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# The Art of the Matter

*The Voice of the Heart: the Working of*

*Mervyn Peake's Imagination*

reviewed by R. W. Maslen

PETER WINNINGTON'S MASTERLY BOOK begins by surprising us with a few facts. As he points out, there has been only a 'tiny body of criticism' dedicated to Peake's works over the last sixty years – and this despite the fact that the *Gormenghast* trilogy has remained in print continuously since the 1960s and is always listed among the four or five most important works of fantasy of the twentieth century; that his pictures and illustrated books are now in huge demand all over the world; and that as many as seven biographies and book-length memoirs of Peake have appeared since his death. By contrast, there have only been three monographs published before Winnington's book, and remarkably few substantial essays or book chapters. What is it that has made critics so reluctant to take on the richly varied productions of this well-loved artist?

The usual answer is that they are just *too* rich and varied. Winnington's is the only book so far to deal with every aspect of Peake's creativity: his poetry, drama and essays as well as his novels, short stories, picture books, illustrations and paintings. It is easy to conclude that he was simply too multifarious a talent to be easily accommodated within the framework of conventional criticism. But another reason for critical neglect of Peake may lie hidden, I suspect, in our very fascination with his biography. Peake's life is all too easily told (as Michael Moorcock has pointed out) as a sentimental tragic romance: the story of a sensitive, other-worldly writer-artist whose flame shone brightly for a brief period before his inevitable descent into lunacy and death. The stigma of mental illness hangs

over his achievements. Part of his first novel, *Titus Groan*, was written as occupational therapy while he was undergoing treatment for 'neurosis' in Southport Emergency Hospital, after suffering a nervous breakdown brought on by the pressures and absurdities of military life in the Second World War. A second, prolonged hospitalization followed the failure of his play *The Wit to Woo* on the London stage in 1957; and there were fears for Peake's psychological health in between these two episodes. For some commentators, the implication is that he was never quite in control of his genius; that his writings and drawings are the undisciplined outpourings of a vast but chaotic imagination, and therefore finally resistant to any rigorous, sustained analysis – except from a psychoanalytical perspective. One of the three monographs devoted to Peake's work, Alice Mills's *Stuckness in the Fiction of Mervyn Peake*, duly adopts such a perspective, and one suspects it will continue to prove popular in future. Indeed, Peake himself seems deliberately to *invite* psychoanalysis through his recurring references to madness, ranging from an unpublished poem of 1939, where he anticipates that with the outbreak of war he will 'be taken away / Into the nightmare land of idiocy', to the derangement of Lord Sepulchre in *Titus Groan*, or Cheeta's psychological torture of the young protagonist in *Titus Alone*. When he found himself in a hospital for the mentally ill in the '50s, Peake wrote to his wife: 'I will never write about mad people again.... I've played too much round the edge of madness.' His playfulness may have cost him dear in terms of literary reputation – more dearly than some of his admirers care to admit.

Then there is the fantastic mode in which so many of his visual and verbal works are cast. When I approached the writer-artist Alasdair Gray with a request to write a short preface to an edition of Peake's *Collected Poetry*, his response was interestingly complicated. 'I couldn't possibly do it,' he said, 'because I wouldn't be able to celebrate his work with honesty.' Peake was a romantic, Gray explained; a self-indulgent escapist who failed to engage with any of the urgent social and political problems of his day. And he went on to illustrate Peake's lack of artistic responsibility by pointing out how he glosses over the sexual politics of feudalism in his account of

the emotional development of Titus Groan; how the wretched condition of the Bright Carvers is placidly accepted by all the inhabitants of Gormenghast; and how the only true revolutionary in the castle, Steerpike, ends as a fugitive murderer hunted down by the merciless champions of feudal justice. At the same time, Gray could quote from memory verses recited by the Poet in the first of the Titus books, and admitted that his own childhood imagination was set on fire by *Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor*, which made him a lifelong admirer of Peake's illustrations. Can Peake's qualities as an artist finally be said to counterbalance what Gray and others have seen as his manifest failings?

Gray is not alone in his vexed relationship with Peake. Some of his most ardent fans confess themselves embarrassed by their love of his work. If he is a romantic, they fear, then he cannot also be modern; if he is an escapist then he cannot also be a thinker; and for many people both terms ('romantic' and 'escapist') imply once again a lack of artistic rigour, a quasi-adolescent undirected effusiveness that relegates all his work to a place on the shelf alongside the cherished books of childhood, to be re-read in a spirit of nostalgia rather than thoughtfulness. Again, Peake contributed to this view through his lifelong interest in adolescence. His favourite book, Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, has an adolescent protagonist; Titus is left stranded at the end of *Titus Alone* in a condition of permanent teenage sullenness; and his poems from 'The Burning Boy' to 'Poem: As Though It Were Not His' are filled with cocky walkers, wiry boys and fit-for-nothing fellows who exert an extraordinary hold on the poet's heart and mind. Peake stands accused as another version of the boy who never grew up, an artistic Peter Pan unable to break free from the images and obsessions of his early years.

Peter Winnington's book does not try to demolish these prejudices. Indeed, it confirms a few of them, such as Peake's obsession with certain recurring motifs, many of them having their roots in his childhood and youth. What it does, however, is to demonstrate beyond all doubt – at least for this reader – that Peake was a deeply committed artist, a serious thinker and a meticulous craftsman whose texts and pictures richly reward close scrutiny. He also shows

that Peake's work is best understood *as a whole*, since his visual art and his writing spring from the same imaginative processes. These processes Winnington investigates with the kind of inspiring thoroughness lavished on Coleridge by Jonathan Livingston Lowes in *The Road to Xanadu* (a book Peake *intended* to read, at least, as we know from a memo he wrote to himself in one of his notebooks). Winnington makes extensive use of Peake's essays on drawing to show how he set about the business of writing his novels, and identifies his novels as a kind of evolving treatise on the business of creating a visual work of art – a sculpture or a painting. And he has found an original and highly successful way of drawing together the multiple strands of Peake's creativity in each successive chapter.

The book is organized into a series of interrelated essays focussing on a number of dominant themes or motifs that surface again and again throughout Peake's work in all media, from the beginning of his career until his final illness. The chapter headings embrace the physical (Islands, Animals, Birds), the emotional (Heart, Solitude, Love), the philosophical (Identity, Evil) and the technical (Perspective, Voice), and close with two more narrowly focussed chapters on specific areas of Peake's writing (the novel *Mr Pye* and his work for the theatre). But my attempt to categorize the chapters in the previous sentence merely goes to show the extent to which they depend on one another. For Peake, the physical, emotional, philosophical and technical aspects of his art are so tightly enmeshed as to be inseparable – which is why Winnington can so convincingly demonstrate how his work in any one medium illuminates his procedures in all the others. The chapter headings are skilfully chosen, and their subjects so thoroughly yet lucidly explored that one ends by imagining one has thought them through for oneself. And they accumulate into a remarkable portrayal of a creative mind at work, which should be recognized as making a significant contribution to our understanding of the creative process itself and of the relationship between one art form and another.

The first chapter lays the groundwork for all the rest, stressing as it does the centrality of the metaphor of the heart to Peake's intellectual and imaginative life. Readers of Peake's work may well have

been struck by his recurrent references to the heart and its beating, both literal and metaphorical; references which imply an obsessive concentration on that organ which wrests it as if by force from the realm of cliché to which it has often been consigned. Indeed, this revisiting and revitalizing of cliché is one of the traits of Peake that Winnington highlights throughout his text. A lot of the metaphors Peake uses – those of islands, of various kinds of animal, of heart and nerve and sinew – are as familiar as the contours of the human body itself; but like a fine draftsman (Peake taught life drawing throughout his professional career as an artist), who enables his viewers to rediscover the strangeness and beauty of those contours, Peake's intensive scrutiny of over-familiar verbal comparisons transforms them into something new and often disturbing. His self-consciousness in reanimating clichés can be confirmed by a glance at one of his later books, *Figures of Speech* (1954), which comprises a series of visual puzzles that give astonishing new life to hackneyed phrases such as 'coming up to scratch' (a merman exploding from the sea in a rapture of self-abrasion) or 'burning one's bridges' (a top-heavy and self-satisfied couple trotting swiftly to the left with the bridges of their noses on fire). So too, Peake's version of the heart turns out to be something new: both an intensely physical organ (Peake's command of anatomy derives both from his studies as a visual artist and from childhood observation of his father's work as a doctor) and a seemingly limitless space into which external impressions are projected and in which new works of art are forged. And like human organs throughout his work, the heart turns out to have an independent life of its own, seizing control of its human possessors against their will at unexpected moments and articulating its desires in the resonant 'voice' which supplies Winnington's book with its title. Peake saw his successful works as utterances of the 'voice of the heart', Winnington contends, and he uses the rest of his book to build on this perception.

A clue to the heart's role in Peake's imaginative process lies in his two chief activities as a visual artist. Throughout his career he drew from models, whether these were professional people employed by the colleges of art where he studied and taught or members of his

own family, whom he drew with astonishing tenderness and frequency. Also, in about 1940 he embarked on the career for which he has become most celebrated among art critics: that of an illustrator of other people's texts. Both these activities involve prolonged gazing at an external object – what Peake describes in *The Craft of the Lead Pencil* as the artist's 'stare'. And both involve *internalizing* that object – whether it be a human figure or a text whose contents must be digested before they can be translated into visual terms. For Peake, the heart is central to the writer-artist's project of internalizing what he sees, whether real or imagined: becoming possessed by it, as it were, so that its life, its form, its senses become one with his, and he can re-present it fully formed to his viewers or readers. It is a process he described with a virtuoso's skill in two important essays on which Winnington draws – *The Craft of the Lead Pencil* and the introduction to his book of *Drawings* – and in each case the heart is central to the description, both as the place to which the object of an artist's attention must be gathered and as an emblem of the vitality an artist must impart to his or her representation of that object. Without the involvement of the heart – the seat of the emotions and the location of the artist's deepest convictions and desires – creation becomes an automatic process, like the functioning of a machine; and throughout his life the notion of human beings becoming mechanised is a source of horror to Peake.

But if Peake's work as a visual artist helps to explain the role played by the heart in his creative process, Winnington also makes the important point that other senses besides vision are equally vital to his creativity. The title of his book is *The Voice of the Heart*, and the 'voice' of a person or thing is what conveys its identity, what distinguishes it from any other thing or person. The book's first chapter brilliantly demonstrates the way Peake's accounts of the act of inventing imaginary beings invariably begin with his characters' voices, as heard in his 'heart', before fleshing out what he has heard inwardly with an appropriate appearance. This explains, Winnington plausibly suggests, why Peake was not content to remain an exclusively *visual* artist: the music of living excited him just as much as its fluctuating shapes did (he acknowledged as much when he

called his first poetry collection *Shapes and Sounds*). In his tenth chapter, 'Voice', Winnington shows how the voices of the characters in Peake's fiction are what give them life: if he did not suffuse a character's utterances with sufficient energy (think of the manic laughter of Prunesquallor, the resonant but hollow tones of Bellgrove, Irma's jarring screeches) he never really got them off the ground. The necessity of fusing voice with shape, inwardness with outwardness in what one creates is beautifully summed up in a sentence from the introduction to *Drawings*, which Winnington cites in his first chapter and at the head of his tenth: 'Art is the voice of man, naked, militant, and unshamed'. The sentence invokes both the unabashed physical nakedness of the newly created Adam and the 'militant' urge to proclaim his triumphant distinctiveness with open mouth – the urge that led to the Fall. And in recalling the Fall of Man as well as the Creation, it hints at the many problems Peake encountered in his own creative process, problems that helped to make that process such a fertile source of narratives for him in the course of his career.

In the first place, the attempt to internalize what one perceives (with either the mind's eye or the body's) – to give it life within oneself, before embarking on the arduous task of making that life perceptible to others – seems frequently to have brought home to Peake how often he was *unable* to penetrate the physical surface of the object of his scrutiny; how often he could not understand the language uttered by another person or thing. One of the effects of the sheer physicality of the heart for Peake is that he is always conscious of the extent to which it is walled in by its cage of ribs, and of the mighty physical force required to wrench that cage apart – an act that stops dead the organ it exposes. It is partly, perhaps, as a result of the difficulty of gaining access to other people's inward lives – even through the artist's obsessive stare or careful hearkening after the special timbre of a given voice – that his work is suffused with such an intense sense of isolation.

Loneliness is for Peake both a pleasure and a pain. It is an essential prerequisite for the rapt contemplation that an artist needs if he is to reproduce what he sees outside him or within; but it also cuts him off from other people, imposing on him a fresh awareness of



Adam's condition as an exile. Winnington's second chapter demonstrates the remarkable pervasiveness of human solitude in Peake's writings, and links it with the invariably solitary nature of his drawn and painted figures: as he points out, Peake's pictures very seldom show people in groups. In this chapter, seclusion comes across as an unalloyed delight for most of Peake's characters, and its interruption tends to destroy the painstaking process of constructing an imaginative environment, a process which is their chief pleasure. But there is a negative form of isolation, too: that of *enforced* solitude as opposed to solitude freely chosen. And in the third chapter, where Winnington identifies the island as the principal metaphor for solitude in Peake's work, it becomes clear that an inability to return from freely-chosen isolation is the worst form of seclusion he can imagine, implying as it does an inability to communicate what lies stored in the heart – and above all a sequestration from the most necessary of human emotions, love.

Actual and metaphorical islands crop up in all of Peake's work, just as they came to dominate his life outside his work. In landlocked China the boy Peake grew up dreaming of islands, with the help of *Treasure Island*, and on his return to the British isles he quickly formed a lifelong bond with one of the smallest islands in that archipelago, Sark. Intriguingly, Winnington points out that islands are never cut off from the other land-masses on earth: they are linked, at base, to the solid ground that sustains the world's oceans as well as the continents bounded by these waters. But the human effort involved in re-forging links between one island and another, or with a continent, is for Peake immense, and accounts for the brittle bridges and dangerous boat-journeys with which his writings and drawings are filled. Unlike Donne, he thought that many men are islands – an effect, Winnington suggests, of Peake's loss of the faith which sustained his missionary forebears; and attempts to escape one's status as islander can result in an obliteration of identity as one drowns in a sea of undifferentiated sensory information. But although solitude may be desired as a means of retaining one's identity, the urge to forge links with others, to commune, to make one's voice heard, overrides all fear of identity loss. The heart desires to

share its contents, and it is this perilous act of communication that his writings and drawings record.

One of the most startling achievements of Winnington's first chapter is his demonstration of the way that the metaphor of the *edge* – among which he includes the border, precipice, axis, and the sharp edge of a knife – dominates Peake's account of the difficult and dangerous artistic task of conveying what is in the heart to one's viewers or readers. The idea of the island developed in the third chapter helps to make sense of this metaphor: the edge of an island is often a cliff (as on Sark), from which one launches oneself at the risk of one's life into the unresponsive ocean of the world beyond. Some people's islands have beaches, Winnington points out, which makes it easier for them to cross the edge or boundary that divides their internal world – the world of the heart – from what lies outside. But in every case, as *Treasure Island* reminds us, the journey from any island – whether a real one or the metaphorical one that stands for the inward space of the imagination – is fraught with peril, and necessitates a sea-voyage that can result in drowning – that is, in the annihilation of one's identity. Traversing the edge that separates one being from another can be murderous, and Winnington cites a number of edges in the *Gormenghast* books and elsewhere that involve death or madness: the edge of the cliff from which Keda flings herself; the edge of a sill on which Swelter trips (carrying the murderous cleaver to which he has imparted an edge that he hopes will destroy his arch-enemy Flay) and which leads to his impaling at Flay's hands; the edge of the roof over which Flay and the mad Sepulchrave tip Swelter's corpse on its way to the Tower of Flints where Sepulchrave will meet his end, and so on. Swelter's cleaver is a hideous instrument of communion with the man he loves to hate; Sepulchrave's dragging of Swelter's corpse to the Tower of Flints is an attempted act of communion with the owls who live there, and who tear Sepulchrave to pieces for his pains. Communicating, through art or by other means, can result in obliteration; and Peake's conviction of this makes one wonder if he did not have a premonition of how he would lose his own identity, and with it his ability to communicate even with the people he most loved, at the end of a lifetime dedicated to art.

The act that most imperils one's identity is to fall in love; and the centrality of the heart metaphor to Peake's work also identifies the centrality of love to his thinking. Winnington is at his most perceptive when talking about love in Peake; both about the difficulty of attaining it – in Peake's poetry, prose and drama there is never enough love to go around, the emotion is always being 'used up' – and of the danger, when one has it, of being overwhelmed, of losing oneself in its intensity, of being drowned in it. The urgency with which Peake's characters look for love, and their final inability to find a sufficient supply of emotional nourishment, forms the subject of Winnington's fifth chapter. But the dangers involved in loving other people prove central to the seventh chapter, too, 'Identity'. Here Winnington shows how Peake's characters are to a startling extent in love with *themselves*, their own inner space, their imaginative world, and how this self-love which is so necessary to the artist invariably finds itself in conflict with the love of others – whether parents or lovers. It's for this reason that Peake's characters love others so passionately – as if drawing sustenance from this love for the construction of their inner world – while at the same time perversely working to cut themselves off from those they love, to flee from their homes as Titus flees his beloved Gormenghast.

The process of fleeing, it is implied, strengthens the inner life, expands the spaces of the heart, confirms one's identity. It does this both by showing how one has no permanent need of any specific Other in order to be oneself, and by subjecting one to the pain of loss – which makes it clear as nothing else can exactly what it is one fears to lose. The heart, then, is a highly conflicted environment, in which the need for isolation wars with the need for affection, the love of self with the love of others. And this 'civil war' of the heart, as Peake calls it in a poem – this struggle between irreconcilable needs – means that there is also a civil war going on in that product of the heart, Peake's art; a war which found an unnerving echo in the global war that broke out just as Peake was reaching maturity as an artist.

As stated earlier, for Peake the heart has a dual function. It is the organ that enables an artist to sympathize with – to become one with

– what he strives to represent in his art, and it is the thing that makes him himself, the location of his inmost being, his integrity. In a sense, these two functions are at odds with one another. Sympathizing, becoming one with others, involves a capacity for chameleon change which seems to put integrity and even selfhood in jeopardy. The heart has a life of its own, independent of the convictions of its owner, and its willingness to warm to what his head tells him should be spurned is sometimes unnerving. By its very intensity, by its desire to internalize what is stared at, the artist's gaze can change him utterly; his heartbeat synchronizes with what he sees and makes him in effect one with it. At times one gets the sense that Peake was profoundly horrified by what he was capable of identifying with, by the responses triggered in him by, say, the loveliness of a war-damaged cityscape; or the beauty of a girl dying of consumption in a concentration camp – her suffering being what delights his artist's eye in the poem 'Belsen 1945'; or the fires liberated by the V1s and V2s in *The Rhyme of the Flying Bomb*. At times the artist in his work acquires the look of astonished self-disgust which he gave to the portrait of Hitler he drew for propaganda purposes at the beginning of the Second World War. This portrait is the first of a series of pictures that purported to record the work of Hitler the war-artist, using blitzed cities and dismembered or starved bodies as the media for his monstrous creativity. One ingredient in Peake's work that Winnington does not discuss in detail (because he deliberately excludes the biographical approach from his analysis) is the role played in its development by the fact that it was written in time of war; but his meticulous account of the working of Peake's imagination shows better than anything that has been written before why Peake should both have shunned direct confrontation with the topic of war in the longer works he produced in this period – *Titus Groan*, his major work as an illustrator, his narrative poem *A Reverie of Bone* – and why war should nevertheless be seen as having shaped his work in terrible ways.

For Peake, engagement with the effects of war, in the form of its ruins and its human victims, was as dreadful a prospect as failure to engage with it. The first could potentially make him complicit with

war's atrocities – transforming him into a petty version of the artist Hitler in his propaganda drawings, as he took pleasure in the act of giving life to various forms of devastation. The second would convict his heart of having refused to make an adequate connection with the most urgent set of facts in the world he lived in – the one object no artist could fail to stare at as he scanned the English landscape. His conflicted response to this situation – he was desperate to get back to London from the various provincial army camps to which he was banished between 1940 and 1942, yet he was also eager to immerse himself in the spaces of his private imagination, as he scribbled away at *Titus Groan* in the camps he hated – perfectly matches the conflict Winnington identifies in Peake's creative heart. In a sense, one could say he was a man born at the wrong time; but isn't that true of everyone who lives through war? And if he had not lived when he did, would his account of insurrection in Gormenghast have had the power that lifts it so far above so many other English fantasies?

There is much more in Winnington's book than I have room to consider here. His chapter on 'Animals' argues that animal companions provided one solution to Peake's fear that his creative solitude might be shattered or taken over by the people he loved. An extraordinary number of his characters adopt such companions, from Captain Slaughterboard with his androgynous Yellow Creature to the Lost Uncle with his surly companion Jackson or Muzzlehatch with his zoo of aggressive but affectionate beasts. Animals serve as a safe substitute for people because there is no need to decipher the complexity of their thoughts and emotions, or to adapt oneself more than superficially to their needs. One cannot be taken over by an animal. It's a lazy way out of an identity crisis, as the pictures of Captain Slaughterboard lounging on rocks with his arm round the Yellow Creature show. On the other hand, once you start to sympathize with animals – no doubt after staring at them for too long – their predicament as helpless slaves of men can change you as much as the scrutiny of any man or woman could do. In the army, Peake clearly felt he was being treated like an animal; though it was not until the 1950s, when he wrote *Boy in Darkness*, that he was able to articulate the full horror of being changed into one. The novella concerns

a monstrous lamb who has the power to invade the hearts of human beings and reshape their bodies from within into the forms of tormented animals. The lamb is another appalling manifestation of the despotic artist, like Peake's Hitler; and the boy Titus almost falls victim to this dreadful beast, a fate he narrowly avoids by cutting it to pieces with the edge of a sword. As Winnington observes, after writing this story Peake never again wrote glibly about the convenience of having an animal companion.

Another extraordinary section of Winnington's book concerns Peake's interest in perspective. Winnington writes well about the unusual visual perspectives, and extraordinary shifts in perspective, that Peake adopts in his finest illustrations; but he writes brilliantly about the ways in which Peake transfers these shifts of perspective to his prose style, narrating scenes from the most unexpected chronological position, usually some future point in time towards which the scene in question inexorably tends. I have read few better pieces of close critical analysis in recent years than those in Winnington's ninth chapter, and shall always be grateful to him for having shown me so clearly how Peake's prose casts its convoluted spell over its readers.

But for me, the most remarkable transformation the book effected was in my view of *Mr Pye*, one of the few texts Winnington describes in its entirety rather than in the context of a specific theme or motif. Coming as it does towards the end of the book, the discussion of *Mr Pye* is a revelation, transforming the novel into one of the high points of Peake's artistic development instead of what I had always taken it to be: a faintly disturbing piece of whimsy. Themes and obsessions Winnington has carefully shown in preceding chapters to be central to Peake's thinking here find climactic expression, in a narrative where the history of Peake's family as missionaries in Madagascar and China comes into startling alignment with his own traumatic experiences: the rise of totalitarianism in Europe, the domination of British culture by political and commercial propaganda, and the question of the role of the responsible artist in a world that seems to have grown indifferent to art.

The essential solitariness of Peake's protagonists here finds

poignant embodiment in the benign-seeming Mr Pye, whose project of exerting a godlike grip over the island of Sark through his missionary zeal to spread the word about his personal divinity, 'the Great Pal', bears a striking affinity to Steerpike's self-appointed mission to seize control of Gormenghast castle. The missions of both men lead them to a crisis of self-induced loneliness in high places: in Mr Pye's case, at the crest of the island to which he has been driven by an angry mob; in Steerpike's, on the rooftops of Gormenghast, from which the former kitchen-boy launches his last desperate attack on his aristocratic alter-ego Titus Groan. Winnington does not need to point out how the names Steerpike and Pye play variations on the letters of Peake's name. Throughout his book he has kept reminding us of how Peake sees the force that drives the artist as a kind of lust for power, a desire to exert control over viewers and readers in the interests of making them share the artist's vision. Mr Pye is a benign Hitler, whose need for love threatens to overwhelm the identities of the people with whom he comes in contact. Eventually his remorseless pursuit of love and the moral high ground leads him to sprout a pair of wings, which set him apart forever from his fellow human beings. In an effort to free himself from these wings he turns to the intensive contemplation of evil, taking as his template a devilish-looking goat that lives on the island; and inevitably his artistic scrutiny of the beast leads to his sprouting horns. Shocked by the ease with which he can identify with evil – become absorbed by it – Mr Pye ends the book by accepting the isolation imposed on him by his wings, as opposed to the horns he has toyed with. The book ends with him soaring from the edge of a cliff on those same wings, like a diminutive and dapper version of that emblem of artistic inspiration, Pegasus, and disappearing into the distance above the ocean. In Winnington's account, this becomes a metaphor for the predicament of the artist, whose desire to embrace and communicate the things he sees paradoxically results in his severance from all communities, and whose quest to give expression to love inevitably ends in a loss of love. This places the book a long way from the effervescent holiday reading it has often been taken for – not least, no doubt, because it is an *illustrated* novel, and illustrated books have always been viewed

as light reading in the English literary marketplace. *Mr Pye* is a worthy sequel to the Gormenghast books, and can never be read as a simple *jeu d'esprit* again.

Towards the beginning of *The Voice of the Heart*, Winnington writes, 'There is a sense in which the first two books about Titus Groan recapitulate at great length the development of a work of art (whether visual or verbal) and the third dramatizes its existence in the outer world'. It is a measure of Winnington's achievement that he ends by convincing us not just of the truth of this statement, but of the fact that this process of developing a work of art is effectively Peake's topic in *everything* he writes; that he is in fact one of the great writers about the responsibilities of the artist. Everyone who admires Peake's work will be delighted by this book; and from now on, nobody who writes about Peake will be able to do so without paying it homage.

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