

Peake

STUDIES

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Edited and published by
G Peter Winnington, Au Village,
1453 MAUBORGET, Switzerland.
Tel. +41 24 436 22 32
E-mail peakestudies@gmail.com
Home page <http://peakestudies.com>

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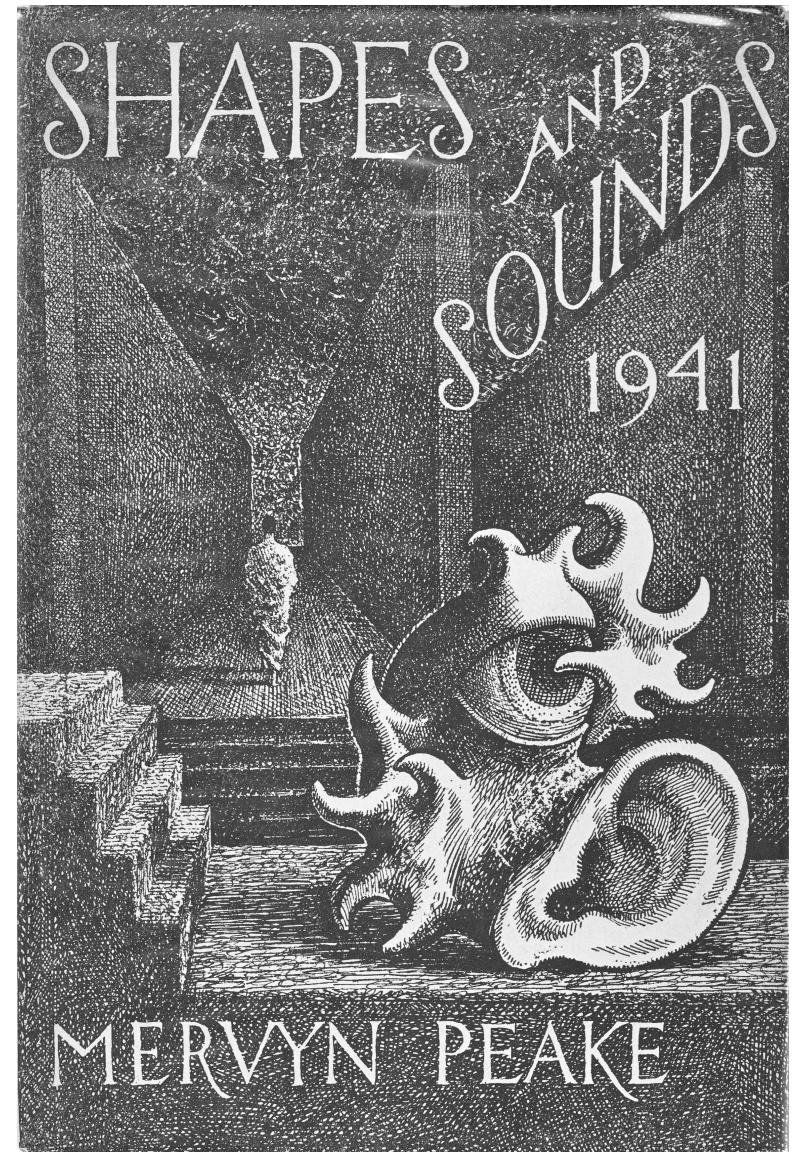
Recent Discoveries

Mike Kemp has been extremely fortunate in coming across a whole series of previously unseen and (consequently) unpublished works by Peake. They include the boy who is on the frontispiece of this issue; a woman in a 1940s trench coat (below) and images for *Shapes and Sounds*, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, and *Bleak House*. Mike has very kindly allowed me to reproduce them here for your pleasure.



On the previous page:
an unidentified boy in pencil, signed and dated 1941 –
too early for this to have been Sebastian, who was born in 1940.
Original size 8 × 10 inches.
Image kindly supplied by Mike Kemp.

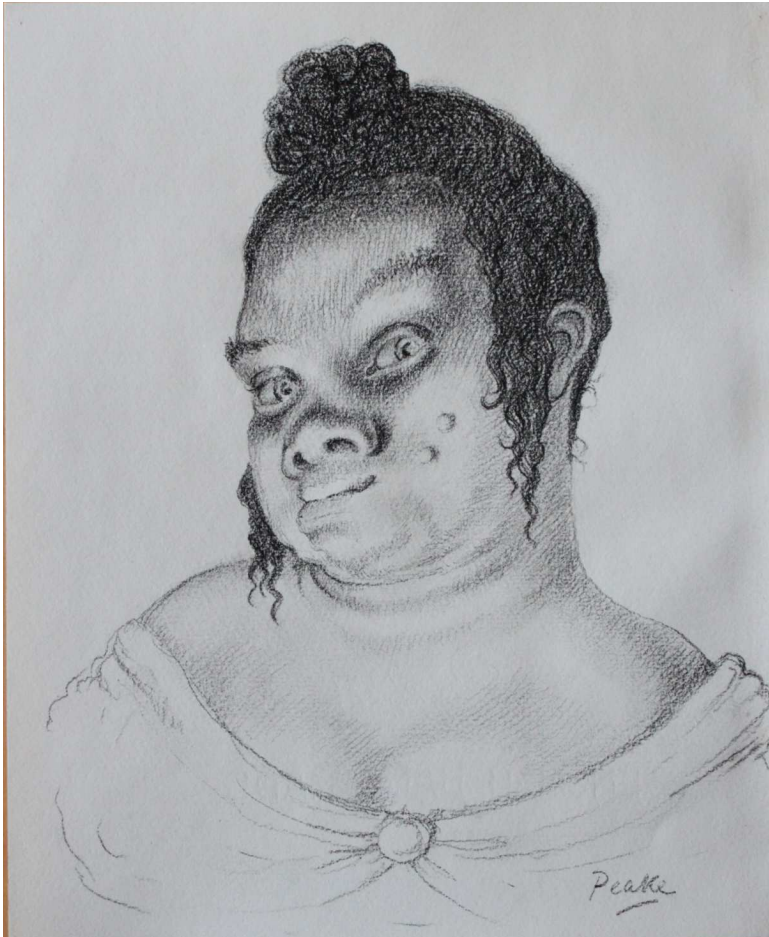
One of the most intriguing discoveries is Peake's pencil drawing depicting the senses of visual perception (shapes) and hearing (sound) which he adapted for the wrapper of *Shapes and Sounds* (facing page).



Next up come these two delightful images in colour of the Frog and the Mouse for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

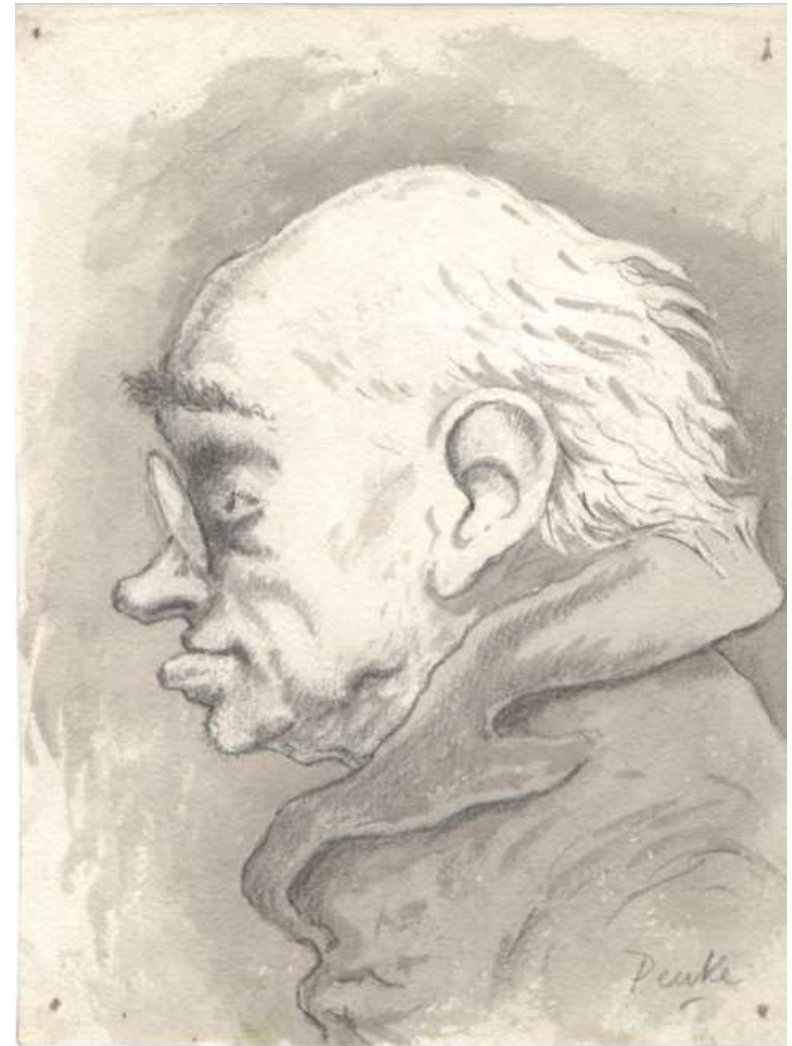


Finally, we have these characters from *Bleak House*:



Mrs Guppy (above) and
(facing page) Mr Turveydrop





Facing page: a completely new view of Mr Gridley, known until now only from incomplete sketches, and (above) the endearing Mr Snagsby.



Another of Mrs Pardiggle's unsavoury sons, presumably Alfred, the youngest (aged five), who 'has voluntarily enrolled himself in the Infant Bonds of Joy, and is pledged never, through life, to use tobacco in any form' (*Bleak House*, chapter 8).

The Grotesque in 'Danse Macabre'

Nahid Shahbazi Moghadam

PEAKE'S FICTION provides numerous instances of how the realms of fantasy and reality may be blended. His undeniable mastery of the grotesque has been variously asserted, compared and discussed. Rosemary Jackson calls him an 'English equivalent to Kafka' in creating the same 'excess of signifiers deprived of meaning... a universe without end' (162). Discussing themes in Peake's fiction, Alice Mills proposes that 'his fiction celebrates the oddities of his characters' behaviour' by manifestations of 'fear, horror, sadism, murder, suicidal depression and psychosis' (224). When characterization is thought to be at the core of his storytelling, he is most often compared to Dickens. Duncan Fallowell calls Peake 'the most accomplished Fantastic Realist in modern English Literature,' most comparable to Dickens in his style of writing (Wintle 404). According to Fallowell, while 'Dickens was eccentric, Peake is entirely grotesque' (Wintle 404). In *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies*, Colin Manlove claims that 'Peake's literary indebtedness to Dickens' is traceable in 'his sense of the grotesque' (215).

In the realm of the grotesque, reality and fantasy can be artistically interwoven. This is what characterizes the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Franz Kafka. Peake displays no less mastery in 'Danse Macabre' (1963), which has recently been reprinted in *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories* (2007). In her foreword to this edition, Joanne Harris describes the story as one which 'takes a familiar image from traditional Gothic tales and gives it a new and sinister twist' (Peake 8). In fact, it goes beyond gothic and represents the grotesque mode with an inclination towards the fantastic.

Classifying 'characteristic motifs of the grotesque,' Kayser mentions the category of 'tools which unfold a dangerous life of their own'

(183). An inanimate object like a mechanical tool can acquire an independent (and therefore dangerous) life of its own in which the organic and inorganic incongruously fuse together. Dieter Meindl calls this commingling of 'the animate and the inanimate' in the grotesque a kind of 'categorical transgression' (15). For him, the modern grotesque presents 'the blurring of the distinction between the animate and the inanimate, the corporeal and the spiritual, the conscious and the unconscious' (16)

The motif of the animated object and category confusion are very artistically depicted in 'Danse Macabre'. Harry, the main character, sees his clothes become an independent entity that gradually transforms into a diabolic or supernatural being. Although not mechanical, the clothes epitomize the development of a dangerous and fatally grotesque form of life. From the moment when Harry witnesses in disbelief his clothes leaving his bedroom cupboard, taking on a human shape and heading for the woods, to the last encounter in the same bedroom, the clothes are very delicately portrayed in their development into a frightening lethal being. It is noteworthy that Peake's references to the clothes elaborately evolve from 'dress clothes' and 'empty figure' (118) to 'apparition' and 'headless creature' (121).¹ While Harry describes himself chasing the headless creature into the wood, one feels as if he is following a real being rather than a set of clothes enlivened by some bizarre sense of life. After the final confrontation on the third Friday night, when Harry reaches home and lights a match in the early morning darkness of his bedroom, he faces 'a headless man, his shirt front, his cuffs and his collar gleaming' (129). In this final meeting with death, he encounters a headless man rather than a mere set of clothes in the mirror.

Referring to objects brought to life, Kayser also points to a parallel between how these objects are alienated by being brought to life and how man feels alienated by being deprived of them (183). In 'Danse Macabre,' Harry is gradually alienated from his surroundings. He also begins to experience diminishing enthusiasm for his circle of friends

1 All quotations from 'Danse Macabre' are from the Peter Owen edition of *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories*.

and the weekly gatherings. To put it directly, the more vividly the clothes are brought to life, the more intensely he seems to be drained of life. After witnessing his clothes meeting his wife's dress, he begins to feel increasingly sick. He seems to be gradually deprived of life and liveliness while the clothes that haunt him are characterized by a growing sense of animation. He describes it like this:

I found myself thinking of nothing else but what would happen on the following Friday. The few friends I saw in the vicinity of my house were shocked at my appearance, for my face, which was naturally a fresh and ruddy colour, had turned grey. My hands trembled, and my eyes kept darting here and there as though I were at bay. (125)

Closely interwoven with the motif of animated objects in this story is the occurrence of *strange sexual encounters*, a concept I have borrowed from Michelle Osterfeld Li's study of the grotesque. Classifying thematic resemblances, Li investigates the grotesque in stories involving weird sexual incidents and experiences.² Her discussion of bizarre incidents of sexual encounters derives from Mikhail Bakhtin's emphasis on the importance of the lower body stratum and acts of copulation in the literature of the grotesque. Bakhtin's study of the grotesque highlights sexuality as a part of physical side of human life particularly when exaggeration and oddity are involved.

Among other critics focusing on the grotesque in relation with sexuality, Ewa Kuryluk considers the grotesque as a set of anti-worlds opposing the objective world of norms particularly in matters of sex and religion (3). Kuryluk believes that Bakhtin and Kayser restricted the world of the grotesque to 'carnivalistic monstrosities' and a 'mental asylum' respectively (3). She extends the grotesque anti-worlds to include the world of femininity in the male dominated world, childhood in the adult dominated world, disintegration and war against peace and order, and so on (3). The anti-world of deviant eroticism and disintegration opposed to normative sexuality and peaceful order

2 Michelle Osterfeld Li devotes a chapter entitled 'Curious Sexual Encounters' to the depiction of various motifs of this theme in Japanese Setsuwa tales (81-115).

of life is created through strange sexual incidents involving dangerously animated objects.

The strange sexual encounter in the present story can be viewed as an example of an anti-world of the grotesque depicting the fatality of excessive passion. The sexual encounter of the two sets of clothes is of prime significance even though it is to some extent overshadowed by the constant threat of the annihilating force embodied in them. Initially, Harry witnesses the clothes making love after dancing together in the woods. In this grotesque scene, he catches sight of 'a little heap of material jumbled untidily together on the sward' (124). Upon approaching 'the *lifeless* heap,' he observes the 'black material intertwined with a lovelier fabric the colour of blue ice' (124, my emphasis). He describes himself as feeling sick while witnessing the scene:

A movement in the untidy heap led at once to a further movement, and then before my eyes the parts began to disentangle themselves and to rise one by one from the ground and to reassemble in the air, and in another instant they were gone. (125)

Significantly, the incident takes place beneath an oak tree.³ It precedes and also foreshadows the inevitable meeting of Harry and his wife at the party and their fatal enforcement to the depth of the wood and the same tree. Considering Harry's confession of cruelty toward his wife for the odd reason of loving her too much (126), the anti-world of excessive passion has no way but to end in annihilation. Harry seems to have been aggressive towards his wife who had left him, disappointed in 'seeing no hope' for their relationship, 'only a strengthening of that perverse and hideous *thing* that drives men to their own destruction, the more the love, the more the wish to hurt' (126, Peake's emphasis). Their reunion is seemingly doomed to bring about death and destruction. Apart from the possibility of the reunion being some sort of a visitation, the fatality of their being together can

3 In his seminal study, *The Golden Bough*, J.G. Frazer reminds us of the importance of the oak tree for the Greeks as a sacred symbol of male fertility to which sacrifice was made (161 & 659).

be viewed in the light of the fact that 'marriages are invariably broken' in Peake's fiction (Winnington 44). In this story, as a possible version of the union of love and death, the couple is reunited only in the face of death.

In grotesque stories, mainly those leaning toward tragedy, death is generally depicted in ways that are either horrific or bizarre or both. John Ruskin truly asserts that death provokes the most inexplicable feeling through 'the paralysis of the reason and over-excitement of fancy,' accompanied by some form of grotesqueness (156). In fact, death is generally recognized as a motif most aptly employed in works qualified as grotesque. As for Peake's fiction, he is well described as a writer interested in themes dealing with 'fall, collapse, obsession and death' (Mills 30). In this story, confrontation with death takes place as apparent 'over-excitement of fancy' drags the victim through weird and frightful incidents. Whether the weird incident is illusory or real, Ruskinian overexcitement of fancy in the face of death takes hold of Harry.

At first he is doubtful about the clothes incident, and the day after the clothes leave the cupboard for the first time, he consoles himself that it was just a nightmare. At the same time, he mentions that 'the dream had been too vivid to be entirely disregarded even in the sane light of a summer day' (119). Later, on the recurrence of the event, he begins interpreting his encounters with the agent of death by making assumptions about the incidents. He mentions that 'when the apparition was about to turn to the window,' it turned toward him and he 'knew it *was* looking at' him (121, Peake's emphasis). In the final scene, as he returns from the woods, he confronts 'a headless man' who is 'facing' him in the light of the match (129). Throughout the story, Harry intrinsically fears death and tries to rationalize events for himself, but has to face it most vividly in the final scene.

Peake's story portrays an interrelationship between love and death surrounded by mysterious and demonic forces. As Kuryluk reminds us, death was considered as a natural termination of life until the late Middle Ages, when Satan and diabolic monsters began to appear in artistic and literary portrayals of man's desperate battle against the horror of death (17). Accordingly, the demonization of death is

connected with its eroticization (Kuryluk 17). In 'Danse Macabre,' the clothes embody both demonization and eroticization of death.

The most ghastly and inexplicable event at the core of 'Danse Macabre' – the clothes coming to life – is described in a most realistic tone. Consequently, the link between reality and the uncanny events of the story is made in a way that keeps the reader in suspense about the supernatural animation of the clothes, the couple's reunion and their mysterious encounter with death. Although their friends arrange the reunion of Harry and his wife, Peter Winnington considers that they are 'brought back together by supernatural forces' (113). The suspense and indeterminacy between reality and fantasy is well secured by simultaneously illuminating and confusing indications throughout the narrative.

Harry's initial disbelief in the clothes leaving the cupboard is contradicted by finding a 'wisp of grass' on his trousers on the day after the incident (119). To add to the confusion, he reveals that he would never have hung his clothes in the cupboard without first checking their neatness. The ice blue dress, which he first sees in the woods dancing and making love with his clothes, is later worn by his wife at the party. While their reunion takes place on the pretext of attending their friends' party, they are described as being aware of the consequences of leaving the ignorant friends behind. In addition, after the final night at the woods, he distinctly relates arriving home and lighting a match in the pre-dawn darkness of his bedroom. All these events climax in his final reference to his wife and himself as being 'both dead' (129). One is left to wonder who is narrating the story and whether he is alive or not.

Mills asserts that 'stuckness and some form of death,' whether 'literal or symbolic' surround most characters in Peake's fiction (7). In this story, the confusion of organic and inorganic life, embodied in the clothes, challenges and subdues the couple's life with dire threats. The hollowness of the mysterious agent of death in the clothes can be taken at a symbolic level as well. For Winnington, it signifies 'the separation of body and soul' which is actually death, the 'ultimate hollowness' (31). Thus, the animation of the inanimate clothes not only confuses the boundaries between reality and fantasy, but also

blurs the dividing line between life and death of the living.

As the agent of death, the clothes also evoke a simultaneous sense of repulsion and attraction, which is unfailingly embedded all through the story in Harry's attitude towards the 'bodiless vesture' (122). He explains that contradictory feelings begin to develop in him after the first time his clothes leave the cupboard, shape into a human form and head for the woods. Harry explains the experience not only as 'frightening' but also 'ludicrous' (120). Following the night of his clothes dancing and love-making with the ice blue dress in the woods, he describes himself as in a state of 'nervous excitement; an excitement almost beastly,' being both 'frightened' and 'fascinated' (125). Notwithstanding the possible deathly peril, there is a sense of curiosity in him which urges further entanglement with the bizarre; the simultaneous fear and glamour of the unknown. Gradually, however, his early mixed feelings of fascination and fright are overshadowed by the pervasive and creeping intrusion of death.

As the central motif in the story, the clothes not only help to reinforce the contradictory nature of the grotesque but also represent its inherent categorical transgression in two respects. First, they are animated and gradually develop into a sinister being which rivals and threatens Harry's life as well as his wife's. Second, the climatic point of categorical transgression is achieved as the clothes struggle on the victims' bodies. With a 'long shudder' comes 'malevolence', as a result of which 'vile restlessness' takes control of the clothes, guiding both clothes and the victims towards the window and into the woods (128). The clothes are described as fighting on the bodies to release themselves, but finally consent to be carried away by the mysterious force, taking the victims' bodies along with them. In a sense, the unknown demonic power and the clothes as well as Harry and his wife are all jumbled together in the most incongruous medley of beings.

Anomalously, the clothes also portray sensuality projected onto them instead of Harry and his wife. This point is remarkable for the abstract depiction of the grotesque in the excessive and extraordinary images of bodily life. In this manner, boundaries between opposites are further crossed; animated clothes or the supernatural demonic power possessing them (instead of the couple in the story) are

described as making love. Harry feels nauseous and sick in both ‘stomach’ and ‘brain’ as he observes the scene (125). Mockingly, the clothes belong to himself and his wife. The failure of Harry and his wife’s married life is thus highlighted through the clothes meeting, dancing and love-making at the expense of the couple. The relationship is actually parodied by the black suit and ice blue dress and their ‘dance macabre’ which creates an anti-world reflecting their failed partnership. Parody, a favourite device in enhancing the effect of the grotesque, is thus discernible in the love relationship of ‘the estranged couple,’ who are eventually reunited in death (Winnington 113).

Harry’s initial distance from the incident can be perceived in that he acts as a detached observer witnessing a queer procession which he is willing to follow for sake of the mystery surrounding it. Then, he is shown growingly concerned and more obviously in trepidation, particularly after he enters the wood and witnesses the encounter between the two sets of clothes. This is further intensified as he attends the party and sees the ice blue dress worn by his wife. Meeting at the party, Harry and his wife decide to remain in their clothes and submit to an experience which parallels that of their clothes; they are then forced into the woods where the clothes danced and made love beneath the oak tree. Once Harry regains consciousness, he finds himself lying down in a spot ‘drenched with an icy dew’ (128). Upon returning home, he most weirdly observes the headless creature hanging around in the room and his wife and himself lying dead on the bed. At this particular instant, he seems to be torn into three beings; one is the narrator returning from the woods, and the other is the one lying dead on the bed. The third can be associated with his clothes in their original headless form, which is simultaneously related to him and separated from him through its connection with an unknown demonic power. In this manner, the borderlines between life and death are further crossed over; eventually we doubt whether he was a living man from the very start.⁴ This also points to his blurred identity,

4 According to Winnington, the ‘couple witness their own evening clothes waltzing together, headless, handless, footless – for they are dead’ (p.31).

fluctuating between himself and his clothes, between his being dead or alive.

With the ultimate defeat in the struggle with the unknown demonic power causing death, the ending of the story evokes a sense of relief. Harry and his wife are portrayed lying on the bed, ‘smiling peacefully’ in their death (129). As Kayser concludes in his final definition of the grotesque, ‘a secret liberation’ is achieved once the grotesque is truly portrayed (188). As most aptly presented in ‘Danse Macabre,’ ‘the darkness has been sighted, the ominous powers discovered, [and] the incomprehensible forces challenged’ in an effort – however vain – to suppress ‘the demonic aspects of the world’ (Kayser 188).

As the central motif, the intrusion of an inanimate object as the agent of death helps to shape a type of grotesque fiction which partly borders on the fantastic. The merging of reality and fantasy is a characteristic feature of the grotesque, most essential and best portrayed in tales bordering on the fantastic. As indicated by Shun-Liang Chao, ‘cognitive confusion of fantasy and reality’ in the literature of the grotesque takes place through the occurrence of ‘fantastic events in a verisimilar setting’ (10). Accordingly, ‘Danse Macabre’ pertinently portrays a world of the grotesque bordering on the fantastic and the uncanny. In this story, the depiction of the fantastic-grotesque is basically rendered through the manifestation of clothes as the agent of death. With the suit of clothes coming to life, inexplicable events begin to occur and remain in an indeterminate and unresolved state. As the basic image at the core of the story, the clothes take the role of the agent of death vividly portraying the fusion of contradictory elements and category transgression inherent in the literature of the grotesque. They transgress boundaries of being by enticing and fatally torturing the victims. The distortion and fusion of realms of being takes place as the clothes transcend their level of being by exceeding the category of non-existence. Of course, the fusion of contradictory realms is by no means restricted to eccentric development of a demonic power in the agent of death. More grotesquely incongruous is their trespassing on their victims’ integrity of being, penetrating and annihilating their lives. While they are strangely transformed to an intellectually higher level, the characters involved in the diabolic

metamorphoses are dragged down to death.

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NAHID SHAHBAZI MOGHADAM is currently attached to the English Department at Semnan University (Iran) as a senior lecturer in English literature. Her area of interest involves theories of the grotesque, twentieth-century British fiction, comparative literary studies, and literary translation. She has published some articles in these areas, and her translation of Mervyn Peake's *Boy in Darkness and Other Stories* into Persian has recently been released (ISBN 978-600-6605-16-6).

'Gormenghast': The Board Game

A review orchestrated by GPW

LAST AUTUMN, a board game of Gormenghast created by Phil Cooke was published by Sophisticated Games (of Cambridge, England). I had helped Phil with information while he was developing it and I was promised a copy, but nothing has come.

So I have done what one does under such circumstances: turned to my friends and the internet. The 'boardgamegeek.com' site tells me that

In this board game each player takes on the role of a 'kitchen rat'. Like Steerpikie you have the same murderous desire for power. Your goal is to accumulate as much influence as you can (in the form of Victory Tokens), rise to the top and become Master of Ritual. To acquire Victory Tokens players move characters around the board to complete various intrigues (detailed on Plot Cards). Completing a plot wins the player Victory Tokens. The first player to acquire nine (or more) Victory Tokens wins the game.

There was a write-up on the same site by a fan of the books, Brian Boyle, who bought the game because of its title. He judged the

Components: excellent. Thick tiles for rooms of Gormenghast castle laid out to form the game board. The cards are of good quality and the thick-card character-tiles stay firmly in their stands.

He found the artwork by John Howe on the cover of the box 'just sensational', whereas the tiles by Phil Cooke are simply 'serviceable'. He found the theme faithful to the book, sensing that 'this game has clearly been crafted by a lover of the novels.'

Playing Gormenghast, Brian Boyle noticed a potential for confusion: inconsistency between the names of things on the cards and the book of rituals and the names of the same things on the board.

(Strangely, this was something I picked up and commented on to Phil when he sent me a proof.) Boyle went on:

It feels a little like a cross between Ankh-Morpork and Roborally but without the chaos on your turn. [It is] significantly luck driven largely due to the goal cards you receive, and whether the people/things on your goal cards are present on the Board at the start. Nevertheless, there is some depth in planning out your moves each turn. There are limited opportunities to frustrate opponents' plans – since [your] opponents' goals are unknown – but opportunities for interaction via ritual effects occur regularly throughout the game.

He concluded that the game (which usually lasts around forty-five minutes) is 'possibly too simple for hard-core gamers, [there being] limited opportunity for interaction [and] almost no opportunity for strategic play.' Consequently it is likely to be of interest principally to 'fans of the novels'.

So let's ask a fan. Just at the time the game came out, Catherine Grose completed her dissertation on how place supersedes character and narrative in the Titus books. She found the game

confusing but engaging. You play as Steerpikie and have to work your way up to Master of Ritual by gaining influence over the characters and getting them to do what you want. The 'plots' that each character has to complete (dictated by the plot cards that each player holds) are reminiscent of Cluedo: you have to get a certain character into a certain room with a certain object. One of the difficulties, however, is that this is supposed to be Gormenghast: no one has a full working knowledge of its layout. So the actual game board is made up of individual rooms that are partly laid out by players at the beginning of the game and partly discovered as you go along. This is actually my favourite aspect of the game because you get to build a different castle every time, by matching up the entrances and exits of each room.

So if you are trying to complete a plot with Mr Flay, for example, and you need to get him to a room which isn't on the board already,

you have to take him off the edge of the map to bring other castle tiles and objects into play. Sometimes it is impossible for you to move your character without getting rid of some of the 'ritual cards' in your hand. At this point you roll the thirty-sided dice, read a passage from the book of ritual, and do whatever it tells you to do (which is very much in keeping with the original books, in that ritual gets in the way of the action). Eventually, someone completes enough plots to become Master of Ritual and the game is over.

The game pieces are very well made, with great illustrations of each character, so if you ever get bored of playing the game, you have a lovely set of Gormenghast-themed coasters for your coffee mugs.

The Things They Say

Another trawl of the world wide web by GPW

FIRST OFF, this poem by Imogen Cassels (age 17) was widely posted in November 2013. She was a Foyle Young Poet of the Year.

To Gormenghast

I lived in the perfect folly of you
 for near enough a month and
 wound myself in miles and corridors
 or in the dark old words of you,
 sentences laced with the poison
 of a thousand pages, the closed
 rooms of chapters I can't remember,
 rooms full of white cats. Fuchsia,
 her frown the most beautiful thing
 about her, she loved the boy I loved,
 bloodied her thick petal lips on
 the knife of his face. Titus, who was
 not a hero. Spider of a candelabra
 the broken symbol of you, something
 profane in the drowning adjectives
 that gather dust, lost in the twin
 skulls of twin skeletons, unburied.
 That passage of earth and water and
 blood that sunk his blonde head black,
 his face paler. Steerpike. I shall go back
 and fall from the tower of the owls,
 again and again.

© Imogen Cassels 2013

I only recently came across the assessment of the Titus books which J. G. Keely posted on Goodreads.com in November 2011. Here is a distillation of what he wrote.

No author writing in English is like Peake. His voice is as unique as that of John Milton, Ambrose Bierce, Joseph Conrad, William Blake, John Donne, or T. S. Eliot, and as fully realized. I am a hard and critical man, cynical and not easily moved, but there are passages in the Gormenghast series which so shocked me by the force of their beauty that, overwhelmed with wonderment, I snapped the book shut and took a moment to catch my breath. I often needed room to breathe and time for contemplation.

The world of Gormenghast is magical and dreamlike, but without the parlor tricks of spells, wizards, or dragons. The magic of Peake's world is the absurdly perfect figures that people it. (They are more fantastic than dragons because their beings are instilled with a shifting and scintillating transience, whereas dragons are inwardly little more than plot movers, drawn from a recognizable tradition; their form and behavior are familiar to us.) Yet the obsessions, quirks, and unpredictability of Peake's people feel all too human. They are frail, mad, and surprising. Each character is brightly and grotesquely alive, at the same time as stylized and symbolic. (Like Gogol, Peake has his own system of symbology.) His exaggerated strokes make his characters recognizable, realistic, and memorable, and result in an enveloping and convincing type of fantasy which engages the mind directly. This leads us to something truly fantastical: to find magic in our own world, and in our own lives.

That is no small achievement. To write unfettered by forms, clichés and archetypes is vastly difficult, and requires either great boldness, or great naivety. Peake is always bold. You will never catch him flat-footed; his pen is forever moving on in sallies and skirmishes, teasing, prodding, and suggesting. In the end, he is a quantum presence, evading our cumbersome attempts to catch him in any one place. Each sentence bears a thought, a purpose, a consciousness. What keeps the book moving is the restless joy of Peake's wit, his love and passion for his book, its places, characters, and story. His love for writing,

and for words, leaps out of every page. A poet with a careful sense of meter, Peake's verse is often the best part of his books: his pure language is a thing to behold.

To be original is to find an inspiration of your own and follow it through to the end. Peake achieves this, maintaining a depth, pace, and quality that is almost unbelievable. Each time he succeeds in lulling us into familiarity, we find that it is a playful ruse, and soon he shakes us free again. Readers desiring repetition, comfort, and predictability will experience shock, betrayal, and confusion. For those who love words, who seek beauty, who relish the unexpected, and who find the most stirring sensation to be the evocation of wonder, I have no finer book to suggest. No other fantasist is more fantastical – or more fundamentally human.

When I asked for permission to quote from his review, J. G. Keely sent me to his essay on *Titus Alone* which appeared in January 2009 on the same site (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/46276484>). Again, this is a distillation of what he wrote all of five years ago.

The third Titus book is not easy to come to terms with. While not as expansive or exacting as the others, it stands on its own, at the same time as completing Peake's philosophical and literary journey.

Over the long stretch of the first two books, we become accustomed to Gormenghast and identify with Titus's everyday struggles against its all pervasive traditions. There is a safety and comfort in tradition. It cushions us from the unknown and forbidden world outside. But the reader who expects the same comfort from *Titus Alone* has not been paying attention. For all the susurrant coo of comfort, tradition is death for Titus – is rot, is black and stagnant water. Readers who are utterly thrown by the world outside Gormenghast have been lulled by yesterday's revolution, and resent the fresh one.

Peake was picking up a thread of literary exploration that began with the great epics of Homer and Virgil, and continued with Milton and Byron. They all explore the role and nature of the hero and how his purpose brings him into conflict with tradition.

So Titus leaves home – as he must to become himself. He cannot

honestly accept or reject Gormenghast and its tradition unless he can see it from the outside. Of course, the real world proves stranger, more daunting, and far more vast than he expects. We've all been there ourselves, but Peake still manages to catch us off guard. We cannot conceive how truly different the outside world will be before we get there.

Titus Alone is self-contained, with its own allies and antagonists, its own places, its own conflict, and its own climax. They all add to Peake's running themes of change, growth, beauty, and meaning. However, the climax in *Titus Alone* is only a dress rehearsal for the true climax, which comes at the very end, as pivotal and sudden as the twelfth book of the *Aeneid*.

In the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, this resolution is the culmination of Titus' childhood, of all his former conflicts, of his life and purpose and individuality. It is the philosophical conclusion of Peake's exploration of the role of the hero, the self, and of tradition. It is also the fulfillment of his vision, his unyielding artistic drive, his final offering to the reader. He ends with beauty, with questions, with verve, and with a wink.

No matter how many times you climb the same mountain, you get no higher. The true visionary adventurer climbs the mountain, and then, as an encore, paints the ceiling of a cathedral. Peake was not content to add a new wing to his masterwork. He showed his commitment to art by razing his own cathedral. As Nietzsche put it: push everything, and abandon whatever topples, no matter how familiar it may have become. He who can apply this to himself and to his own works is the only artist deserving of the title – and such is Peake.

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Drawing on Peake

Peake's work is a constant source of inspiration for artists. Just for once, here's a glimpse of some of the works that I have come across recently, starting with a lino print illustrating Aunty Flo (who became a crow) by Scarlett Tierney.



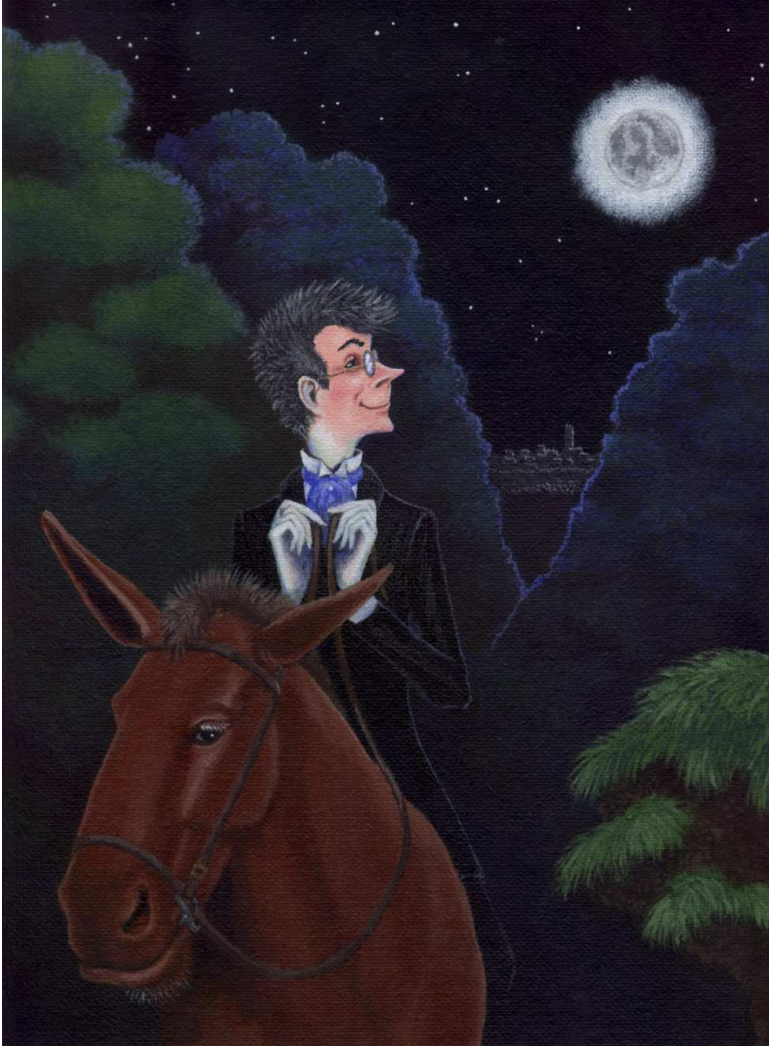
In France, Morgane Velten has drawn a series of eighteen images in black-and-white, illustrating scenes from *Titus Groan*. Here's



Steerpike seducing Irma, and then the Countess in bed. More here: http://issuu.com/morgane-velten/docs/chemindefer_pour_le_net04/18?e=0



During the last few years, H. L. Tyler, who is a professional sculptor and costume-maker, has sent me examples of her work. She seems to have a particular affection for Dr Prunesquallor, for she has painted



'Prunesquallor's Journey'
(See facing page)

him, sculpted him and, most recently, made embroidered portraits of him, along with other characters. She has a gallery at Deviantart, <http://imagination-heart.deviantart.com/gallery/>



Above: 'Doctor Prunesquallor: Pick Your Poison'

Readers may need reminding that when the Countess pays the doctor an unexpected visit in chapter 7 of *Gormenghast*, he invents an extraordinary tale – of travelling on a mule that he defends against a python – to account for the knife that, thanks to Irma, is stuck in the ceiling.



Above: 'Steerpike: How White and Scarlet is that Face,' and
(below) 'A Sunflower in Gormenghast' both embroidered by H. L. Tyler



This dramatic depiction of 'The Banishment of Flay' by Johanna Cranston was done last year as an art college project. Found on <http://www.creativebloq.com/illustration/image-week-visions-gormenghast-7133640>



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