illegally. Shortly after the body of Mahalia Geary is found and after Inspector Borlú learns that she was killed in

one city and dumped in the other, there is a sense of relief because this means that Breach should handle the investigation. This does not happen, however, as it turns out that Mahalia Geary's dead body was smuggled across the border, and Breach does not care about smuggling:

> Breach has powers the rest of us can hardly imagine, but its calling is utterly precise. It is not the passage itself from one city to the other, not even with contraband: it is the manner of the passage. Throw felid or cocaine or guns from your Besź rear window across a crosshatched yard into an Ul Qoman garden for your contact to pick up – that is breach, and Breach will get you, and it would still be Breach if you threw bread or feathers. Steal a nuclear weapon and carry it secretly with you through Copula Hall when you cross *but cross that border itself*? At that official checkpoint where the cities meet? Many crimes are committed in such an act, but breach is not one of them. (Miéville, 134, emphasis original).

This expands the storyworld with an invention of a police force that intentionally is kept vague, and the vagueness stresses its powers. Textual gaps that readers attempt to fill through tangibly related information from the storyworld drive spatial immersion. While Breach may seem illogical or even contradictory when explained outside of the novel, in the context of the storyworld it is plausible. This showcases how explicit exposition helps establish a storyworld — such as the geographical relationship between Ul Qoma and Besźel — but also how textual gaps and unexplained phenomena (such as Breach) create opportunities for readers to actively engage with the storyworld. It may be confusing how smuggling a dead body between two cities does not evoke the wrath of the most resourceful police force, but their jurisdiction is clear and Inspector Borlú's reaction may well mirror that of many readers: "This is fucking bullshit" (Miéville, 135).

The mental processes of both readers and characters are challenged continually when faced with logical contradictions. We see another example when Inspector Borlú is in Ul Qoma to help their investigation into the Mahalia Geary murder and find himself physically close to his home in Besźel:

> In Ul Qoma I was in Ioy Street. It is pretty equally crosshatched with Rosidstrász where I lived. The building two doors along from my own house was a late-night Ul Qoman liquor store, half the pedestrians around me in Ul Qoma, so I was able to stop grosstopically, physically close to my own front door, and unsee it of course, but equally of course not quite, with an emotion the name of which I have no idea. I came slowly closer, keeping my eyes on the entrances in Ul Qoma. (Miéville, 238)

The contradictory feelings of Inspector Borlú being aware of his surroundings and understanding that he is physically close to his own home, but still acknowledging that he is legally in another country and must as such unsee his home, only works if the character(s) manage to convey the seriousness with which the situation is regarded in the storyworld. It is common to define a cultural identity based on what one is *not*, and feelings of proud nationalism are easy to spot in the novel, not least in the Ul

Qoman Senior Detective Dhatt, but also, more clearly, in the underground activist groups who either want to unite the two cities or keep them more strictly separated. The realities of the split between the cities are often explored and accentuated via these activist groups, and Inspector Borlú is unsurprisingly interested in them and their potential role in the Mahalia Geary murder. Miéville almost humorously delves into the problems of being part of an underground political group whose goal it is to unite the two cities. These unifactionists, or unifs, observe the status quo and uphold the authority of Breach better than regular citizens because they, as dissidents and potential troublemakers, are watched more closely than regular citizens. When Borlú meets and interrogates Drodin, one of the unifactionists, he explains the problem.

> He shook his head, and when he looked back at me it was with anger and perhaps hate. 'Do you know how many of my friends have been taken [by Breach]? That I've never seen again? We're *more* careful than anyone.' It was true. A political irony. Those most dedicated to the perforation of the boundary between Besźel and Ul Qoma had to observe it most carefully. (Miéville, 64)

This is another example of how Miéville's political interests shape his storyworld and illustrates the complicated realities of any political group that wants to enact change. The motivations of these activist groups give breadth to the storyworld; there are moving pieces and behind-the-scenes driving forces that transcend the murder plot. Implicit in the existence of any such underground group is a deeper history in the storyworld. Unlike the ubiquitous quest narratives where characters explore an unknown storyworld together with a reader, *The City & The City* is driven by a knowledgable main character that skillfully navigates a world he, unlike the reader, is already familiar with. The fictional elements infuse the narrative with particular and Weird (capital W) aspects, while realism and recognizable ideologies provide context and a framework. This infusion helps show how speculative fiction ties in well with the philosophical branch of possibilism and that storyworlds are more stipulated than discovered. Through writing, possible worlds such as *The City & The City* are stipulated and thus offer a chance to engage with the problems in the text. Although some possible worlds theorists are occupied with the truth value of fictional worlds — recognizing that fictional events and characters in and of themselves are neither true nor false because their ontological status is highly debatable. For example, as the argument goes, asking Alexandre Dumas whether he was telling the truth about Edmond Dantes serves little purpose because a character's actions have no real-world consequences. However, this somewhat dilutes the influence and phenomenological output of engaging with texts. Doležel writes more on this

in “Porfyry’s Tree for the Concept of Fictional Worlds” (2019), where he argues that possible worlds need to be authenticated by an authoritative text in order to invoke feelings and thereby gain some truth value.

> I explained the specific world-creating power of the fictional text by the theory of authentication: a possible world is converted into a fictional world when it is authenticated by a felicitous fictional text […]. It is as authenticated possibles that unicorns and fairies, Odysseus and Raskolnikov, Brobdingnag and Chevengur exist and that readers can gain access to them, fear them, or feel pity for them […]. (57)

As such, *The City & The City* is the authoritative text that makes us able to tackle the phenomenon of unseeing as well as the logical impossibility of the geography of Besźel and Ul Qoma. The problems in the storyworld become authenticated by the existence of *The City & The City*, and we are therefore able to interpret the narrative seriously and consider the events and characters as real with legitimate consequences. While the usefulness of this distinction at first glance may seem questionable, I argue that its applicability is readily observable. In theoretical physics as in political science, impossibilities are made plausible and authentic by the existence of a felicitous text or theory and thereby gain ontological status. While there naturally is a difference between a theory textbook and a narrative such as *The City & The City*, our real-world horizon of possibility is expanded when engaging with fiction and seriously considering the problems therein.

As the analysis of the major workings of *The City & The City* now shows, immersion into the storyworld happens via sensory stimulants that enable readers to become engrossed not only in the plot, but also in the storyworld itself and the peculiar atmosphere it evokes through the logical impossibility and the aesthetics of the two cities. Affective reactions are necessary in order to understand the narrative, and readers follow Inspector Borlú’s reactions and guidance throughout the story. The subjective experiences and knowledge readers obtain through Inspector Borlú are crucial. As noted earlier, part of the sensory stimulant scope includes shock, and *The City & The City* uses devices such as shock to provoke a bodily reaction from readers that both provides immersion and counters established genre assumptions. Since the New Weird is arguably still a relatively new genre, at least compared to science fiction and fantasy, it may be slightly more difficult to properly understand when genre conventions are countered. However, since many New Weird narratives heavily draw on existing genres readers are still able to anticipate certain conventional narrative devices that Miéville then disturbs. Because *The City & The City* draws heavily on the police procedural and noir crime stories,

certain aspects — such as the murder at the beginning of the story — are unsurprising, but as the Weird encroaches and the plot is weaved around unfamiliar storyworld construction. Aesthetic immersion into the storyworld becomes as important a part of the reading experience as the plot — if not more so! Although the predictability of certain genres is what readers return for, such as the familiar quest fantasy or the common romance novel, the worldbuilding in *The City & The City* provides a framework for the murder mystery that ultimately carries the story. While we must appreciate Miéville's linguistic skill, the *whodunnit* would be significantly less appealing if *The City & The City* did not include complex worldbuilding that in particular draws on cultural inventions (cf. Wolf).

There is a strong relationship between the reader, and their affective responses, and the text itself. While I have acknowledged the role of politics in Miéville's work generally, ideological readings are incapable of adequately articulating the inner workings of a storyworld that drive immersion. Furthermore, as Miéville also acknowledges, political interpretations are not necessary in order to understand the text. *The City & The City* puts the storyworld in the foreground and consciously wants to explore a seemingly illogical construction that is made plausible through the seriousness with which it is regarded by characters in the storyworld. As New Weird fiction by authors such as Scott Hawkins and Jeff VanderMeer also shows, it is a prerequisite that such stories take themselves seriously if storyworld construction will be accepted by readers. The deliberate choice of placing Ul Qoma and Besźel in only a vaguely recognizable location forces readers to consider the implications of both cities. When a storyworld with otherworldly or weird elements is placed in the actual world instead of a secondary world, a number of narrative problems arise that must be tackled. Miéville uses references to technology, culture, ways of dressing, and general cityscape aesthetic to build an overall narrative aesthetic that usefully assists the noir style and its mostly bleak atmosphere. Readers can thus form a connection to the aesthetics of the storyworld and become immersed into the storyworld.

I have in this chapter highlighted aspects of *The City & The City* which in the context of worldbuilding and the New Weird as a literary phenomenon are important. The novel makes deliberate use of a complex logical impossibility with far-ranging implications that readers must strive to take seriously and factor in when analyzing the storyworld and engaging with it. Furthermore, the novel manages to produce an expressive and often bleak atmosphere by its portrayal of the two cities. Especially the poorer of the two, Beszel, to which Inspector Borlú belongs, recalls a rainy and gray concrete aesthetic

that becomes a central part of the aesthetic dimension of the novel. These aesthetics, together with the weird storyworlds, are an important part of the New Weird and the ways this mode of writing pushes genres and pushes worldbuilding strategies and assumptions. Framed by a conventional murder mystery, *The City & The City* constructs a highly imaginative storyworld that challenges readers' abilities to accept weird realities and the political and cultural difficulties that arise as a consequence thereof.

The chapter included a detailed discussion of some major aspects of the New Weird. While the issue of genres (or modes) is not always pertinent, I find that in the case of emerging genres it is worthwhile to trace its mechanisms so as to better contextualize interpretations. In the case of Miéville, his novels are often a very deliberate attempt at expanding textual borders and moving beyond tropes and known limitations. *The City & The City* is but one example of this where a murder mystery and police procedural has been intertwined with the weird, and I have in this chapter highlighted several aspects that in this context are relevant. For example, the issues of *unseeing*, breaching, and coterminous streets has added depth to the storyworld in *The City & The City* which has significant implications for the reading experience and the novel's immersive potential. Juxtaposing the strategies Miéville employed with conventional fantastic literature highlighted how the worldbuilding in his writing, and the New Weird generally, diverges from recognizable approaches. The New Weird makes deliberate attempts at moving beyond what is usually found in speculative fiction and fantasy, and one way it does this is by fusing elements. For example, in *The City & The City*, Miéville fuses a murder mystery in the real world with weird elements from fiction and a logical impossibility. In the storyworlds from his other novels, the pattern repeats; the starting point is often grounded in the familiar but is then changed or adapted via the New Weird's combination of several (sub)genres. In this chapter I have accounted for what the starting point for *The City & The City* is; in other New Weird stories, Miéville takes inspiration from westerns, or certain revolutions, or worker conflicts, or imperialist explorations and exploitation and combines these with speculative fiction and horror elements which amalgamate into the structures we see in the New Weird.

Conclusion

At the outset of this dissertation stood the hypothesis that it is possible to become immersed into storyworlds as easily as one might become immersed in a story and its characters. This immersion happens as a consequence of worldbuilding and the atmosphere that these fictional worlds evoke. The four texts I have analyzed stand both as singular entities which must be understood on their own terms, but they also exist as part of a wider literary context. In this wider context, the narratives represent certain types of fantasy or speculative fiction literature and are thus strongly linked to certain tendencies and formations within their respective genres. These observations enable an identification of subgenres and the beginning of a typology of fantasy and speculative fiction that consider the aspects I have dealt with in my analysis, namely worldbuilding and literary atmospheres. The strategies of worldbuilding I have highlighted assist this typology by clarifying the underlying mechanisms that drive various kinds of storyworlds and their atmospheres. It is important to acknowledge that these texts, although often grouped under the same labels, employ aspects of worldbuilding that differ in scope and form. The issue of typology in the context of these literary genres is, however, quite precarious given the fluid nature of speculative fiction and fantasy. What this dissertation has contributed primarily concerns the identification of the dynamic and ever-changing nature of worldbuilding. This dynamic underscores how there is no fixed schemata or rigid pattern with regards to worldbuilding, and this is further evidenced by the still-evolving nature of speculative fiction and fantasy as these genres constantly expand, change, and challenge.

Certain traditional types of fantasy narratives, often within the so-called high fantasy genre, rely on recognizable and approved strategies of worldbuilding. Le Guin's *Earthsea* is in this dissertation the prime example of this. These storyworlds include diverse phenomena, such as fantastical beings, magic, and any type of inventions within the fictional realm, and they are highly detailed in their depiction of their storyworlds. The existence of maps and other supportive paratextual material is common, and these types of narratives often rely on historical or medievalist knowledge since the foundation of these storyworlds is often a quasi-medieval one. Common examples beyond *Earthsea* include *A Song of Ice and Fire*, and, of course, *The Lord of the Rings.* These types of storyworlds make use of tropes and structures which are now so widespread that grouping texts into (sub)genres based on

these qualities has become possible. As I have shown in my reading of *Earthsea*, conventional fantasy narratives still produce particular atmospheres that inform their storyworlds and provide an aesthetic feel which becomes a central aspect of the immersive qualities of the text. While many quest fantasy narratives are driven forward by their plots, the storyworld itself creates a framework that specifically provides immersive potential. This immersive potential is linked to the possibility for readers to engage with storyworlds; questions concerning travel, magic, and culture may not be directly answered within the narrative but the storyworld itself, based on the available information, allows opportunities to understand and analyze it. The particular atmosphere that a given storyworld produces is part of this since, as I argue, these atmospheres are an intangible but important aspect of worldbuilding that must be considered alongside the elements of worldbuilding that scholarship has focused on thus far.

Regarding complicated texts such as *Gormenghast*, its idiosyncratic and quizzical worldbuilding marks a significant departure from the conventional quest fantasy. Few texts exist that are similar in form and structure and this makes a clear classification difficult. However, *Gormenghast* does share features and crucial aspects with M. John Harrison's *Viriconium* (1971-84) series. As we have seen, its focus on a particular and elaborate location, Gormenghast Castle, is a feature that especially the New Weird has embraced. While Peake and Harrison employ different styles of worldbuilding, their departure from quest fantasy is noticeable; they aim for undermining the explicitness and mappability of the storyworld in the wake of Tolkienian epigones. While Peake did publish *Titus Groan* before the era of Middle-earth began, his work nevertheless remains unique in terms of its worldbuilding strategies and the conscious focus on grotesque and gothic atmospheres. This, then, enables us to retrace a certain idiosyncratic countercurrent to the trend of elaborate and descriptive details. This generally results in a challenging and immersive experience in which the storyworld must be actively decoded and constantly (re)analyzed. Gene Wolfe's *The Book of the New Sun* (1980-83) exists in this category, too, due to its complicated narrative structure and complex intradiegetic narrator. Despite any degree of complexity or structural differences, what unites these books is their reliance on atmosphere as a key component of worldbuilding. As we saw with regards to *Titus Groan*, there are both explicit locations, such as the Hall of Spiders or Swelter's horrible kitchen, but also specific scenes that can generate evocative and powerful moments; while fairly little might happen plot-wise in these scenes, the atmosphere is overflowing and immersive.Understanding these types of narratives as atmospheric and

focused on location(s) rather than plot allows for readings that, in the postcritical sense, do not go against the grain but rather strive to acknowledge what the narrative, via its storyworld, is attempting to accomplish.

Murakami marks a third tendency or formation within recent developments in speculative fiction. His transcultural blend of Western and Eastern elements of myth and fantasy, with a particular focus on introspection and psychology, imbues his worldbuilding with an atmosphere that, when juxtaposed with Anglophone literature, is markedly different from the other texts analyzed. The transcultural aspect of Murakami's storyworlds and its productive hybridity can also be observed in recent developments in other media, including web series, anime, and manga. The storyworlds that Murakami creates are infused with an atmosphere of the mundane coupled with magical realism, and *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* takes this a step further by incorporating aspects from cyberpunk, fantasy, and hard-boiled detective fiction which serve as the foundation for his dual-storyworld narrative. What this shows is that there is significant potential with regards to transcultural worldbuilding where strategies and genres are blended to create a new whole. There exists an aesthetic blend in cyberpunk, given its predisposition for combining a Western futuristic society with typically Japanese aesthetics such as in *Snow Crash* (1992) and *Altered Carbon* (2018), but the distinct atmospheres that Murakami creates moves beyond mere genre fusions. Literary tendencies that are distinctly Japanese, such as the normalization of magical realism, are in Murakami's storyworlds combined with Western elements that propel this transcultural blend forward. While the existence of dual-storyworlds by itself is not unique, it is the atmospheres that pervade both these storyworlds, and how they complement each other, that we must note. The captivating mundane within Murakami's stories is enriched by the enchanting and immersive quality of the storyworlds he creates.

The fourth and final trend concerns the New Weird and specifically China Miéville's contribution to this genre. Although Miéville's work did not start the New Weird, his name and his stories have come to represent the genre and the narratives themselves, including the book at hand, *The City & The City*, which stands as a prototype of the New Weird. Miéville's storyworlds explore characteristic components of worldbuilding and a generally ambivalent atmosphere that is original in the context of speculative fiction and fantasy. As such, the New Weird rightly must be considered a genre of its own. The fusion of horror, science fiction, and fantasy creates weird storyworlds that also move beyond the

recognizable quasi-medieval aesthetics of the quest narratives. The New Weird instead makes use of enigmatic locations, unexplainable creatures, and otherworldly phenomena that come to rest at the very core of a given storyworld. In *The City & The City*, a logical-impossibility made plausible (or at least imaginable) propels Miéville's provocative and captivating thought-experiment into the realm of what might be possible. The New Weird presents the outrageous and strives to make it conceivable. While most of Miéville's novels make fairly explicit use of political events to drive their plots and shape their storyworlds, the noteworthy aspect concerns the manner in which these elements contribute to worldbuilding. This also stresses a key point of Miéville's texts, one which is often found in other New Weird storyworlds as well, namely that they employ endogenous plots which are shaped around often inexplicable or *weird* events which influence the storyworld. As I also stressed in the chapter itself, the New Weird seems to generally emphasize specific locations — the Vorrh in *The Vorrh* (2012), Area X in *Annihilation* (2014), the library in *The Library at Mount Char* (2015), and, of course, the twin cities in *The City & The City* (2009). This, then, marks a clear departure from speculative fiction and fantasy which closely follows the elaborate journeying undertaken by one (or multiple) main characters to a multitude of locations. The trend may even be retraced to the very origins of the Weird since Lovecraft himself also either referenced or directly used strange locations to highlight the eerie atmospheres of his tales: R'lyeh from *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928), Innsmouth from *The Shadow over Innsmouth* (1936), and the ancient otherworldly city found in Antarctica in *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) are key examples. Ultimately, the New Weird, and Miéville in particular, constructs complex storyworlds in which the machinations of complex cultural and political environments drive events that happen in (or around) weird and atmospheric locations.

By analyzing the presence of atmospheres that occur as a result of worldbuilding in speculative fiction and fantasy, this dissertation has shown the potential for these areas to evoke affective engagement, influence immersion, and result in a wide range of potential experiences with a given text. The ways in which atmospheres are evoked are numerous, and the precise nature and aesthetic dimension of a text's atmosphere depends on the singular qualities of individual texts and their worldbuilding. The analyses have shown an incredibly strong link between worldbuilding and atmosphere. While characters and dialogue contribute to atmospheres as well, either through naming conventions, vocabulary, mannerisms, or character motivations, a significant contributing element is worldbuilding itself since

the storyworld produces both profound moments and important locations. These also carry immersive potential, and the analyses have shown that works of speculative fiction and fantasy are able to construct narratives and storyworlds in which the storyworld itself is a driving force behind immersion more so than the plot. While this may not be entirely unique to speculative fiction, there does exist a strong preponderance for speculative fiction to rely on storyworlds to a very high degree compared to other genres and other forms of literature. The presence of atmosphere may be intangible, and certainly some narratives do not depend on (or produce) atmosphere to a meaningful degree, but certain types of texts are profoundly atmospheric and this aspect must be taken into account when considering how the text and its storyworld function. There is immense potential for further research in this area; there are no fully-realized ways of accounting for and describing atmosphere and its place in literary theory remains somewhat uncertain. I see atmosphere as a logical extension of the thoughts and ideas inherent in postcritique precisely because atmospheres must be *felt* and *experienced* at the time of reading. This is in line with the general argumentation in postcritique but until now postcritique has not dealt explicitly with atmosphere (or even storyworlds). What route postcritique will take is uncertain but I am confident that it will influence the way literary studies handles analysis of complex texts that rely on emotional engagement and a degree of self-loss. Atmosphere relies on both those elements, and it has proven rewarding to explore storyworlds based on the idea that atmospheres are central components (or aspects of) worldbuilding in speculative fiction and fantasy.

Postcritique has proved useful as a conceptual basis and as the beginning of an analytical framework. Traditional critical approaches continue to be valuable and many texts are analyzed in rewarding ways by employing general literary critique, but the perspectives offered by postcritique, with particular focus on emotions, immersion, and potential experiences, encourages readings that allow the singular qualities of a given novel to stand out. Postcritique by itself still is unlikely in its current state to serve as the foundation for an entire analysis; the theory and concepts require an alliance between postcritique and other schools of thought. For this dissertation, the combination between postcritique as a framework and worldbuilding as the foundation resulted in an analysis which was able to account both for the building blocks of fictional worlds as well as the emotional component therein.

Close readings of four selected works of speculative fiction and fantasy have led to insight into the workings of worldbuilding and the potential situations and locations which contribute to a novel's

intangible but vividly-present atmosphere. While it remains clear that characters, dialogue, and plot all contribute to a novel's atmosphere, worldbuilding as a whole is a significant source of both immersive potential and atmosphere in speculative fiction and fantasy. Postcritique was instrumental in creating a framework that expanded the usefulness of worldbuilding analysis and their storyworld atmospheres. It is clear that there remains strong potential for more work on postcriticism and I suspect that we in coming years will see significant contributions to the postcritique camp which solidify analytical approaches. At this stage, postcritical analysis is by necessity quite experimental and it is possible to hone in on a multitude of topics that are all relevant from a postcritical perspective.

Currently, many scholars working on postcritique have shown relatively little interest in speculative fiction and fantasy. This is unfortunate since there is strong potential for understanding these types of narratives via postcritique and for developing postcritique by using this type of fiction. For example, as the analysis of *Titus Groan* revealed, fringe texts are usefully understood via postcritique exactly because traditional critique cannot account for all the movements and affective qualities in these texts. Postcritique is also the area where I see great potential for further research. As this dissertation has demonstrated, many texts are usefully understood via postcritique but new approaches and new developments would result in a change in how we understand and interpret literature. In the case of the New Weird, for example, traditional critique is helpful with regards to tracing the political and cultural influence that have inspired these narratives. However, concerning the immersive potential, atmosphere, and simply the *weirdness* of these storyworlds it is necessary to move beyond traditional critique lest these crucial aspects be relegated to a supporting role at best. The experience of encountering the weird, the fantastical, the otherworldly, and the magical are key aspects of speculative fiction and fantasy. The potential for further research in this domain is astonishing; we may both reevaluate classic texts and analyze modern fictional storyworlds via postcritical analytical vocabulary and a revised understanding of the function and potential of literature.

Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* (1968-2001) was included to test my hypothesis about immersion into storyworlds, and because it was important to include a text that in terms of its worldbuilding makes use of (by now) recognizable and conventional strategies. *Earthsea* constructs a detailed storyworld in which the emotional depth of its characters is supported by a storyworld framework that allows Le Guin to explore complicated interpersonal matters without relying on conventional quests, wars, or a

high level of violence. I have shown the role that Taoism plays as a foundational element in Le Guin's worldbuilding, and her deliberate employment of this particular branch of philosophy as a core element is significant for most major areas of the narrative. I juxtaposed this with how authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis constructed their storyworlds; both relied on Christian structures which ultimately influenced both the heart of their stories as well as the mechanisms of their storyworlds. Le Guin, on the other hand, diverged from the quest fantasy tradition and instead created an introspective and immersive storyworld. The main character, Ged, with whom readers at first explore *Earthsea* in a companion-role, eventually changes into a supporting character. Although Le Guin was undoubtedly inspired by what we now understand as the Tolkienian tradition of fantasy writing, she nevertheless managed to create a storyworld that through its philosophy, construction, tone, and style, evokes powerful moments of evocative atmosphere. This atmosphere is typically either the result of reader/character encounters with particular locations, such as the Immanent Grove, or the result of personal quests to become, in the Taoist sense, whole and balanced. Le Guin's interest in Jungian psychology plays a well-documented role in this too; my investigation of both Taoism and Jungian psychology as foundational reveals that it, too, has informed her worldbuilding. What marks Le Guin's *Earthsea* as a complex and enduring work is the scope of her worldbuilding. Originally meant to remain a trilogy, *Earthsea* eventually included several novels and short stories through which we may trace Le Guin's evolution as an author. Later novels are significantly more overt in their feminist focus, such as *Tehanu*, but the core elements in her worldbuilding remain the same. There exists a continued interest in issues of balance and equilibrium in the narrative.

From a postcritique perspective, *Earthsea* is a remarkably rich storyworld primarily due to its deliberate focus on emotional depth and development. The narrative structure itself, however, is also usefully explored via postcriticism; I developed Felski's idea on shock to include the peculiar shock experienced because of the drastic shift in scope, tone, and character between novels. This also applies in the original trilogy: already in the second book, *The Tombs of Atuan*, Ged is a supporting character who only appears approximately halfway through. The personal quest Ged underwent in *A Wizard of Earthsea* is concluded, and Le Guin now lets other characters occupy central positions. This differs from generic quest fantasy narratives in which the main character(s) typically remain the same (*The Wheel of Time, The Lord of the Rings, The Belgariad,* and others) — this creates an expansion of the

storyworld which enables exploration of specific locations and their atmospheres by letting time pass and characters age. For example, the travel-heavy *A Wizard of Earthsea* showcases much of the Earthsea realm, while *The Tombs of Atuan* is focused on a single enigmatic and atmospheric location. Certain locations are recurring elements, such as Roke and the Immanent Grove, and these become important points of interest. Highlighting these aspects underscores how *Earthsea*, via postcritique and considerations on atmosphere and worldbuilding, may be analyzed in new and rewarding ways which move beyond the character-heavy starting point that much scholarship has focused on. Particularly the atmospheric locations and the atmosphere that results as a consequence of the narrative structure are crucial aspects of *Earthsea* that drive its immersive potential. A central part of this, as I have shown, is connected to Taoism and the foundational and significant role it plays in Le Guin's conceptualization of *Earthsea*. Taoism influences both the worldbuilding but also the atmosphere that the storyworld produces because the Taoist influence touches on so many areas that offer potential experiences and immersive power. Ultimately, then, *Earthsea*'s worldbuilding is characterized by a holistic worldbuilding strategy in which the resultant atmosphere is closely linked to the ideas that inspired Le Guin.

Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast* (1946-1959) quickly revealed itself to be a prime example of atmospheric worldbuilding. I focused in particular on *Titus Groan* although occasional references to the whole trilogy were important for the sake of context and perspective. The insight gained from critically exploring *Titus Groan* is relevant for the entire trilogy and therefore representative. Peake's unique worldbuilding strategies have resulted in a sophisticated and intricate storyworld in which many common fantasy tropes are missing. Most of the action takes place in a single location, Gormenghast castle, and this becomes both the most influential location as well as a central pseudo-character in the story. Peake's adjective-laden vocabulary and the slow pace of the plot makes *Titus Groan* a peculiar reading experience, but one that has endured and inspired other authors whose interest in grim locations harkens back to Peake himself — the most notable example in the context of this dissertation being China Miéville.

In order to understand *Gormenghast*, I developed what I termed the spiderweb narrative. Peake's storyworld consists of numerous small interconnected situations, locations, and atmospheres which are combined to create a significant whole. For example, a cursory reading might not reveal any immediate

connection between the grim events centered around Swelter and Mr. Flay, and the events with Fuchsia Groan. However, the common thread concerns the castle and all the many lives woven around the castle, and this trend is visible throughout the novel. Instead of a major plotline serving as the foundation for storyworld exploration, as is usual in quest fantasy narratives, *Gormenghast* instead relies on smaller isolated and self-sufficient painting-like scenes in which the strange mannerisms of characters combine with the Gothic locations to evoke an eerie ambiance and generally unsettling atmosphere. This atmosphere is a driving force of the novel and consequently explains a great part of the allure of *Gormenghast* despite its seemingly lack of overarching storyline. The spiderweb narrative, then, is created as a tool to identify and understand the role of small, interconnected narrative strands which work both on their own (cf. Swelter and Mr. Flay) but also contribute to a grander whole. The atmosphere becomes an aesthetic experience at the center of *Gormenghast* and this atmosphere is what drives immersion. Unlike conventional fantasy narratives in which an intriguing quest stands at the center of the action and readerly curiosity, *Gormenghast* instead relies on affective responses and attunement to its bleak storyworld. This is a fascinating situation because, generally speaking, this is relatively rare — even in speculative fiction. The importance of atmosphere and readerly attunement to what the novel sets out to achieve is also a significant part of the reason why *Gormenghast* has resisted traditional critical scholarship focused on ideological and political readings. While these angles remain valid starting points, few convincing readings of *Gormenghast* exist that employ these foci. This, then, becomes a convincing example of both the need for, and the usefulness of, new modes of scholarly interpretation and analytical repertoire. Postcritique has in this context been invaluable, and I see *Gormenghast* as an illustrative and important example of a novel that captures well the potential for postcritique to offer perspectives that allow interpretations that are not guided by predetermined frameworks that risk being unnecessarily restricting.

Haruki Murakami's *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985) was included in this dissertation for several reasons. Including a non-Western narrative showcased how worldbuilding strategies may take forms that differ from the conventions of the Anglosphere. While Murakami has been described as particularly westernized, several important aspects of his work nevertheless clearly portray Japanese proclivities and sensibilities. The dual-world and dual-narrative in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* demonstrates how a single novel may encompass numerous

different types of worldbuilding strategies and atmospheres. In the "Hard-boiled Wonderland" sections, the combination between aspects from cyberpunk, hard-boiled detective fiction, and dystopian futurism merge and produce an atmosphere that deliberately draws on recognizable aspects of these genres. When combined with the almost typical Japanese/Murakami attention to the mundane, we are then left with a complicated storyworld in which the life of the main character often seems quaint and down-to-earth given his focus on relaxed dining and unapologetic consumption of alcohol. The complex amalgamation of subgenres in the "Hard-boiled Wonderland" sections are juxtaposed with the different aesthetics encountered in the "End of the World" sections. "The End of the World" draws significantly on the fantasy tradition and the storyworld is in many familiar ways constructed like a generic fantasy world. The map that accompanies "The End of the World" is a big part of this and allows readers to understand the layout and limitations of what the "Boku" narrator goes through. Fantastical creatures like the unicorns and the enigmatic characters that the main character relies on for information are also typical of the fantasy genre. The atmosphere that is produced in "The End of the World" is different from the one in "Hard-boiled Wonderland", and the combination of two unique atmospheres in a single novel contributes meaningfully to a reading experience. In narratives with a single permeating atmosphere, such as Peake's *Gormenghast*, the atmosphere becomes almost a subconscious element that readers attune to. When there are no drastic shifts and oscillations in the aesthetic nature of a storyworld then its atmosphere will also remain constant. In texts like *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, however, worldbuilding strategies and atmospheres are constantly moved to the forefront of the reading experience because the shift in tone, style, content, and aesthetics is immediately noticeable when Murakami switches from one storyworld to the other. Making sense of these shifts and understanding the interplay between the two worlds becomes important elements of reading and understanding the novel.

My reading of *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* has furthermore revealed the strong connection between consciousness and worldbuilding in Murakami's work. As becomes clear by the end of the novel, the "End of the World" exists in the mind of the main character, and Murakami constantly plays with the relationship between life and the world, and the conscious and unconscious mind. In most fictional storyworlds, the storyworld and its worldbuilding exists as a backdrop tapestry; it is a unique and important entity, and while the characters necessarily engage with the storyworld by

virtue of the fact that they exist within the storyworld, there still remains a pseudo-distance between characters and storyworld. The characters do not exist anywhere else because they *cannot* exist anywhere else. In Murakami's worldbuilding, however, this disconnect in the relationship between the storyworld(s) and the character(s) does not exist in the same way and, interestingly, this style of constructing Murakami's fictional worlds is not unique to *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. There often exists a complicated relationship between the 'over here' and 'over there' in Murakami's writing, and characters typically find ways of navigating between the two — precisely as also happens in *Hard-boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. We are left, then, with a complex storyworld in which Murakami makes use of worldbuilding strategies from numerous genres and fuses them in order to create a fictional world in which dual-worlds and dual-narratives coexist. This impacts the novel's atmosphere in tangible ways and marks a noteworthy departure from the worldbuilding strategies that we most often observe in the Anglosphere. Additionally, the atmospheres of both "Hard-boiled Wonderland" and "The End of the World" are complemented and enhanced by the existence of the other. While the two storyworlds for most of the narrative seem disconnected, their very differences highlight the unique aspects of each storyworld and this intensifies the atmosphere of each storyworld.

China Miéville's *The City & The City* (2009) proved to be a tremendously important inclusion in this dissertation. Situated firmly within the New Weird, *The City & The City* exists as an example of the constantly-evolving nature of speculative fiction, and the profound importance of worldbuilding is exemplified convincingly in this novel. The coterminous cities Ul Qoma and Beszél are the focal point of the novel's complex structure in which the reader is tasked with understanding an illogical cultural, geographical, and political situation that the main character, Inspector Tyador Borlú, takes for granted. This is a major part of why the novel is an immersive speculative fiction narrative and more unforgiving than generic quest fantasy texts in which information is provided more readily, and where the worldbuilding is meant to assist readers as well as characters. In the New Weird, and certainly *The City & The City*, fewer answers are provided at the outset and questions concerning the precise nature of these weird worlds are not always knowable or answerable. This, then, makes *The City & The City* a thought-experiment in which Miéville deliberately toys with the idea of borders and the seemingly arbitrary nature of them, as well as the potentially extreme differences in culture, politics, and

economics in two cities which, in less weird circumstances, should reasonably be indistinguishable — or even a single, coherent city.

Miéville framework in *The City & The City* is centered around a fairly typical murder investigation and his conscious attempt at contributing to hard-boiled detective fiction is apparent. As in many other speculative fiction narratives, however, the plot itself takes a backseat and what instead drives the reading experience is Inspector Borlú's attempts at navigating the intricate geopolitical situation. Although the two cities exist in the same geographical space, inhabitants of one city must consciously *unsee* citizens from the neighboring city. Streets that link the two cities are *crosshatched*, and one may not simply cross the street from one city to the other. The borders are clear and must be respected; transgressions are swiftly and severely punished by the mysterious government entity known as Breach. Miéville placed the two cities in what we may assume is Eastern Europe, but this is an inference based on aesthetics and naming conventions; no clear-cut answer is provided. Interestingly, Miéville's story does take place in the real world which means that readerly understanding of real world geopolitics play a role in the interpretative process. Furthermore, the aesthetic component is extremely important and both cities contribute to this aspect. Both cities also produce a distinct atmosphere, one in which the grim brutality of the murder investigation is shrouded in the complex machinations of the two cities and the various political factions therein. Unlike Murakami's novel, in which the two worlds are interdependent but produce entirely unique atmospheres, Miéville's storyworld produces a singular atmosphere but one in which the construction and nature of both cities play a role. For example, the fact that Beszél is poorer than Ul Qoma is a major factor in both the worldbuilding and the resulting immersive atmosphere since Borlú's (and consequently the readers') experience varies greatly as he travels from one city to the other and experiences shifts and changes in architecture, culture, language, and people.

The New Weird is usefully understood via postcritique in great part since the New Weird relies on often strange and eerie elements that are not easy to explain or account for by using traditional theoretical approaches. Attunement to what the novels try to do, and the atmospheres that they evoke, become as much part of the reading experience as any other aspects. For example, as I have noted, a significant ingredient in Lovecraft's cosmic horror is precisely the atmosphere he manages to evoke. The same is largely true for the writers in the New Weird who, in their deliberate blending of genres

such as horror, fantasy, and science fiction, strive to create weird storyworlds that must be *felt* and *experienced* through their atmospheres and illogical or unexplained phenomena become part of the immersive experience. Furthermore, it is clear that the New Weird, certainly including *The City & The City*, makes specific locations the focal point of their stories. These locations generally evoke certain atmospheres and analytically considering these from a postcritical perspective enables readings that consider how the text, and these peculiar locations, are *present* and what strange and uncertain moods the text is attempting to produce.

The Postcritical Contribution

Postcritique has proved useful as a conceptual basis and analytical framework. Traditional critical approaches continue to be valuable and many texts are analyzed in rewarding ways by employing traditional literary critique, but the perspectives offered by postcritique, with particular focus on emotions, immersion, and potential experiences, encourages readings that allow the singular qualities of a given novel to stand out. Postcritique by itself still is unlikely at its current state to serve as the foundation for an entire analysis; the theory and concepts require an alliance between postcritique and other schools of thought. For this dissertation, the combination between postcritique as a framework and worldbuilding as the solid foundation resulted in an analysis that was able to account both for the building blocks of fictional worlds as well as the emotional component therein.

Close readings of four selected works of speculative fiction and fantasy have led to insight into the workings of worldbuilding and the potential situations and locations which contribute to a novel's intangible but vividly-present atmosphere. While it remains clear that characters, dialogue, and plot all contribute to a novel's atmosphere, worldbuilding as a whole is a significant source of both immersive potential and atmosphere in speculative fiction and fantasy. Postcritique was instrumental in creating a framework that expanded the usefulness of worldbuilding analysis and their storyworld atmospheres. It is clear that there remains exceptional potential for more work on postcriticism and I suspect that we in coming years will see significant contributions to the postcritique camp which solidify analytical approaches. At this stage, postcritical analysis is by necessity quite experimental and it is possible to hone in on a multitude of topics that are all relevant from a postcritical perspective. Key postcritical texts often speak broadly about the potential for literature (in a general sense) to be transformative, or

at least influence readers in particular ways which are not described or covered by traditional critique. However, it is important that future postcritical work delves into texts and employ these ideas on specific texts so that postcriticism can move beyond being an abstract framework and relatively loose line of argumentation. Right now, as I have noted, it seems that postcritique does need the support of other theories when employed in close readings but that is not necessarily only a downside. Postcritique, as has become clear, provides both a vocabulary but also (importantly) a conceptual framework in which narratives may play roles that are not considered in traditional critique. The areas identified by Felski, for example, have shaped this dissertation significantly and my deliberate attempt at moving beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion has always been in the forefront of my readings.

At this point, many scholars working on postcritique have shown relatively little interest in speculative fiction and fantasy. This is unfortunate since there is strong potential for understanding these types of narratives via postcritique and potential for developing postcritique by using this type of fiction to explore the core assumptions in postcritique. For example, as the analysis of *Titus Groan* revealed, fringe texts are usefully understood via postcritique exactly because traditional critique cannot account for all the movements and affective qualities in these texts. Postcritique is also the area where I see great potential for further research. As this dissertation has demonstrated, many texts are usefully understood via postcriticism but new approaches and new developments would result in a change in how we understand and interpret literature. Reading the world in a grain of sand and tirelessly pursuing the hermeneutics of suspicion cannot be a viable strategy for all types of narratives. For example, few analyses taking the road of traditional critique would have argued in favor of the existence of atmospheres. I have in this dissertation identified specific instances of sections and aspects that produce atmosphere and argued for both the existence but also importance of this aspect. While the issue of atmosphere is somewhat intangible, it remains a core component of storyworlds and one which I find particularly crucial in the context of immersion and affective attachment. Previous readings of the novels I have analyzed, especially *Titus Groan* and *The City & The City*, have not considered these aspects. The synthesis of worldbuilding, atmosphere, and postcritique has provided a helpful avenue by which complex storyworlds may be understood. As speculative fiction and fantasy moves in the direction of less rigid and more weird structures, this change in approach becomes viable. Worldbuilding theory on its own risks being descriptive; postcritique on its own risks being purely

conceptual; atmosphere on its own risks being too abstract. Combining these areas, however, creates a solid framework through which we may delve into storyworlds, identify their inner workings, and pinpoint moments of profound atmosphere in order to explain their evocative and immersive potential.

The End of the Road

And finally, what now? The question remains whether these insights are relevant only for a specific subset of narratives or if the ideas can be applied to a wider range of texts. I have focused almost exclusively on speculative fiction and fantasy and I remain convinced of the strong potential for these genres to showcase the potential for postcritique, atmosphere, and worldbuilding theory to provide meaningful insight. While worldbuilding is most useful for texts that establish fictional worlds, both atmosphere and postcritique are entirely relevant in a broader context. I have referenced texts that do not fall under the speculative fiction and fantasy umbrella, such as Kazuo Ishirguro's *The Remains of the Day* and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The theoretical ideas and concepts I have worked with can readily be applied to these types of texts as well. Texts that make use of the mundane in enchanting manners often inadvertently produce certain atmospheres that become part of the storyworld and the reading experience. As such, I see immense potential for postcritique, and areas like atmosphere, to provide insight into a wide range of texts.

Further research that considers these topics might develop specific strategies for analyzing texts with atmosphere and postcritical ideas in mind. Currently, as I have noted, there exists some uncertainty with regards to methodology; this work in progress may be explored via research that considers more (types of) texts that expand, challenge, and simply use postcritique as an analytical foundation. While I hope that work on speculative fiction and fantasy will continue in the ways I propose, there is little reason, as far as I can see, to not employ these ideas on narratives that differ completely from what I have focused on. Furthermore, there is ample room for further developing existing ideas. I have written at length about several of Felski's concepts, but some areas received more attention than others. Further research might delve into precisely what type of knowledge is produced in speculative fiction and fantasy, and what kind of application (if any) this has on both a personal and societal level. The recent focus on attachments, which I find promising, might also be expanded in order to figure out the ways in which attachment influences reading proclivities and lasting emotional connections.

Even specific movements or periods, such as Romanticism or Modernism, may benefit from readings that highlight their unique atmospheres and the potential experiences the texts offer. All in all, then, there are right now no clear limits on the potential for postcritique to contribute to literary analysis. We are in the early phases, but as more work is produced our understanding of postcritique will develop and insight into texts, both new and old, will also expand in innovative and promising ways.

Lastly, here at the end of the road, we may consider the new pathways that literary analysis might explore. There exists inspiring potential for new ways of reading and analyzing, and right now postcritique is at the forefront of this. I have in my dissertation contributed to this ongoing development and I am confident that still more research will venture into the lands and spaces found in speculative fiction and fantasy in order to further explore precisely how storyworlds function.

German Summary

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Dissertation untersucht die Konstruktion fiktiver Welten in der spekulativen Literatur und Fantasy-Literatur und konzentriert sich dabei insbesondere auf die spezifischen Atmosphären, die die jeweiligen Erzählwelten erzeugen. Bei der Suche nach einer geeigneten Methodologie lohnt es sich, auf eine Allianz zwischen *Postcriticism*/ *Postkritik* (*Postcritique*) und der Erforschung literarischer Atmosphären sowie der Aspekte des *Worldbuilding* zurückzugreifen. Fiktionale Welten sind bekanntlich ein integraler Bestandteil von Literatur und Erzählen (Storytelling) und dies zeigt sich insbesondere in Genres, die darauf angewiesen sind, von der realen empirischen Welt deutlich abweichende Erzählwelten zu etablieren. Spekulative Literatur, die eine breite Palette von (Sub-) Genres wie Science-Fiction, Fantasy, Horror und *New Weird* umfasst, verfügt in diesem Zusammenhang über ein reiches Spektrum des Aufbaus detaillierter Erzählwelten, wie beispielsweise ein literaturgeschichtlicher Rückblick zu erkennen gibt. Die fiktiven Universen prägen das Leseerlebnis erheblich. Daher bildet das Verständnis der Konstruktionsweisen dieser fiktiven Welten sowie der Rolle(n), die sie jeweils spielen, ein zentrales Thema dieser Dissertation. Darüber hinaus wird die Dissertation zeigen, dass nicht nur alle fiktionalen Welten durch ihr *Worldbuilding* (ihre jeweiligen Weltkonstruktionen) unterschiedliche Atmosphären erzeugen, sondern dass diese Atmosphären auch für die Immersion und die ästhetischen Komponenten eines Textes von entscheidender Bedeutung sind. Der Grad, zu dem die Atmosphäre zentral ist, unterscheidet sich von Text zu Text. Manche Storyworlds streben bewusst nach einer bestimmten Stimmung in der Storyworld, während andere ungewollt Atmosphären erzeugen, die zuweilen marginal bzw. anderen Aspekten untergeordnet bleiben können.

Die vier für die Analyse ausgewählten Romane umfassen mehrere Genres und verschiedene Worldbuilding-Strategien. Ihr gemeinsamer Nenner bildet die Tatsache, dass sie alle in hohem Maße auf eine fiktive imaginäre Welt angewiesen sind und detaillierte Erzählwelten konstruieren, die für die Immersion genauso wichtig sein können wie die Geschichte und ihre Handlung selbst. Das Ziel bei der Auswahl von vier spekulativen Romanen besteht darin, ein möglichst breites Spektrum abzudecken; die Untersuchung beleuchtet unterschiedliche Ansätze des Worldbuilding und eruiert, wie

Atmosphären in verschiedenen Kontexten erzeugt werden. Obwohl ich nicht unbedingt argumentiere, dass diese Romane für bestimmte Trends innerhalb bestimmter (Sub-)Genres repräsentativ sind, sind sie dennoch relevante sowie anschauliche Beispiele spekulativer Literatur, die in ihrer vergleichenden Gegenüberstellung das differenzierte und facettenreiche Potenzial von spekulativen Fiktionen und ihren imaginären Welten hervorheben. Es wäre zwar eine alternative Option, sich auf einen einzigen Autor zu konzentrieren – was bei jedem der vier von mir ausgewählten Autoren ohne weiteres möglich gewesen wäre, da sie alle sehr produktiv waren bzw. sind und eine große Anzahl von Veröffentlichungen haben – jedoch wollte ich bewusst die Reichweite dieser Dissertation durch die Auseinandersetzung mit unterschiedlichen Autoren und verschiedenartigen Romanen vergrößern und vertiefen. Dies lässt die Dissertation für einen größeren Leserkreis relevant erscheinen, insofern gezeigt wird, dass die Themen, mit denen ich mich befasse, nicht lediglich einen idiosynkratischen Sonderfall betreffen. Im Folgenden stelle ich die von mir ausgewählten Romane kurz vor und erläutere zugleich das theoretische Fundament dieser Dissertation.

Ursula K. Le Guins *Earthsea*-Saga (1968-2001) stellt ein Beispiel für konventionelle Fantasiewelten dar und liefert den notwendigen Kontext sowie einen geeigneten Vergleichspunkt, der es erlaubt, den experimentelleren Charakter der anderen Werke in den übrigen Kapiteln schärfer herauszuarbeiten. Le Guin ist sowohl für ihre Fantasy-Werke als auch für ihre Science-Fiction berühmt. Während *Earthsea* zunächst aufgrund seiner Position als klassische Fantasy-Erzählung geeignet scheint, in die vorliegende Studie einbezogen zu werden, wird die Komplexität und Tiefe von Le Guins *Worldbuilding* darüber hinaus eine wichtige Rolle spielen, um zu verdeutlichen, wie unterschiedlich die Strategien des *Storyworld*-Designs ausfallen können. Anfänglich dünn als konventioneller Bildungsroman verschleiert, verwandeln sich die Earthsea-Romane schnell in eine weitläufige, emotional dichte und fesselnde Erzählwelt, in der Introspektion und persönliche *Quests* den Archipel von *Earthsea* von anderen Fantasy-Storyworlds abheben. Selbst viele Jahre nach der Veröffentlichung des ersten Earthsea-Buches, *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968) teilen nur wenige Fantasy-Romane die einzigartigen Merkmale von Le Guins höchst erfolgreichen bzw. einflussreichen Romanen. In der Analyse von *Earthsea* identifiziere ich die zugrundeliegenden Bausteine der Erzählwelt von Le Guin und hebe Schlüsselmomente hervor, die eine unverwechselbare und evokative Atmosphäre erzeugen. Im Verlauf der Interpretation lenke ich darüber hinaus besondere Aufmerksamkeit darauf, wie der Taoismus und

(in geringerem Maße) die Jungsche Psychologie Le Guins *Worldbuilding* beeinflusst und geprägt haben. Der Taoismus ist sowohl in der narrativen Konstruktion als auch in den philosophischen Grundlagen der *Storyworld* sichtbar. Geds introspektive Reise und die Rolle und Entwicklung von Tenar zeigen dies besonders gut. Insgesamt ist *Earthsea* fest in der Quest-Fantasy-Tradition verankert, jedoch lassen sich dabei wichtige Unterschiede erkennen wie beispielsweise das Fehlen von Gewalt sowie der Struktur der Quest(s), die im Allgemeinen eher introspektiv als auf Eroberung oder Gewalt ausgerichtet ist. *Earthsea* verfügt über eine bemerkenswert reichhaltige Erzählwelt, vor allem aufgrund des bewussten Fokus auf emotionale Tiefe und Entwicklung. Die Erzählstruktur selbst lässt sich indessen ebenfalls mithilfe der *Postcritique* sinnvoll erforschen.

In diesem Zusammenhang bietet es sich an, Felskis Konzeption des ‚Schocks' zu entwickeln, um den eigentümlichen Schockeffekt einzubeziehen, der aufgrund der drastischen Verschiebung von Umfang, Ton und Charakter zwischen den Romanen wirksam wird. Dies gilt auch hinsichtlich der Original-Trilogie: Bereits im zweiten Buch, *The Tombs of Atuan*, ist Ged eine Nebenfigur, die erst ungefähr nach der Hälfte der Erzählung auftaucht. Die persönliche Suche (*Quest)*, die Ged in *A Wizard of Earthsea* durchlaufen hat, ist abgeschlossen und Le Guin lässt nun folgerichtig andere Charaktere zentrale Positionen einnehmen. Diese Verfahrensweise unterscheidet sich von den genretypischen Quest-Fantasy-Erzählungen, in denen die Hauptfigur(en) normalerweise die gleichen bleiben (*Das Rad der Zeit*, *Der Herr der Ringe*, *Belgariad* und andere) – sie schafft eine Erweiterung der Erzählwelt, die die Erforschung bestimmter Orte und ihrer Atmosphäre begünstigt bzw. ermöglicht, während sie die Zeit verstreichen und Charaktere altern lässt. Zum Beispiel entfaltet das ‚reiseintensive' Buch *A Wizard of Earthsea* einen Großteil des Earthsea-Reichs, während *The Tombs of Atuan* sich auf einen einzigen rätselhaften und atmosphärischen Ort konzentriert. Bestimmte Orte sind wiederkehrende Elemente, wie ‚Roke' und der ‚Immanent Grove', und diese werden zu wichtigen Sehenswürdigkeiten.

Mervyn Peakes *Gormenghast*-Trilogie (1946–1959), die hier mit besonderem Fokus auf den ersten Roman, *Titus Groan* (1946) in den Blick genommen wird, präsentiert eine vergleichsweise kleine Erzählwelt, die die zentrale Bedeutung von – und das gleichzeitige Vertrauen auf – Atmosphäre im Prozess ihrer Weltkonstruktion eindrücklich zeigt. Peakes Werk ist ein schwieriger, in vielfältiger Hinsicht schwer zugänglicher, aber nichtsdestoweniger zentraler Teil der Fantasy-Tradition, zumal seine besonderen Strategien des Worldbuildinges einzigartig waren (und bleiben). Die Handlung wirkt

minimalistisch und die Geschichte erscheint dadurch noch rätselhafter, dass die namensgebende Hauptfigur ein Kleinkind ist. Die Erzählwelt ist von ihrer Größe und räumlichen Ausdehnung her relativ klein, aber ihre ästhetische Dimension und die akute Tiefe der Szenen und Charaktere, die Peake präsentiert, schafft eine Verschmelzung von grotesker, eigenwilliger, schräger, gotischer Fantasy mit einer originellen und beunruhigenden Atmosphäre, die das gesamte Werk durchzieht. Es gibt wenige Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen *Gormenghast* und generischen Fantasy-Texten; es ist ein schwieriges Buch, aber gerade seine rätselhafte Schwierigkeit prädestiniert es zu einer würdigen Aufnahme, nicht zuletzt auch weil *Gormenghast* postkritische Theorien und Konzeptualisierungen wunderbar auf die Probe stellt. In meiner Lektüre von Peakes Werk betone ich die Strategien des Worldbuilding, die verwendet werden, um intensive Szenen zu schaffen, in denen die Ereignisse selbst zwar skurril oder abweisend erscheinen mögen, aber die Atmosphäre, die die Szenen umgibt, intensiv und herzlich ist. Dies wird ergänzt durch das, was ich die Spinnennetz-Erzählung (*Spiderweb narrative*) nenne; ein komplexes Netz von Erzählelementen, die zusammen ein vollständiges Ganzes bilden, aber auch einzelne (Erzähl-)Stränge aufweisen, die besonders hervorstechen. In meiner Analyse von *Gormenghast* lenke ich besondere Aufmerksamkeit auf den atmosphärisch eindringlichen Kampf zwischen Swelter und Mr. Flay. Die Feindschaft zwischen diesen beiden markiert einen dramatischen Höhepunkt. Die Atmosphäre, die sowohl durch ihren Kampf als auch durch die Umgebung, in der sie sich bewegen, erzeugt wird, macht die Textstelle zu einem außergewöhnlichen Beispiel für die lebendige Präsenz von Atmosphäre. Dies wiederum verdeutlicht, wie wirkungsvoll und eindrücklich bestimmte Romane aus Gründen sein können, die nichts mit der Handlung selbst zu tun haben. Darüber hinaus dienen mehrere andere Szenen, in denen die Darstellung bestimmter Charaktere sowie das Gebäude des Schlosses ein Gefühl der Vorfreude und Unheimlichkeit evozieren, letztendlich als anschaulicher Beleg dafür, wie und warum diese *Storyworld* trotz ihrer langsamen und minimalistischen Handlung immersiv und atmosphärisch dicht ist. Im Zentrum von *Gormenghast* wird die Atmosphäre zu einem ästhetischen Erlebnis eigener Art. Es liegt auf der Hand, dass diese Atmosphäre die Immersion fördert und stimuliert. Im Gegensatz zu herkömmlichen Fantasy-Erzählungen, in denen eine faszinierende Suche im Mittelpunkt der Handlung steht und die Neugier des Leser/innen anregt, verlässt sich *Gormenghast* stattdessen auf affektive Reaktionen und die genaue Abstimmung der Atmosphäre auf seine düstere Storyworld.

Dies ist eine faszinierende Situation, die im Allgemeinen relativ selten vorkommt – selbst in der spekulativen Fiktion. Die Bedeutung der Atmosphäre und die Einstimmung des Leser/innen auf das, was der Roman erreichen will, ist auch ein wesentlicher Grund dafür, warum *Gormenghast* sich der traditionellen, auf ideologische und politische Lesarten ausgerichteten kritischen Forschung widersetzt hat. Während diese Blickwinkel sicherlich Legitime Ausgangspunkte bleiben, gibt es nur wenige überzeugende Lesarten von *Gormenghast*, die die genannten Schwerpunkte als Analyseinstrumentarium verwenden. So werden anhand des gewählten Beispiels schlaglichtartig die Notwendigkeit und der Nutzen neuer Methoden der wissenschaftlichen Interpretation und der Erweiterung des analytischen Repertoires deutlich. Der *Postcriticism* erweist sich in diesem Zusammenhang als Ansatz von unschätzbarem Wert, und *Gormenghast* fungiert als ein illustratives und wichtiges Beispiel für einen Roman, der das Potenzial postkritischer Modelle gut einfängt, besonders deren Möglichkeit, Perspektiven anzubieten und Interpretationen zu ermöglichen, die nicht von vorgegebenen Rahmenwerken geleitet werden, die Interpretationen von Anfang an einschränken könnten.

Haruki Murakamis Doppel-Erzählung und doppelte Weltkonstruktion in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (1985) präsentiert einen Erzähltext aus einem nicht-englischen Teil der Welt und gibt zu erkennen, wie Aspekte aus dem Hardboiled-Genre, Cyberpunk und Fantasy zu einer komplizierten neuen Erzähleinheit verschmelzen. Das Werk des japanischen Autors Murakami wird in diese Dissertation aufgenommen, da sich sein Zugang zu fiktionalen Welten spürbar von der meisten anglophonen Literatur unterscheidet. Der Kontrast, den dies eröffnet, wird sowohl die Einzigartigkeit von Murakamis *Storyworld* hervorheben als auch eine aufschlussreiche Perspektive auf die anderen von mir aufgenommenen Romane bieten. Die Tatsache, dass *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* Elemente aus mehreren Genres vermischt, macht es im Kontext einer Betrachtung des *Worldbuildings* besonders interessant. Wie, mit welchen ästhetischen Mitteln, wird eine *Storyworld* ermöglicht, in der zwei unterschiedliche imaginäre Welten nebeneinandergestellt werden, und wie gestaltet sich die Beziehung zwischen diesen beiden Welten? Natürlich ist Murakami nicht einzigartig darin, eine duale *Storyworld* zu schaffen, sondern es sind vielmehr die eigentümlichen Atmosphären, die mit jeder der beiden erzählten Welten verbunden sind, die zu einer speziellen treibenden Kraft in der Erzählung werden. Seine Fähigkeit, das scheinbar Alltägliche mit Aspekten des magischen

Realismus und im Fall von *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* auch mehrerer anderer Genres zu kombinieren, generiert ein erstaunliches, hybrides Resultat, das ein faszinierendes Beispiel für komplexes *Worldbuilding* ist. Ich betone insbesondere die Bedeutung des Zusammenspiels zwischen den beiden Erzählwelten und die Art und Weise, wie das Bewusstsein der Hauptfigur im Zentrum der *Worldbuilding*-Prozesse innerhalb des Romans steht. Sowohl die Hauptfigur als auch die Leser müssen diese seltsame Konstruktion verstehen, und die schrittweise Entzifferung dessen, was genau in der Erzählung vor sich geht, wird zu einem Schlüsselelement des immersiven Potenzials innerhalb des Textes. Meine Lektüre von *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* enthüllt die enge Verbindung zwischen dem Bewusstsein des Protagonisten und dem *Worldbuilding* in Murakamis Werk. Wie am Ende des Romans klar wird, existiert das „Ende der Welt" im Kopf der Hauptfigur und Murakami spielt ständig mit der Beziehung zwischen Leben und Welt, dem Bewussten und Unbewussten. In den meisten fiktiven *Storyworlds* existiert die *Storyworld* und ihr *Worldbuilding* als eine Art Kulisse oder detailreicher Hintergrund; es ist eine einzigartige und wichtige Einheit, und obwohl sich die Charaktere aufgrund ihrer Existenz innerhalb der Erzählwelt notwendigerweise mit der fiktiven Welt beschäftigen, bleibt immer noch eine Pseudodistanz zwischen den Charakteren und der Erzählwelt. Die Charaktere existieren nirgendwo anders, weil sie nirgendwo anders existieren können. In Murakamis *Worldbuilding* funktioniert diese Trennung in der Beziehung zwischen der/den *Storyworld(s)* und den Charakter(en) jedoch nicht auf die gleiche Weise und interessanterweise ist dieser Stil der Konstruktion von Murakamis fiktionalen Welten nicht einzigartig für *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. Es gibt in Murakamis Schriften oft eine komplizierte Beziehung zwischen dem „hier" und „dort", und die Charaktere finden häufig Wege, zwischen den beiden zu navigieren – genau wie es auch in *Hard-boiled Wonderland und The End of the World* der Fall ist. So entfaltet sich eine komplexe *Storyworld,* in der Murakami *Worldbuilding*-Strategien aus zahlreichen Genres nutzt und sie zu einer fiktiven Welt verschmilzt, in der duale Welten und zwei verschiedene Erzählungen nebeneinander existieren. Dies beeinflusst die Atmosphäre des Romans auf greifbare Weise und markiert eine bemerkenswerte Abkehr von den Strategien des *Worlbuildings*, die wir am häufigsten in der neueren anglophonen Literatur beobachten.

China Miévilles *The City & The City* (2009) ist ein Vertreter der Strömung des *New Weird*, eines faszinierenden literarischen Trends, der gezielt versucht, die Grenzen bekannter Genres zu

überschreiten, um neue und schräge Erzählwelten zu schaffen und diese nicht nur möglich, sondern auch glaubhaft zu machen. Miévilles Roman ist das einzige der vier von mir ausgewählten Werke aus der Primärliteratur, das keine vollständig fiktive, imaginäre Erzählwelt erschafft, sondern eine, die der realen empirischen Welt fiktionale Elemente hinzufügt. Miévilles Rahmen in *The City & The City* dreht sich um eine typische Mordermittlung und unternimmt somit offensichtlich den Versuch, zu Detektivromanen des *Hard boiled*-Typs beizutragen. Wie in vielen anderen spekulativen Erzählungen tritt jedoch die Handlung selbst in den Hintergrund; was stattdessen das Leseerlebnis motiviert, sind die Versuche von Inspektor Borlú, sich in der komplizierten geopolitischen Situation zurechtzufinden. Obwohl die beiden Städte Besźel und Ul Qoma im selben geografischen Raum liegen, müssen die Bewohner der einen Stadt diejenigen der Nachbarstadt bewusst ignorieren bzw. ausblenden. Straßen, die die beiden Städte miteinander verbinden, sind schraffiert, und man darf nicht einfach die Straße von einer Stadt zur anderen überqueren. Die Grenzen sind, oberflächlich betrachtet, klar abgesteckt und müssen beachtet werden, denn Übertretungen werden schnell und hart bestraft. Die beiden Städte sind zwar fiktiv, aber die Leser können vermuten, dass solche Orte irgendwo in Osteuropa existieren, was sich allerdings aus dem Text nicht definitiv erschließen lässt. Der Roman ist durch die grundlegende Situation geprägt, dass die beiden Städte im selben geografischen Raum existieren. Die räumliche Überlagerung der Städte am selben Ort wie auch die Tatsache, dass der Roman in der realen empirischen Welt spielt, schafft spezifische Parameter, die seine Weltkonstruktion, sein spezifisches *Worldbuilding*, maßgeblich beeinflussen.

Miéville ist bekanntermaßen ein politischer Autor, aber ich möchte dieses Werk speziell aus einem postkritischen Standpunkt analysieren, der stattdessen die seltsame Atmosphäre und die logischen Unmöglichkeiten unterstreicht, die dieser Erzählung innewohnen. Die Aufgabe, das Seltsame plausibel und real erscheinen zu lassen, erweist sich als nicht einfach. Dies wird durch das *New Weird* (das in der Forschung kontrovers verhandelt wird und notorisch schwer zu definieren bleibt) weiter verkompliziert, denn in dieser Gattung wird bewusst versucht, Grenzen zu überschreiten und neue ästhetische Grenzen im Kontext der literarischen Fiktionen hervorzubringen. Nicht zuletzt aus diesem Grund erscheint es wichtig, mindestens einen *New Weird*-Text in das Textcorpus der Untersuchung einzufügen; das Genre bildet eine richtungweisende Neuentwicklung innerhalb der spekulativen Fiktionen und Fantasy und ist insofern eine spannende und wichtige Erweiterung des

zugrundeliegenden Materials dieser Dissertation. Mehr als die anderen Kapitel erfordert dieses Kapitel eine vertiefte Kontextualisierung und einen genaueren Blick darauf, was genau das *New Weird* als Genre umfasst. Es gibt eine reiche und komplizierte (Kultur-)Geschichte des Seltsamen und die Vertiefung in dieses Thema liefert wichtige Hintergrundinformationen, die meine Analyse von *The City & The City* leichter verständlich machen. *The New Weird* ist einzigartig sowohl hinsichtlich seiner *Worldbuilding*-Strategien als auch in Hinblick auf seine bewussten Versuche, über etablierte Genre-Tropen hinauszugehen. Dies ermöglicht zudem einen genaueren Blick darauf, wie die Erzählwelt im Einzelnen aufgebaut ist und wie die logische Unmöglichkeit des Romans sukzessive umgesetzt wird. Das Thema des ‚Nichtsehens' ist ein Thema, das ich dabei ausführlicher erforsche, weil es das Herzstück des *Worldbuildings* darstellt und das Gedankenexperiment allererst ermöglicht, das Miéville mit seiner Erzählung vorschlägt. Letztendlich zeige ich, wie das Seltsame im Zentrum dieser komplexen Erzählung steht und die Erkundung der Zwillingsstädte in Bezug auf das immersive Potenzial des Romans im Mittelpunkt steht. Das Phänomen des *New Weird* lässt sich mithilfe der Postkritik sinnvoll erfassen, da *New Weird* auf oft seltsamen und unheimlichen Elementen beruht, die mit traditionellen theoretischen Ansätzen nicht leicht zu erklären oder zu plausibilisieren sind. Die Abstimmung der evozierten Atmosphäre auf die Wirkung, welche die Romane in ihrer Entwicklung anstreben, trägt ebenso zum Leseerlebnis bei wie alle anderen oben genannten Aspekte. Ein wesentlicher Bestandteil von Lovecrafts kosmischem Horror beruht genau auf der spezifischen Atmosphäre, die er in seinen Schilderungen hervorruft. Gleiches gilt weitgehend auch für die Autoren des *New Weird*, die in ihrer bewussten Vermischung von Genres wie Horror, Fantasy und Science Fiction bestrebt sind, sonderbare *Storyworlds* zu schaffen, die durch ihre eigentümlichen Atmosphären gefühlt und erlebt werden müssen, wobei ihre unlogischen oder unerklärlichen Phänomenen integraler Teil der immersiven Erfahrung der Rezipienten werden.

Die Hauptherausforderung, die mit der Arbeit in dieser Dissertation verbunden ist, besteht darin, einen geeigneten theoretischen Rahmen zu schaffen. Um die bestehenden theoretischen Probleme zu lösen und auch zur Entwicklung derselben Theorien beizutragen, habe ich drei Hauptbereiche ausgewählt. Die drei grundlegenden theoretischen und konzeptionellen Säulen, auf denen die vorliegende Dissertation beruht, wurden gewählt, da sie sich gegenseitig ergänzen und versuchen, Fragen zu beantworten, die für meine Forschung relevant sind. Die erste Säule betrifft die Ansätze der Postkritik/

des *Postcriticism*, die sich von rein ideologischen oder politischen Lesarten abgrenzen, sich also von solchen Interpretationen absetzen, die versuchen, Texte zu entlarven, um unter die Oberfläche zu schauen, um herauszufinden, was ein Text ‚wirklich' sagt. *Postcritique* bezeichnet einen relativ neuen konzeptionellen und theoretischen Rahmen und eine neue Denkweise, die darauf zielt, das verfügbare analytische Repertoire in der Literaturwissenschaft zu erweitern, indem sie immaterielle Themen wie Affekt, Atmosphäre und Emotionen ernsthafter berücksichtigt. Postcritque ist eine wissenschaftliche Methodologie, die sich noch in der Entwicklung befindet; daher existiert in Hinblick auf das hier untersuchte Textcorpus noch kein konkreter (genrespezifischer) Rahmen für eine postkritische Analyse. Hierbei greife ich hauptsächlich auf die Arbeiten von Rita Felski zurück. In ihren jüngsten Büchern *Uses of Literature* (2008), *The Limits of Critique* (2015) und *Hooked: Art and Attachment* (2020) plädiert Felski für eine Veränderung unseres Verständnisses und unserer Herangehensweise an Literaturanalyse. Besonders auf die Ideen, die in *Uses of Literature* entwickelt wurden, greife ich in meiner Studie zurück und sondiere ihren Einsatz als analytische Werkzeuge. Ferner hat auch der Band *Critique and Postcritique* (2017) von Elizabeth S. Anker und Rita Felski maßgeblich zu meinen Postcritique-Abschnitten beigetragen und liefert notwendige Hintergrundinformationen. Der Ansatz der Postkritik wurde bislang als analytisches Werkzeug noch nicht detailliert erprobt. Diese Dissertation und ihre zugrundeliegenden Annahmen und Ansätze verstehen sich als ein Versuch, im Rahmen eines stringenten postkritischen Projekts die Möglichkeiten und die Reichweite des Ansatzes in genrespezifischen Analysen zu eruieren.

Die zweite Säule betrifft die zeitgenössische Theorie des *Worldbuildings*. Obwohl historisch gesehen seit langem ein wissenschaftliches Interesse an der sogenannten Theorie der möglichen Welten (*Possible Worlds Theory*) bestand, ist dieser Zweig der Forschung sehr abstrakt, philosophisch und theoretisch ausgerichtet. Ich stütze mich in erster Linie auf Mark J. P. Wolf, dessen Beitrag zu diesem Gebiet bedeutend ist. Besonders *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (2012) hatte großen Einfluss auf die Formierung einer zeitgenössischen Theorie des *Worldbuildings*. Auch seine anderen Arbeiten, darunter *The Routledge Companion to Imaginary Worlds* (2019) und *Exploring Imaginary Worlds* (2020), sind zentrale Texte, die wichtige Terminologien bieten, mit denen die wissenschaftliche Analyse fiktiver Welten möglich wird. *Worldbuilding*, wie wir es heute verstehen, hat sich weiterentwickelt und konzentriert sich in der aktuellen Narratologie mehr auf die

einzelnen Bausteine von Erzählungen und deren Zusammenspiel. Bei einer Analyse fiktiver Welten ist es wichtig, die grundlegenden Strukturen und Konstruktionsweisen, die eine *Storyworld* ausmachen, zu verstehen und zu bestimmen, da dies einen Ausgangspunkt für weitere Analysen bietet. Dies hängt eng mit der dritten konzeptionellen Säule zusammen, den literarischen Atmosphären.

Alle *Storyworlds* erzeugen bestimmte Atmosphären, insbesondere spekulative Fiktion und Fantasy generieren unwillkürlich und häufig unbewusst Atmosphären durch *Worldbuilding*. Wie sich diese Atmosphären im einzelnen manifestieren und wo und wie sie durch die Leser am intensivsten empfunden und erlebt werden, hängt von den jeweiligen Qualitäten und der Konstruktion jedes einzelnen Textes ab. Atmosphären sind ein abstrakter und immaterieller, aber enorm wichtiger Aspekt von Leseerfahrungen. Demnach fungiert die Atmosphäre als eine logische Erweiterung des *Worldbuildings*, wenn auch viele Theorien zum *Worldbuilding* die Atmosphären, die durch Worldbuilding erzeugt werden, nicht berücksichtigen. Hans Ulrich Gumbrechts *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* (2012) und Gernot Böhmes *The Aesthetics of Atmoshere* (2017) sind zweifellos Schlüsseltexte für die Erforschung des genannten Konzepts, aber keiner von beiden befasst sich eingehend mit spekulativer Literatur und Fantasy. Ihre Argumente für die Bedeutung literarische Atmosphären sind jedoch überzeugend und bilden richtungweisende Beiträge zu diesem Thema. *Storyworlds* evozieren Atmosphären, diese sind in ihnen auf eine bestimmte Weise präsent, aber die Atmosphäre zu lokalisieren und zu beschreiben ist keine leichte Aufgabe. Es ist jedoch nichtsdestoweniger eine wichtige, grundlegende Aufgabe, da die Atmosphäre für das Leseerlebnis zentral und ein integraler evokativer Teil der ästhetischen Dimension eines Textes ist. Mein Bestreben besteht also darin, *Postkritik*, die Erforschung von *Worldbuilding* und Atmosphäre miteinander zu verbinden, um somit zur Weiterentwicklung dieser Theorien beizutragen und zugleich geeignete Analysemodalitäten und -kriterien für spekulative Fiktionen bereitzustellen. Um diese vielversprechenden Synergien zu erreichen, wende ich einen postkritischen Ansatz an, der sich auf *Worldbuilding* konzentriert, um seine Funktion für *Storyworlds* und die affektive Interaktion des Leser/innen herauszuarbeiten. Dabei spielen die Atmosphären einer gegebenen Erzählwelt eine entscheidende Rolle sowohl für die Erzählwelt selbst als auch für das immersive Potenzial eines Textes. Überraschenderweise fehlt es an eingehenden Analysen von Texten des hier diskutierten Genres, obwohl sie geradezu Paradebeispiele für evokative und atmosphärische Erzählungen sind, die

fiktive Welten aufbauen und Atmosphären erzeugen, die aus einer postkritischen Perspektive sinnvoll untersucht werden können.

Die bemerkenswerten Wirkungen der Kunst und die Kraft ihrer Ästhetik sind ein diskussionswürdiges, aber gegen konkrete theoretische Formulierungen recht resistentes Thema. Kunstwerke und insbesondere *Storyworlds* rufen eine spezielle Stimmung hervor, auf die sich die Leser instinktiv und vertiefend einlassen können und dieses Gefühl, diese Stimmung, wird meist durch die Atmosphäre hervorgerufen. Atmosphäre ist ein zentraler ästhetischer Begriff, den ich verwende, um die Kraft der Form in den Texten zu erklären, die ich in dieser Dissertation analysiere. Ähnlich wie Felskis Ideen ist die Atmosphäre jedoch etwas immateriell und ein relativ junges Phänomen mit einem gleichermaßen jungen theoretischen Rahmen. Als kritischer Begriff hat Atmosphäre in letzter Zeit an Bedeutung gewonnen und insbesondere Hans Ulrich Gumbrechts einschlägige Studie *Atmosphere, Mood, Stimmung* markierte einen Wendepunkt für unser Verständnis von literarischer Atmosphäre. Kognitivisten wie Peter Stockwell haben in der Literaturwissenschaft mit der Idee von Atmosphären und Tönen gearbeitet und diese passenden Begriffe scheinen mir beim Studium der Fantasy-Literatur und der spekulativen Fiktion zu wenig genutzt. Ich schlage vor, Atmosphäre als Schlüsselbegriff für ein kritisches Denken über Literatur zu verwenden, da Atmosphäre zwischen Subjekt und Objekt und zwischen Subjekt und Umwelt angesiedelt ist. Die Atmosphäre beeinflusst sowohl das Subjekt als auch das Objekt: Das Leseerlebnis des Subjekts wird, sei es bewusst oder unbewusst, durch die jeweilige Atmosphäre entscheidend bestimmt, und die ästhetische Qualität des Objekts hängt oft von der Atmosphäre ab. Daher gibt es eine starke komplementäre Beziehung, die nicht nur ermöglicht zu erkennen, was mit Subjekt und Objekt geschieht, sondern auch erlaubt, die „Brücke“ zwischen den beiden zu erklären. Anders ausgedrückt, ist die Analyse der Atmosphäre ein wichtiger Faktor, um zu erklären, welches Zusammenspiel zwischen dem Leser und dem Text entsteht, weil die Atmosphäre sowohl die Immersion als auch die Weltkonstruktion prägt.

Demnach lohnt es sich, Atmosphäre als einen ergänzenden Aspekt zum *Worldbuilding* zu erforschen, zumal sie nicht durch ein klar definiertes Set von „Regeln“ oder Schemata begrenzt ist. *Worldbuilding*, wie im Folgenden gezeigt wird, lässt sich leichter durch unterschiedliche narrative Funktionen und Elemente beschreiben (vgl. JP Wolf, Marie-Laure Ryan, Lubomír Doležel) und erklärt auf nützliche Weise die mechanischen Funktionsweisen einer *Storyworld,* während die Atmosphäre nicht begrenzt

oder eingedämmt ist durch die konventionelle Theorie des *Worldbuildings*. Bestimmte Genres eignen sich besonders gut für eine Untersuchung der Atmosphäre, wie etwa die *Gothic Novel*, aber in anderen Genres scheinen Stimmung und Gefühl auf den ersten Blick im Hintergrund zu stehen. Es scheint, als ob spekulative Fiktionen gezielt bestimmte Atmosphären verwenden (oder danach streben). Texte wie VanderMeers *Annihilation* (2014), Lovecrafts *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928) und Miévilles *The City & The City* (2009) veranschaulichen dies überzeugend durch ihre Verwendung von Unsicherheit, Lücken, Antizipationen, beunruhigenden Stimmungen und unkonventionellen *Worldbuilding*. Viele Texte der Weltliteratur sind mit Blick auf die Atmosphäre leichter zu verstehen; insbesondere Kazuo Ishiguros *The Remains of the Day* (1989) ist ein ausdrucksstarker und bemerkenswerter Text, der genau illustriert, wie ein Roman mit einer scheinbar einfachen Geschichte dennoch ein fesselndes Leseerlebnis bieten kann, bei dem nicht nur Charaktere und Schauplatz wichtig sind, sondern auch die Atmosphäre mit ihrer Brückenfunktion zum Leser. Die Atmosphäre fördert also die Immersion, das Eintauchen in die erzählte Welt, das ein entscheidender Aspekt der spekulativen Fiktion ist, da die Auseinandersetzung mit der fiktiven Welt ein zentraler Teil des Leseerlebnisses ist.

Atmosphäre durchdringt alle Erzählungen, wenn auch in unterschiedlichem Maße, und ihre Erforschung kann dazu beitragen, das diffuse Etwas zu erklären, das unbestreitbar Teil eines Raums, einer Landschaft oder einer Umgebung oder sogar einer ganzen narrativen Weltkonstruktion zu sein scheint. Obwohl sie aufgrund ihrer Resistenz gegen objektive Kategorisierung und Definition als problematisches Analysewerkzeug erscheinen mag, möchte ich dennoch ihr Potenzial untersuchen und für die Bedeutung und Stärke des Atmosphärenbegriffs argumentieren. Es passt gut zu der allgemeinen Denkweise der Postkritik und ist gerade einer der neuen Wege, um Literatur in einem neuen Licht zu verstehen, das weder ‚misstrauisch' noch ideologisch ist, sondern sich darauf konzentriert, welche Art von Stimmung der Text hervorruft. Die Allgegenwärtigkeit der Atmosphäre in verschiedenen Umgebungen und Situationen, insbesondere in der Literatur, macht sie wertvoll, auch wenn sie ein gewisses Maß an Ungreifbarkeit besitzt. Die mit der Atmosphäre verbundenen affektiven Qualitäten spielen eine wichtige Rolle bei der emotionalen Verbindung zu vielen Arten von Erzählwelten und beeinflussen maßgeblich die immersive Qualität und das Potenzial des Textes. Dies ist entscheidend, weil es nicht allein die Immersion in Geschichten, sondern auch in *Storyworlds* zu erklären vermag. Offensichtlich konzentrieren sich viele spekulative Erzählungen mehr oder weniger gleichermaßen auf

Geschichte und Atmosphäre, aber in Texten, in denen die erzählte Welt wichtiger ist als die Geschichte sowie der Plot, wird die Atmosphäre zu einem Schlüsselelement sowohl für das Textverständnis als auch für das Eintauchen in den Text (die Immersion). So erweist sich ein Text wie *The Call of Cthulhu* nicht nur wegen der Entdeckungen der Hauptfigur und der letztendlichen Enthüllung der Cthulhu-Entität als interessant. Vielmehr bildet ein großer Teil dessen, was die Immersion vorantreibt, genau jene kosmische Horroratmosphäre, die der Text mit spezifischen Mitteln hervorruft. In ähnlicher Weise stimuliert in *Titus Groan* die Stimmung der erzählten Welt in Kombination mit der Besonderheit der Charaktere die Immersion mindestens ebenso wie die Geschichte selbst – wenn nicht sogar noch mehr. *Titus Groan* ist ein schwieriger Text, aber er wirkt faszinierend auf die Rezipienten, weil er ein seltenes Beispiel für eine Erzählung ist, die in hohem Maße auf die Dimension der Atmosphäre angewiesen ist; letztere ist weder eine Ergänzung noch eine nachträgliche Komponente oder lediglich eine Folge des detaillierten fiktiven Weltentwurfs.

Die Literaturtheorie erweitert stetig ihr Repertoire. Ich verwende hier bewusst das Wort ‚erweitern', da zwischen traditioneller Kritik, kritischer Theorie und weltanschaulicher Kritik und der mich interessierenden Tendenz zur Postkritik eine gewisse Kontroverse herrscht. Ich sehe indessen keinen Grund, warum es sich um ein Entweder/ Oder handeln muss. Vielmehr argumentiere ich, dass die Literaturwissenschaft von einer größeren Vielfalt von Werkzeugen in ihrem Arsenal profitieren wird. Postkritisch bedeutet keineswegs ‚unkritisch', vielmehr handelt es sich um einen Begriff, der das Potenzial aufkommender innovativer Ideen umfasst, wobei der „kritische" Teil seines Namens seine enge Beziehung zu früheren Denkweisen und Wissenschaften unterstreicht. Die Komponente „post" ist kein Ersatz für Kritik, kein Überschreiten, sondern eine Förderung der Idee, dass die literarische Analyse eine Komposition bzw. Kombination sein und aus mehreren Elementen bestehen kann, die sich nicht gegenseitig ausschließen und die Bedeutung der Affekte nicht außer Acht lassen. Dies ist besonders im Kontext spekulativer Fiktion nützlich, da die Analyse von einer neugierigen und forschenden Position ausgeht, die fragt: „Was macht der Text möglich? Was wird hier geschaffen, was versucht er und wie?" Postcriticism oder Postkritik gewinnt als Bewegung an Bedeutung und Wissenschaftler*innen wie Rita Felski, Elizabeth S. Anker, Toril Moi und Eve Sedgewick beschäftigen sich auf verschiedene Weise mit der Herausforderung des Status quo der Literaturwissenschaft. Diese Dissertation trägt zur Argumentation der Postkritik bei, die wiederum ein großes Potenzial besitzt, um

neue Wege des kritischen Denkens über Literatur und insbesondere spekulative Fiktion zu erkunden. Die postkritische Bewegung legt den Fokus mehr auf den Affekt und weniger auf die Ideologie. Dieser aufkeimende Bereich der Literaturtheorie identifiziert eine starke Verbindung zwischen der Beziehung der Leser zu einem Text und dem Text selbst; Diese Art, Literatur zu verstehen, widerspricht in gewisser Weise der traditionellen ideologischen Lesart, die die Fähigkeit des Kritikers schätzt, perfide Wahrheiten zu entlarven, die sich scheinbar unter der Oberfläche eines Textes verbergen und aufgedeckt werden müssen, um zu erfahren, was der Text wirklich sagt. Postkritik ist in mehrfacher Hinsicht eine Reaktion auf die sogenannte ‚Hermeneutik des Verdachts' (*hermeneutics of suspicion*), die diese verborgenen Wahrheiten in Texten aufzudecken versucht. Während viele Arten von Texten zweifellos auf interessante Weise durch traditionelle Methoden der Literaturanalyse erschlossen werden, interessiere ich mich stattdessen für das Potenzial der Postkritik, um neue und in jüngster Zeit aufkommende Elemente der Fiktion zu erklären.

Genauer gesagt liefert die Postkritik sowohl ein Vokabular als auch eine Denkweise über die Textanalyse, die neue Formen der Analyse ermöglicht; solche, die schwierige Fragen in Bezug auf Immersion, Textatmosphären und die Rolle des *Worldbuildings* ansprechen. Es ist zwar schwierig, Emotionen und Affekte in eine Analyse einzubeziehen, aber diese Aspekte bleiben ein wesentlicher Bestandteil des Lesens und müssen als solche berücksichtigt werden. Es gibt ein starkes Potenzial für *Worldbuilding* in der Fiktion sowie Atmosphären, die emotionale Bindungen hervorrufen, und Postkritik ermöglicht die Erforschung solcher Ideen. Ein wesentlicher Teil dieser Dissertation widmet sich der Idee der Atmosphären im *Worldbuilding*. Die vier von mir ausgewählten Romane erzeugen besonders stimmungsvolle Atmosphären. Andere Romane hätten gewählt werden können; andere Romane hätten andere Beziehungen, andere Verbindungen, andere Atmosphären und andere Strategien des *Worldbuildinges* zeigen können. Es wäre für mein Projekt übertrieben zu argumentieren, dass diese vier Romane repräsentativ für alle spekulativen Fiktionen und Fantasy sind, aber das war nie der Punkt. Vielmehr möchte ich postkritische Lesarten eben dieser Romane präsentieren, um alternative Lesarten aufzuzeigen, die auch in Analysen anderer Romane eingesetzt werden können. Obwohl die Postkritik relativ abenteuerlustig ist, wenn sie etablierten Analysemethoden widerspricht, hat die Bewegung dennoch einige Ähnlichkeiten mit dem Formalismus und der Neuen Kritik, da auch diese ein Interesse an einer genauen Lektüre und der Anerkennung der Einzigartigkeit jedes Werks teilen.

Dies steht im Gegensatz zu Strukturalismus oder ideologischer Hermeneutik, die in ihren Versuchen, Muster zu finden, zwangsläufig verallgemeinern. An dieser Stelle ist es erwähnenswert, dass die Strategien innerhalb des Lagers der Postkritik variieren; Felski wagt beispielsweise keine genaue Lektüre, sondern begnügt sich mit (relativ kleinen) Beispielen, um ihre Punkte zu veranschaulichen. Forscher wie Gumbrecht hingegen beschäftigen sich intensiv mit der genauen Lektüre einzelner Werke und heben ihre einzigartigen Qualitäten und die einzigartige Qualität dieses bestimmten Werks hervor.

Durch die Analyse der Präsenz von Atmosphären, die als Ergebnis von *Worldbuilding* in spekulativer Fiktion und Fantasy auftreten, beleuchtet diese Dissertation das jeweilige Potenzial dieser Bereiche, ein affektives Engagement der Rezipienten hervorzurufen, Immersion zu fördern und zu einer Vielzahl potenzieller Erfahrungen mit einem bestimmten Text zu führen. Die Art und Weise, wie Atmosphären evoziert werden, ist vielfältig und die genaue Natur und ästhetische Dimension der Atmosphäre eines Textes hängt von den einzigartigen Qualitäten einzelner Texte und ihrer jeweiligen Weltkonstruktionen ab. Die Analysen zeigen eine bemerkenswert enge Verbindung zwischen *Worldbuilding* und Atmosphäre. Während Charaktere und Dialoge ebenfalls zu Atmosphären beitragen können, sei es durch Namenskonventionen, Vokabular, Eigentümlichkeiten oder Charaktermotivationen, trägt des *Worldbuildings* selbst wesentlich dazu bei, da die *Storyworld* sowohl tiefgreifende Momente als auch wichtige Orte hervorbringt. Diese bergen ebenfalls immersives Potenzial, und die Analysen haben gezeigt, dass Werke der spekulativen Fiktion und Fantasy in der Lage sind, Erzählungen und Erzählwelten zu konstruieren, in denen die Erzählwelt selbst mehr als die Handlung eine treibende Kraft hinter der Immersion ist. Auch wenn dies nicht ausschließlich der spekulativen Fiktion vorbehalten ist, besteht eine starke Disposition dazu innerhalb der spekulativen Literatur, die sich im Vergleich zu anderen Genres und anderen Literaturformen in sehr hohem Maße auf der Wirkung ihrer Weltentwürfe stützt.

Bislang haben die meisten Wissenschaftler, die sich mit *Postcriticism* beschäftigen, relativ wenig Interesse an spekulativer Fiktion und Fantasy gezeigt. Dies ist bedauerlich, da es durchaus ein großes Potenzial gibt, diese Arten von Erzählungen über Postkritik zu verstehen und Postkritik zu entwickeln, indem diese Art von Fiktion verwendet wird, um die der Postkritik innewohnenden Kernannahmen zu erforschen. Beispielsweise werden Randtexte, wie die Analyse von *Titus Groan* zeigt, über die Postkritik gerade deshalb sinnvoll verstanden, weil die traditionelle Kritik nicht alle Bewegungen und

affektiven Qualitäten in diesen Texten berücksichtigen kann. Insgesamt lässt sich in der Postkritik ein großes Potenzial für weitere genrespezifische Forschungen erkennen. Wie die vorliegende Dissertation aufzeigt, können viele Texte durch die postkritischen Ansätze hinsichtlich ihrer Funktionen und Wirkungsmechanismen besser verstanden werden. Neue Ansätze und neue Entwicklungen können zu einer Veränderung des Verständnisses und der Interpretation von Literatur führen. Wie die Analysen in meiner Dissertation zeigen, lassen sich beispielsweise auch seit Jahren erforschte Texte wie *Earthsea* auf neue Weise analysieren; es ist durchaus lohnend, sich auf die immersiven und faszinierenden Qualitäten der Erzählfiktion zu konzentrieren, auch wenn diese Eigenschaften auf den ersten Blick nicht leicht greifbar sind. Es wäre kaum möglich gewesen, die immateriellen und affektiven Aspekte zu diskutieren, ohne die erwähnten postkritischen Theorien und Konzepte weiter zu untersuchen. Ich bin davon überzeugt, dass Analysen, die sich nicht der ‘Hermeneutik des Verdachts’ (*hermeneutics of suspicion*) bedienen, von grundlegender Bedeutung sind, damit Texte mit einzigartigen Qualitäten nicht unnötig reduziert und ihre singulären Qualitäten nicht verstanden und in einen ihnen fremden Kontext gesetzt werden. In der Literaturwissenschaft besteht Potenzial und Bedarf für solche neuen Ansätze und Konzepte. Die Genese von Kunst und Literatur wird unter anderem von Leidenschaft, Enthusiasmus und Hingabe angetrieben. Insofern erscheint es nurmehr legitim, diese Aspekte auch in der Wissenschaft angemessen zu berücksichtigen – insbesondere, wenn es darum geht, die emotionale Komponente beim Lesen sowie die allgegenwärtigen, aber schwer fassbaren Aspekte von *Storyworlds* zu erfassen.

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I hereby declare that I completed the submitted doctoral thesis independently and with only the help referred to in the thesis. All texts that have been quoted verbatim or by analogy from published and non-published writings and all the details based on verbal information have been identified as such.