Article

Peake's Palette: The Green-Painted Spiritual Plane of *Titus Groan*

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Abstract

Mervyn Peake's 1947 novel *Titus Groan* continually defies genre recognition. Scholar Farah Mendlesohn, however, places it decisively in the category of immersive fantasy. Building on Mendlesohn's categorization, I further illustrate Peake's mastery of immersive fantasy in *Titus Groan* by analysing a symbol imbedded in the text: a green light. This article reaches across media to frame Peake's descriptive strategies in the context of his role as a visual artist, particularly in his use of abstracted imagery to depict a collective mental and emotional experience between his characters. This, paired with prophetic language surrounding the green light, gestures to the presence of spiritual forces in Peake's fictional world. I begin by outlining the art historical context in which Peake worked, concentrating on the philosophies of Peake's artistic contemporaries and the connections between abstract art and notions of universal spiritual forces. I then closely analyse the green light in *Titus Groan*, linking Peake's descriptive mode to these philosophies. Finally, I explore narrative evidence for connecting these abstract descriptions of the green light to a spiritual agent at work in the novel—an assertion which heightens an understanding of Peake's meticulous worldbuilding. Pulling from fantasy scholarship, art historical writings, and inter-artistic theory, this cross-media study argues that *Titus Groan*, in addition to its oft-viewed physical setting and vibrant characters, houses an observable spiritual plane—into which the green light provides an entry point for the reader. The first study to identify *Titus Groan*'s green light as a repeated and significant symbol, this article bolsters an understanding of Peake as an immersive fantasy worldbuilder by focusing on the first book of the Gormenghast trilogy. With its narrow focus on *Titus Groan* and the symbol of the green light, this article alerts scholars to the existence of Peake's unobserved worldbuilding exertions and forms a basis for further study of the trilogy.

Keywords

Mervyn Peake, Gormenghast, Fantasy, Worldbuilding, Abstract Art

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Introduction

The writer-artist Mervyn Peake wrote in a 1947 letter to his wife Maeve Gilmore, "*[Titus] Groan*, I feel, could grow great, imaginative wings, flare out majestically, ludicrously, earthily, gloriously into creation, unlike anything else in English literature" (qtd. in Winnington, "Mervyn" 13). Nearly seventy-five years after its publication in 1946, scholars continue to dissect these "imaginative wings" of *Titus Groan*—the first in his *Gormenghast* trilogy—as well as how the interplay between the book's "ludicrous" and "earthy" influences challenge and complicate genre recognition. Leading Peake scholar Peter Winnington states in 2006 that "it has taken 60 years to work out what's going on in Peake's created world" (*The Voice* 218). Fantasy scholar Farah Mendlesohn, however, places the *Gormenghast* books decisively in the category of fantasy literature that she terms immersive fantasy, which she defines as a "fantasy set in a world built so that it functions on all levels as a complete world" (59). Inspired by Mendlesohn's notion of "all levels," this article elucidates Peake's inclusion of a spiritual level in his created world. Despite Gormenghast Castle's reliance on rituals and traditions, *Titus Groan* contains no explicit mention of a higher power. Instead, the rituals are conspicuously disembodied from their original spiritual (or even social) function—foregrounding a lack of broader significance to the many prescribed and sacred actions mandated by life at Gormenghast Castle (Ciambezi 18). This disconnect between the many rituals and their origins may initially indicate a lack of spiritual forces in the narrative. However, this article illustrates that Peake does imbue his novel with spiritual, or transcendental, forces. This spirituality can be best understood as unseen or non-physical powers that alter the actions or emotional states of multiple characters.

This article performs this work by analysing a visual symbol that occurs throughout the first *Titus* book: a distinctive green light. The green light accompanies moments of destiny in the novel, often seeming to allude to future events and to affect characters' mental states. Numerous characters hyper-fixate on the green light, drawing the reader's attention to its significance. The green light's significance is further evidenced by the narrative circumstances in which it recurs and the visually abstracted form that the light takes. The latter—which can often be seen as a traditional mimetic narrative description rapidly being distilled into its basic structural makeup—echoes abstractive trends in modern art. As a visual artist working in early twentieth century Europe, it is plausible that Mervyn Peake encountered the writings of literary-turned-art critic Herbert Read. Peake scholar Robert Maslen outlines connections between Read and Peake in the publishing world, their mutual acquaintances, and shared involvement in the Surrealist movement in Britain at the time. As well as expressing an interest in fantasy as a rhetorical mode during his time as a literary critic, Read wrote extensively on the relationship between spirituality and art in his 1937 book *Art and Society*. Read's proposed link between spirituality and art also reflects historical art movements emerging during the years leading to Titus Groan's publication. This historical connection between art, literature, and spiritual philosophies in the early twentieth century frames the creative environment in which Peake was working. This era was marked by a growing notion of universal experience afforded by abstract art–a trend that energizes my examination of Peake's worldbuilding. Peake creates a spiritually

active plane of his fictional world by tapping into this notion via visual artistic techniques. Therefore, this article begins by analysing the art historical context in which Peake was operating. It then performs textual analysis on the green light itself, linking Peake's descriptive mode to these philosophies. Finally, it presents narrative evidence for connecting these abstract descriptions of the green light to a spiritual agent at work in the novel. Together, these analyses heighten an understanding of Peake's meticulous worldbuilding by visualizing a previously unexamined facet of his fictional world—the spiritual plane.

Peake and Visual Art

Rather than being directly correlated to any specific religion, this spiritual plane of *Titus Groan* can be thought of in relation to the philosophies of animism, which Read describes as tending "to seek an explanation of events in active agents, such agents being invisible and spiritual. It involves a dualistic world, a world of bodies and souls, causally connected" (27). *Art and Society* includes chapters on magic and mysticism, both of which consider historical animism in relation to abstract philosophies that were emerging during Peake's lifetime. Read further describes the relationship between animism and abstraction as understood in the early 20th century:

> Behind the phenomena of existence are mysterious powers, powers which can only be conceived imaginatively. And this phrase 'conceived imaginatively' is a key to the art of animistic peoples. Their art is an attempt to symbolize the spirituality behind appearances. It does not therefore strive to represent any actuality, any living presence: it strives to get beyond the actual, to get to the transcendental[…] by abstracting from reality, by seeking an essential structure, a skeleton of the object. [Man] geometricizes his representation of the object, and in this geometric figure finds a symbol of the spiritual reality (27-28).

In the moments of the green light's appearance, described later in this article, Peake moves from representing the "actuality" of the physical object touched by the green light to capturing its essential form. He abstracts, seeking "a skeleton of the object" in his descriptions. What he describes as a window in one moment soon becomes a mere "square of light"; a backlit area between foliage becomes a "splinter" (*Titus Groan* 161; 280). Like the followers of animism seeking the transcendental through abstract art, Peake distils the green light to geometric figures to visually symbolize the spiritual reality of Gormenghast. This spirituality, or "mysterious powers", can be understood as paranormal, non-corporeal, or supernatural. Most significantly, these instances of abstracted green light both catalyse and accompany moments of prophecy and collective emotional events in the narrative. This repeated connection between abstract art (and the social theories they would evoke at the time of the novel's writing), and the fantastical instances of prophecy and collective experience makes the subtle spiritual force discernible in *Titus Groan*. The green light serves as a signpost for moments of this paranormal power's emergence.

To broadly introduce the artistic philosophies of abstraction evoked by Peake, I turn to an interview between famed abstract painter Piet Mondrian and a critic in a 1919 edition of *De Stijl*. The critic asks, "but won't such abstracting and transformed composition make everything look alike?". Mondrian replies, "That is a necessity rather than a hindrance, if we wish to express plastically what all things have in common instead of what sets them apart" ("Dialogue" 286). Mondrian expresses here the significance of universal recognition and commonality between seemingly disparate experiences via visual art—one of the core artistic philosophies leveraged by Peake in *Titus Groan*. Mondrian later relates this to spirituality: "The colored planes, as much by position and dimension as by the greater value given to color, plastically express only relationships and not forms. [...] [R]elationships must purely express the universal, the harmony, the unity that are proper to the spirit" ("Neo-Plasticism" 290-292). Mondrian disavows specificity, claiming that a form's similarity to other forms is the force which taps into the human spirit. This same technique can be seen as Peake transforms his mimetic descriptions of objects into broad shapes and colours. He presents a less specific, more universal form of the green light—creating an avenue for reading Peake's work through the lens of art history.

Peake's association with abstract artists of his time, as well as his marriage to artist Maeve Gilmore, suggests that he was aware of abstract artistic philosophies like Mondrian's ("Tickets"; "Maeve Gilmore"). Because my claim centres on Peake's rhetorical use of abstract art techniques to allude to a textual spiritual plane, a portion of my textual analysis compares his imagery to works of artistic contemporaries. I will focus on the works and writings of Roger Hilton and Victor Pasmore, both of whom were in gallerist Lucy Wertheim's "Twenties Group" alongside Mervyn Peake ("Tickets"). Both Hilton and Pasmore wrote of the universalizing and spiritual effects of abstract art in the 1930s, contributing to the zeitgeist in which Peake operated in the years before writing *Titus Groan*. Their writings–along with those of several Neo-Plastic and Abstract Expressionist artists–suggest a cultural context from which to view Peake's abstraction of the green light and provide supplements for describing Peake's "universalizing" techniques.

In his 1947 talk "The Artist's World," Peake illustrates his desire, as a visual artist, to move beyond merely making a mimetic "inventory" of visual objects:

> I am interested in far more than just the surfaces of things [...] As I see it, or as I want to see it, the marvels of the visible world are not things in themselves but revelations to stir the imagination—to conduct us to amazing climates of the mind [...] The world includes the whole physical and spiritual alphabet from the A of a distilled glory to the Z of vileness (6-7).

In this segment of his essay, Peake gestures to the crux of my argument—that the abstract green images present in *Titus Groan* represent his artistic goals to "apprehend more" than "the endless kaleidoscope of coloured shapes and patterns that swims across the vision" (6). Peake submits that the makeup of an object or scene goes beyond the "surface of things" (7). Whether that surface be literary description or visual attributes, he suggests—as Read does—that there are powers in the world only accessible via the imagination. As Peake contemplates his attempts to depict the "marvel of the physical world," he asks, "What can one do but try and hint at such things in words or paint or pencil, using the

medium most apt to the idea?" (7). Peake, in his own words, establishes himself as a practitioner of intermedial representation. Furthermore, in describing the world as including "the whole physical and spiritual alphabet," he suggests a desire to evoke a spiritual existence in his art, reinforcing the argument that the green light can be interpreted as a glimpse into the spiritual landscape of Gormenghast. Peake scholar Pierre-Yves Le Cam also relates Peake's works to the shrouded yet agentic workings of the world, echoing the notions described in Read's writings on animism. Le Cam states, "using colours and images in organically organized sentences, Peake brings out the hidden power of life through the senses beyond time and space as we know them" (161). Le Cam's statement—particularly his emphasis on "colours and images" within a literary medium to reveal hidden power—supports the claim that Peake creates a discernible spiritual force via a symbolic green light.

Peake's 'Green Light'

Before delving into the artistic renderings of the green light throughout *Titus Groan*, it is helpful to begin with the symbol's most overt depiction. At the end of the novel, young Titus is the Earl and has just disrupted a centuries-long tradition by casting an ancient relic into a lake. The final lines of the text express this disruption with a green light: "And there shall be a flame-green daybreak soon. And love itself will cry for insurrection! For tomorrow is also a day—and Titus has entered his stronghold" (396). In this instance, the light is not directly observed by any character. Rather, it is anticipated by the narrator, marking the only time the narrator supersedes present voice and predicts the future in a sweeping, universal sense. It is an overtly stated, rather than experienced, prophecy—latched to a "flame-green daybreak." In connecting this green sunrise, a clearly non-mimetic descriptive choice, to the future events of *Gormenghast*, Peake connects a narratorial instance of foretelling to this green symbol. This moment serves to firmly support the notion that the green light is implicitly linked to prophecy and destiny. Observing the other occurrences of the green light alongside this explicitly prophetic instance, I argue that Peake employs a symbolic green light to indicate largely unseen spiritual—or transcendental—forces acting upon the characters and world of Gormenghast.

The reader is first exposed to the green light, an entry point into the "senses beyond time and space" in a chapter aptly entitled "In a Lime-Green Light." In the passage directly preceding the chapter, Mr. Flay, the first servant of the Earl, is distracted from an urgent task by a "dull greenish light from a small window [which] held his eye" (*Titus Groan* 161). Though Flay has been commanded to fetch the Earl's son, he instead goes toward the light "with an illogical and inquisitive itch overriding his better judgement" (161). Peake's use of the word "illogical" here establishes a sense of the green light's subconscious hold over Flay. Rather than applying conscious logic to choose to move toward the light in pursuit of a specific end, Flay appears forcefully compelled to walk forward. The reader is further alerted to this compulsion by the line: "before he realized that he was even intrigued, he found that his feet had forestalled his brain and were carrying him across the quadrangle" (161). Here, the light exerts a pull on both Flay's mind and body. As the reader and Flay soon discover, the green-lit window gives him a view of his enemy, the cook Swelter,

meticulously planning his murder. In addition to forewarning Mr. Flay, the knowledge gleaned of this plot—initiated by the green light—is pivotal to the novel's subsequent events and has significant ramifications for the inhabitants of Gormenghast Castle. A sense of destiny pervades the scene:

> Mr. Flay moved [his head] upward inch by inch until he saw what he had by some prophetic qualm known all along that it was his destiny to see. In the room below him the air was filled with an intensification of that ghastly green which he had noticed from across the quadrangle. The lamp that hung from the centre of the room by a chain was enclosed in a bowl of lime-green glass. The ghoulish light which it spewed forth gave to every object in the room a theatrical significance (162).

Peake syntactically foregrounds the green light, employing alliteration with "ghastly green", "lime-green glass", and "ghoulish." He textually enmeshes Flay's "prophetic qualm" and the event's "destiny" with the previous moment when Flay first viewed the green light from afar—again suggesting that some unknown force pulled Flay into this moment. Flay relates the first signs of this force to "that ghastly green which he had noticed from across the quadrangle." Finally, at the close of the passage, Peake veers towards the instructional, as if to clearly mark his symbolic signpost: *follow the green light for "significance."*

The degree to which Peake emphasizes the symbol's presence further heightens its narrative significance. Mendlesohn contends that many secondary-world fantasies deliberately avoid lengthy exposition, instead allowing the reader to slowly learn the intricacies of a world already known to the protagonist. She calls this "showing" rather than "telling" (60). Similarly, Winnington asserts that Peake was a known proponent of opening scenes *in media res*, showing a situation or character in action then adding context and detail by later showing flashbacks (*The Voice* 211). This tendency to withhold information—e.g. slowly revealing character traits by showing past experiences rather than explaining the character trait—can be viewed as a form of "showing" rather than "telling." Given this narrative and descriptive technique frequented by Peake, the level of overt "telling" present in the light's initial appearance is notable. As mentioned, Peake goes so far as to name the chapter "In a Lime-Green Light," drawing the reader's attention to the lighting of the scene to lay the foundation for a recognizable pattern in the novel. Even as the scene changes focus from describing the "inquisitive itch" produced in Flay by the green light towards giving it a practical function—illuminating the details of Swelter's murderous plan—Peake does not allow the phenomenon to fade to insignificance. He maintains its presence through the scene, describing Swelter's "clothes tinctured by the lime-green lamp above," how the steel of Swelter's cleaver "flared in the green light," and again experiencing "that window of green light" (*Titus Groan* 163-165). Peake's insistence that the reader note the green light establishes a firm basis for reading it symbolically in this chapter. However, it is the light's recurrence that suggests its symbolic function as an indicator of spiritual forces in the narrative.

The intensity of this initial description of the green light is crucial to initiating a recognizable pattern, as the light does not appear again until one hundred pages later. Keda, Titus's wet nurse and a member of the community of the Bright Carvers, walks with

the man who rescued her from the wilderness, known only as "the brown father" (280). As they walk, Keda notices "a greenish light in the sky with a surface like alabaster" (280). The green light—the source of which is unknown—emanates from a crag on a mountain, the very place where Keda will end her own life later in the tale. As in the scene with Flay, Peake uses elaborate, destiny-filled language: "it was beyond coincidence that Keda's eyes were drawn towards the particular opening in the foliage that was divided into two equal parts by a vertical splinter of green fire" (280). Much like Flay's "prophetic qualm," Peake's language of "beyond coincidence" draws the moment in stark lines of destiny. Keda enters an immediate state of fear at seeing the light, again suggesting its emotional effect on characters. She wonders at its significance, stating "what does it mean, father, that thin and dreadful crag?" (280). The brown father answers, "If it is dreadful to you, Keda, it means that your death is near" (280). The green light, peeking through foliage Keda notices "even at that distance," foreshadows her death (280). Knowing that she will soon end her life—knowledge solidified by this scene and the prophetic green light—motivates Keda to return to the Bright Carvers and give birth to her child before her death. As we learn later in the book, this child will have implications for the fate of Gormenghast and its 77th Earl, Titus. In the moment he shirks one of Gormenghast's most sacred rituals at the end of the novel, Titus experiences a strong emotional connection with Keda's child.

Keda's scene also demonstrates that the symbolic effect is not unique to a single character. As the green light affects both Flay and Keda, among others, the reader can see it as a psychological and emotional catalyst for the characters residing in Gormenghast. In other words, this green light serves as an entry point into a sense of transcendent agency—of a higher power—existing in that world. This multi-character effect suggests that the spiritual experience in the secondary world may be collective in nature, and universal in its green-tinted manifestations. Both Keda and Flay are inexplicably drawn to the light, as demonstrated by Flay's compulsion to walk toward it and Keda's "beyond coincidental" notice of the small, distant area. Whether the compulsion originates from within the characters themselves—perhaps as intuition—or is incited by an external spiritual agent, the presence of the green light appears to symbolize a collective force within Gormenghast. Like in Read's descriptions of animism, a "mysterious force" is at work under the surface of Peake's world, which he can "only" conceive imaginatively. The sense of uncontrollable movement the reader sees in characters confronted with the green light suggests a subtly depicted spiritual power in Gormenghast, one which affects multiple characters and is accompanied by a distinct visual symbol.

Not only do Flay's and Keda's visions establish the green light's prophetic narrative function and psychological effect, they also demonstrate Peake's visual abstraction of the symbol. Wendy Steiner argues that the analogy of painting to literature is "a metaphor about resemblance itself, and, even more significantly about the resemblance between reality and the systems man has developed to represent it" (1). To create as full a secondary world as possible, a universe resembling reality but represented using the literary medium, Peake may have sought to supplement his writing with another system he knew well: the medium of painting. His artistic influence is clearly seen in his detailed, minute descriptions of characters and physical objects—this is a defining feature of Peake's grotesque style. His specific techniques for universalizing and abstracting the

green light—namely distilling images to pure shape and colour—also seem to be influenced by his visual artistic background. As Le Cam aptly states, "descriptive power is the core of Peake's fantastic realism, since it allows his poetic aesthetics to be represented" (14). In 'The Artist's World,' Peake himself speaks of the challenges of creative depiction in any mode, stating that the artist "must bite off more than he can chew" if he is to capture the multifarious imaginative planes of experience (7). Describing Peake's descriptive techniques, Winnington states, "[w]henever Peake writes of visual perception, he underlines its selectiveness: what we see depends not upon the optical qualities of the eye but on the heart and mind behind it" (*The Voice* 192). Peake draws on his multimedia creative expertise to conjure a "new and altered perception of reality" in *Titus Groan*, betraying neither his exactitude of description nor his abstracted visual imagery by employing both techniques (Le Cam 5). They are delineated—one belonging to the in-text physical plane of *Titus Groan*, the other to the in-text spiritual plane.

Peake's descriptions of the green light move swiftly from mimetic to abstract in the aforementioned scenes. In the moment with Mr. Flay, he first describes it as "a dull greenish light from a small window," a description true to the physical reality of what Mr. Flay is seeing. His next use strips the light of descriptive elements that make it recognizable as a specific object, calling it a "square, greenish, glow." Finally, it is referred to as simply a "square of light." Visuals of simple squares of light and colour evoke images of Peake contemporary Roger Hilton's abstract paintings, which often featured green squares encompassing the majority of the canvas. Adrian Lewis cites a letter "in which [Hilton] affirms that 'I crave after beauty' and that artists failed 'through not being in tune [with the universal]'" (312). Like Mondrian, Hilton emphasizes a goal of evoking the "universal." It is for the same reason that Peake might have distilled the green light to its basest makeup: a square of light. In doing so, he creates a more universal impression, one which morphs away from representing a particular object. Further, his universalizing techniques of the green light coincide with multiple characters being compelled into action, suggesting a connection between Peake's abstract descriptive mode and the forces affecting the characters of Gormenghast. This technique expands his secondary world beyond physical representation into the realm of the spiritual and transcendental.

This same abstraction appears in Keda's green-hued prophetic moment. Moving from "a greenish light into the sky" to "a vertical splinter of green fire," Peake again strips his purely representative techniques in favour of abstraction. Painter and Peake contemporary Victor Pasmore describes his own ethos around visual art as, "'[t]he painting will become an idea or a new image; the painting's not abstracted from something outside, it's something created from the inside'" (Courtney 1). Keda's perception of the green light evokes Pasmore's notion of "creation" from the inside of the world. The reader is not given a description of the foliage or the light as a whole prior to its description by Peake. The "vertical splinter" is the entirety of the image—a creation born of Keda's viewpoint of the world. Additionally, this vertical splinter and "foliage that was divided into two equal parts" by the splinter, calls up images of Abstract Expressionist Barnett Newman and his famous "zips" or vertical lines on colour-field canvases (Gardner 42). In a 1949 monologue, Newman says of his paintings:

> [S]uddenly one realises that the sensation is not one of space, [of] an object in space. It has nothing to do with space and its manipulations. The sensation is the sensation of time—and all other multiple feelings vanish like the outside landscape (Gardner 47).

Echoing the artistic philosophies of both Pasmore and Newman, Peake's green-lit crag is not a representation of a specific object in Keda's world. It is not formulated to represent an existing physical structure, but rather it conveys her perception of a moment in time. Coincidentally mirroring Newman's notion of temporal depictions, this "zip" of green light appears to thin time for a moment, suggesting that some spiritual force has emerged from "inside the world" to warn of her future demise. While connections to specific artistic philosophies suggest Peake's narrative intention, his overt abstraction of unnatural green light—which often conveys meaning and compels action—indicates that there is an agentic force behind these green-lit occurrences. Furthermore, Peake's feeling that "one cannot resist the effort" to unlock, via art, the "miraculous coffers" of life experience, gestures to his passion for robust and multiplanar representation ("The Artist's World" 7). In crafting this recurring and oft-abstracted symbol, Peake provides an interpretable spiritual plane in his built world—a plane which mirrors his notion of a world including "the whole physical and spiritual alphabet" (7).

Likes its predecessors, the next appearance of the green light subtly evokes Abstract Expressionist techniques. However, its true value for this article is its role as the third occurrence of the light—establishing a clear pattern—and its intimate depiction of the light's emotional effect. The light emerges as Countess Gertrude expels Mr. Flay from Gormenghast Castle—the only world he has ever known—and alters the destiny of Peake's secondary universe. The eventual chain of causality between Flay's banishment, his violent battle with Swelter, and the 76th Earl's subsequent demise is first revealed in the following passage, illuminated by a wash of green light:

> Flay lifts his small bony head higher into the air. He cannot comprehend what has happened. All he knows is that it is more dreadful than he can feel, for a kind of a numbness is closing in on his horror like a padding. There is a greenish sheen across the shoulders of his greasy black suit, for the morning light has of a sudden begun to dance through the bay window (296).

Again, this wash of light signposts a significant moment, a moment of great import for the future of this secondary world. However, unlike the overt "flame-green daybreak" that appears at the end of the novel, the light in this instance begins as unchanged morning light coming through the window. It is only as it touches Mr. Flay's figure that it appears green, distinguishing it from the previous scenes in which the light is initially viewed from a distance and is immediately green. While this moment does portend consequences for the castle and its inhabitants, the green light is less prophetic and informative here than in its prior manifestations. It appears to instead reflect and mitigate a moment of spiritual and emotional turmoil. Flay's eyes are not drawn to a pre-existing green symbol which then pulls him toward some action. It neither compels nor warns, but rather shields Flay from his distress "like a padding." This emotional scene solidifies the presence of a repeating

symbol that has a cognitive effect on the novel's characters, as well as gestures toward spirituality as a comforting mechanism. The symbol and the spiritual realm it increasingly illuminates, together with Peake's masterfully represented physical and emotional planes, create a multi-layered world in *Titus Groan*.

The Green-Lit Spiritual Plane

In creating and drawing the reader's attention to a contextual symbol—that is, a symbol that only functions within the text and does not hold universal meaning outside the world of the book—Peake constructs an implicit spiritual plane within Gormenghast. As a society built entirely around its rituals, which time has obscured into near meaninglessness, the world of Gormenghast appears on the surface to lack a sense of collective spirituality. However, Peake makes an explicit point to create a universal, non-corporeal experience among his characters. This experience can be seen most readily as the author shifts perspective away from the climactic battle between Flay and Swelter to the other characters in their beds:

> Lying awake, for none could hope to sleep, there was not one in all the dark and rattling place who had not cogitated, if only for a moment, on the fact that the entire castle was awake also. In every bed there lay, with his or her lids apart, a figure. They saw each other. This consciousness of each other's solid and individual presences had not only been engendered by the imprisoning downpour but by the general atmosphere of suspicion that had been mounting—a suspicion of they knew not exactly what—only that something was changing—changing in a world where change was crime (330).

This universal knowledge of change, of an altered future, highlights a sense of shared spiritual experience among the characters in *Titus Groan*. The spiritual plane breaks through into the observable, visual universe in the form of the green light, which always appears in moments of great change. As a recurring descriptive indicator of the characters' spiritual—or internal—engagement with Gormenghast's destiny, the green light suggests Peake's thorough creation of a universe that "functions on all levels as a complete world."

The connection between the shared intuition of the castle's inhabitants and the symbolic green light is made concrete toward the end of the tale. Rottcodd, the eremitic keeper of the Bright Carvings, watches from his window as the castle's inhabitants return from Titus's "Earling" ceremony. First, Rottcodd muses on the collective sense of unease and change: "his new sense of flux, which inexplicable and irrational as it appeared on the surface, was, nevertheless, something which poisoned his mind and quickened his heartbeat. An intuitive sense of danger [...] had made itself felt among those who lived below" (394). Immediately after this, Rottcodd sees the green light: "[F]rom the glimpse of a green reflection in the lake the size of a stamp, arose, of a sudden the cry of an old voice, cruel, even in its remoteness" (394). Though the source of the cry is not known, it can be read as the spiritual voice of tradition—the "old," "cruel" rituals of Gormenghast—withering in the face of impending change. Again, the green light appears (or, perhaps,

shows itself) as a character senses a significant change. In this moment, Peake connects the collective world experience among his characters to the green-lit symbol.

Conclusion

By observing the author's constructed symbol of the green light, the reader glimpses the edges of an unknown spiritual force in the immersive world of Gormenghast. To quote Read's descriptions of animism, which closely echo the type of non-human spiritual presence this article suggests, Peake's "world is integral; matter and spirit are not distinct, but interpenetrate. Supernatural forces vie with natural forces in the same sphere of reality" (28). Narratively, Peake places the green light in moments of prophetical knowledge-gaining, imbues the scenes with a sense of destiny, and depicts the light driving characters toward action or a certain emotional state. Rhetorically, he employs intermedial visual artistic tactics like abstraction, which—during his time as both artist and writer—would have been closely associated with universalism and spiritual evocation in art. This association is demonstrated through the writings of his contemporaries. Throughout the novel, Peake illustrates the green light's effect on multiple characters. This elevates the symbol to a collective status, distinguishing the green light from an individual experience by a single character. In line with Mendlesohn's proposed "levels of a complete world" in immersive fantasy, Peake builds an avenue for glimpsing a spiritual, non-corporeal level of his secondary world via the green light. Existing beyond the grasp of mimetic or representative forms, this spiritual plane evoked by cultural allusions to abstract art establishes Peake as a notable practitioner of modern artistic prose.

A wider study of the complete Gormenghast series is necessary to fully illustrate the spiritual forces at work in Peake's secondary world, which may assist in clarifying its place in the fantasy genre. This study also serves as an exemplar for interpreting the rendering of non-mimetic experience through the lens of visual artistic techniques. Future studies could apply this approach to the other writings of Mervyn Peake, as well as create descriptive linkages between the visual and narrative works of other author-artists. Finally, this article broadly suggests a causal connection between art movements and narrative techniques that emerge during the same historical period—a notion which could be widely applied in the both the literary and art historical fields and grant a more holistic understanding of the cultural landscapes of the past.

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