The Transformative Power of Liminal Spaces in Roald Dahl's James and the Giant Peach, Ursula K. Le Guin's The Beginning Place and Neil Gaiman's Coraline

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The Transformative Power of Liminal Spaces in Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*

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1 Introduction

Liminality is a wide-spread phenomenon of in-betweenness. With regards to liminal life phases, examples such as the time between high school graduation and an apprenticeship or studies, or the period between two jobs come to mind. Apart from life phases, liminality can also denote the physical in-betweenness of a place. In this sense, roads and hallways as the in-between of two or more places, airports and petrol stations as spaces of transit and graveyards in the sense that they are situated at the border between life and death can all be considered liminal. Another form of liminality can be found in liminal beings, namely beings that can traverse thresholds between worlds. Jesus is perhaps the most prominent liminal being of Western culture, whose crossing of the threshold between the dead and the living is celebrated annually in religious Easter rituals around the globe. Although in literary works liminality is often associated with heroic journeys and divine realms, in the fantasy works by Roald Dahl, Ursula K. Le Guin and Neil Gaiman, liminal spaces are spheres that foster personal development for the everyday protagonists. As such, they have the power to encourage readers to embrace the liminal life phases mentioned above that they might find themselves in or to seek out liminal spaces should they feel trapped in their lives by for instance quitting a job or leaving a suburban life behind for the sake of personal development[1].

The research aim of this thesis is twofold. The first research aim lies in analysing the liminal spaces that promote personal growth within the story structures of Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* (1961)*,* Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* (1980) and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* (2002) and determining their specific impact on the lives of the respective protagonists. Subsequently, this paper seeks to establish how the liminal spaces in all the three fantasy stories can be read as representative of liminal spaces and rites of passage in life that

[1] This idea aligns with Bjørn Thomassen's argument that "liminal experiences can be 'artificially produced' as in rituals, or they can simply happen, without anyone planning for it, as in natural disasters or the sudden disappearance of beloved persons" (18).

facilitate personal growth. This first part of the paper thus closely analyses the works of fantasy with the help of the structuralist theoretical framework established in the first chapter. The second research aim goes beyond the analysis of the works of literature and seeks to uncover the potential that lies in literary representations of liminality with regards to the reader. For this purpose, at the beginning of the third chapter, new theoretical considerations developed from the philosopher Martha Nussbaum and the cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget will be considered. With their help with it will be possible to establish the potential of liminality depictions for the reader on a theoretical level. On the outset it appears that the protagonists of all three novels have experienced troubled childhoods including unstimulating and stagnant living situation in which personal growth is hampered. For all of them, the fantasy intrusion of the liminal spaces with all their challenges stimulates psychological development with regards to the establishment of autonomy and independence outside of the characters' familiar surroundings. This positive impact of liminal spaces on the protagonists' personal development may teach readers the transformative power of markedly liminal life phases. Thus, this thesis aims at showing the transformative power of liminal spaces both on the level of the literature and on the level of the reader.

Liminality was originally an anthropological term denoting the in-between status that a subject finds themselves in during a rite of passage. Since being coined within anthropology, liminality has frequently been applied to fantasy and children's literature by scholars like Farah Mendelsohn, Lori M. Campbell, Sandor Klapcsik and Emma Hayes. What makes the application of the concept to literature even more appropriate is the fact that the anthropologist Victor Turner, who was concerned with liminality, "was stimulated by literary interests, which included children's literature" (Joseph 116-117). In the following, a short literature review of the application of the concept to fantasy literature will be given to elucidate the gap that this thesis intends to fill.

Perhaps most significantly, Farah Mendelsohn classified four different rhetorical strategies of fantasy in her *The Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008). She explores the different ways in which fantasy narratives are constructed, meaning how the fantastic elements are introduced, one of these is the *liminal fantasy*. Based on Brian Attebery's idea that a genre is a so-called *fuzzy set*, she selects texts with more and less similarities to fantasy (Mendelsohn, *Taxonomy* 169). At the core of her works lies the idea that

> there are essentially four categories within the fantastic: the portal-quest, the immersive, the intrusive, and the liminal. These categories are determined by the means by which the fantastic enters the narrated world. In the portal-quest, we are invited through into the fantastic; in the intrusion fantasy, the fantastic enters the fictional world; in the liminal fantasy, the magic hovers in the corner of our eye; while in the immersive fantasy we are allowed no escape. (Mendelsohn, *Rhetorics* xiv)

Taking a closer look at the liminal fantasy reveals that this type of story is characterised by its fantastic occurrences which the characters in the story are generally unfazed by while the reader remains in confusion (Mendelsohn, *Rhetorics* 182)[2]. In the view of Mendelsohn, the most prominent of liminal fantasies are fantasies of irony (Mendelsohn, *Rhetorics* 191). Irony is created as “we are presented with the obviously fantastical, and watch while the protagonists ignore it or respond in ways that feel dissonant” (Mendelsohn, *Rhetorics* 191). It needs to be emphasised that the liminal fantasy does not explicitly include liminal spaces such as thresholds or portals but rather that the reader remains on the periphery of knowledge about the magic within the story and thus is situated in a liminal space.

[2] Based on this, she originally termed this type of fantasy *estranged fantasy* in her essay *Toward a Taxonomy of Fantasy* (2002) as the reader feels an estrangement from the protagonist in the story. Only in her *Rhetorics of Fantasy* (2008), she uses the term of *liminal fantasy* instead.

Briefly, Mendelsohn's definition of the portal-quest fantasy shall be laid out as portals are liminal spaces and play a role in the analysis of liminal spaces within the three primary novels. The so-called portal fantasy

> is quite simply a fantastic world entered through a portal. ... Crucially, the fantastic is *on the other side* and does not 'leak'. Although individuals may cross both ways, the magic does not (Mendelsohn, *Taxonomy* 173).

Furthermore, these types of fantasy stories are "almost always quest novels ... [,] they ... proceed in a linear fashion with a goal that must be met" (Mendelsohn, *Taxonomy* 173) and the stories often grow in mystery rather than clearing matters up (Mendelsohn, *Taxonomy* 173).

Following on from the liminality of Mendelsohn's portal fantasy, Lori M. Campbell's work *Portals of Power* (2010) specifically focuses on the realm of liminality in its spatial form. Campbell explicitly criticises Mendelsohn for defining the portal fantasy superficially (3). In her view, Mendelsohn does not acknowledge "the symbolic possibilities of the device" (3). Further, Campbell continues that "these 'in-between' spaces, the portal connotes a myriad of power associations and imbalances, centralizing and making transparent the ways in which literary fantasy attacks real-world problems" (6). Moreover, Campbell is of the view, which she expressly shares with Susan Honeyman, that the "real-world child acts as a porter through which the fantasist can use art and imagination to impact adult society" (14). In other words, the child reader takes up an influential position "*between* their world of make-believe and that of adult reality" (14). In line with this, Campbell draws on another argument by scholar Alison Lurie, who substantiates that writers with a vision for a society will often weave their ideas into children's novels (14). Stories of that kind have the power to bring about societal change as they "appeal to the imaginative, questioning, rebellious child within all of us ... and act as force for change" (qtd. in Campbell 14). Although, the primary literature by Dahl, Le Guin and Gaiman is not predominantly understood as children's literature, the Romantic notion of literature

having an inherent power to bring about change, even though in our case change with regards to the reader's psychological development rather than change for a whole society, is central to this thesis.

Another scholar concerned with the concept of liminality in fantasy literature is Sandor Klapcsik. In his work *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction* (2012), Klapcsik reinterprets liminality with the help of the post-structuralist theories by Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault[3] and defines three characteristics of liminality. Namely, that liminality is the "constant oscillation, crossing back and forth between social and cultural positions" (14). It is also the "space of continuous transference, of a never-ending narrative forming an infinite process towards an unreachable end" (14), and liminality relies on "transgressions, or traversals, across evanescent, porous, indefinite, ambiguous, evasive borderlines" (14). Klapcsik differentiates between four categories of liminality. Firstly, he defines "cultural or institutional liminality" (20) which designates the liminal position of the authors he discusses as "their target audience is a blend between readers of mainstream and genre literature" (20).[4] Secondly, he explicates that *generic liminality* (55), pertaining to "genre overlapping" (55) is a form of liminality. Thirdly, Klapcsik expounds *narrative liminality,* which signifies a liminality in which "the reader oscillates among various perspectives, focal points, styles, and intertextual registers" (21). Lastly, the scholar lays out *thematic liminality,* meaning that "the text hovers at the edge of reality and that of the fantastic" (55). Connected to the other theoretical applications of liminality, Klapcsik's *narrative liminality* should be understood as closely connected to Mendelsohn's *liminal fantasy*

[3] Sandor Klapcsik draws on from Derrida that traditional philosophy deals with polar opposites in which "one of the two terms controls the other" (Derrida qtd. in Klapcsik 9). He further discusses Derrida's call for "a science that would examine (and deconstruct) margins, limits and liminality" (Klapcsik 12). Further, Klapcsik focuses on Foucault's concept of heterotopia (13) which denotes "spaces that provide an alternate space of ordering while paradoxically remaining both separate from and connected to all other spaces" (Topinka 55). From these post-structuralist theories, Klapcsik derives his definition of liminality.

[4] Klapcsik's definition of "cultural or institutional liminality" raises doubts about the absence of an overlap between readers of mainstream and genre literature. A more fitting example of such liminality might be found in fantasy for children, as it is frequently read by adults to children who possess varying levels of understanding and cultural knowledge, thereby placing the author in a significantly more pronounced liminal position. Additionally, translated fantasy literature also places the author in a liminal position between different cultures.

and his *thematic liminality* as bearing strong likeness to the portals that Lori M. Campbell is concerned with. His only entirely new discovery lies in liminality in the form of intersecting genres and cultural liminality. According to Klapcsik, Neil Gaiman's novels *Neverwhere* (1996) and *The Graveyard Book* (2008) in which respectively the homeless people of London and the dead ancestors are situated in a "magical invisibility" (76) are strong critiques of social injustice (76), in which certain groups of people are overlooked and forgotten. This social criticism bears similarities to the power that liminal spaces can have according to Lori M. Campbell with regards to revealing current injustices (6).

As a last scholar concerned with literary liminality in fantasy fiction, Emma Hayes shall be taken into consideration. In her dissertation *Betwixt-and-Between: Liminality in Golden Age Children's Literature* (2018) she discusses how liminality in five different spheres "reflects social changes that occurred throughout the Victorian and Edwardian eras" (Abstract). According to Hayes, the "repeated evocations of the liminal ... signal a fundamental anxiety with the in-between" (201) and thus childhood itself (201). Hayes sees liminality in children's literature as a representation for processes in real-life on a sociological level. Similarly, this thesis will take liminality in fantasy works to be representative of liminality on a more personal level. Since liminality as a phenomenon is persistent in life and literature, it is important to compliment the research on older texts with research on literary texts from 1960 onwards. Furthermore, within this contribution to the research on liminality in fantasy studies the primary literature will not be labelled children's literature anymore as it dismisses the symbolic importance that these stories can hold for readers of all ages.

As the summary of previous research on liminality within fantasy fiction has revealed, this thesis will stand out in the sense that it analyses liminal spaces as a structural aspect of the three fantasy novels. Like Lori M. Campbell, Sandor Klapcsik and Emma Hayes, the research findings concerning liminality will be used as a mirror to the social sphere as well as a powerful tool to shape opinions and therefore change the social sphere. The difference to the work of the

scholars lies in the fact that they analyse how liminality mirrors the social sphere. Thus, they are concerned with the idea that liminality has the potential to reveal social injustices in the real world as in the case of Campbell's research on portals, with the depiction of social criticisms as for Klapcsik's research on Neil Gaiman and with the specific angst of a generation as in Hayes research on Golden Age children's literature. This thesis, however, will explore the developmental impact that liminal spaces have on the protagonists. Further, the potential of these representations to teach the individual reader about the importance of in-between phases for personal and social development rather than for the development of a society as a whole or that of child readers specifically will be explored.

On a methodological note, the primary texts have been chosen on the grounds of their cultural and temporal differences. Not only are the three works from three different decades, namely the 1960s as for Dahl's work, the 1980s in the case of Le Guin's novel and the early 2000s as in Gaiman's case, but also the cultural backgrounds of the writers are varied. Whereas Roald Dahl is an English male author with a military background, Ursula le Guin is a female American author with an academic background, the youngest writer of the trio, Neil Gaiman is another English writer although from a different generation. This will ensure the universality of the research findings as they cannot be accounted for by the same cultural, temporal or social background of the three authors.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the necessary theoretical background will be presented and interpreted. At first, the theoretical concept of liminality and its anthropological origins will be laid out. Thereafter, as a basis for the investigation of the structural place that liminal spaces take up within the three fantasy stories, the branch of structuralism within literature will be presented. The structuralist method explicated in this section will be applied in chapter 3.3 of this thesis. To round off the first chapter, the two theories on story structures in myth and folk tale by Joseph Campbell in his *The Hero's Journey* and Vladimir Propp with his *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1928) will be outlined. These two theories will be used in order to

determine the structural place of liminal spaces within the three novels and will inform the analysis of the three works alongside the theoretical concept of liminality.

In the second chapter, the respective story structures of the three novels and the occurrence of liminality therein will be analysed with the help of the theoretical tools from the previous chapter. The focus of this chapter lies on the analysis of liminal spaces as perceived by the respective protagonists. This is to say that although a certain space may be liminal to one character in the sense that it is a transitional space and can, but does not have to, provide sufficient input for personal development, it might not be perceived as thus by others. The second chapter will conclude with an interpretation of the liminal spaces in the three works of fantasy as representative of liminality in life. This interpretation will support the argument for the learning potential that lies within the literary depictions of liminality.

In the third and last chapter, the learning potential that lies in the liminality representations will be addressed. To elucidate this learning potential, Martha Nussbaum's philosophy of the literary or narrative imagination, which has the force to instruct readers of literature to be empathetic, and the learning theory of constructivism by Jean Piaget will be laid out. With the help of Nussbaum's argument and Constructivism, it will be revealed that the reading of the three fantasy stories discussed in this thesis can teach readers that liminal spaces have the power to transform one's character and should thus be entered into when they present themselves or sought out. Further, the structuralist learning theory of Piaget will be connected to the common structure of all three novels. Based on this, it will be argued that the structural similarities of all three stories to folkloric story structures intensifies the potential of instruction. Readers can readily incorporate the new knowledge from the works of fantasy due to the structural similarities to known story structures.

Overall, this thesis states how literature despite its decreasing importance within society at present can have a positive impact on the development of the individual which could encourage more people to venture off into fictional worlds once again.

2 Liminality, Structuralism and Story Structures

This chapter will lay the theoretical basis for this thesis. At first the theoretical concept of liminality and its implications for anthropological research will be outlined. This concept will help identify the liminal spaces within the three novels in the third chapter of this thesis. The following subsection on Structuralism in literature will serve as background information for the structuralist theories applied in this thesis. Further, the structuralist method will be applied in chapter 4.3 in connection to the learning theory of Constructivism. The chapter will conclude with the presentation of two structural theories with regard to story structures. The theory of the hero's journey by Joseph Campbell explores the structure of myth, while Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale* explores the common structure of fairy tales. With the help of these two theories the structural place of liminal spaces within the story structures of the three fantasy works will be determined in the third chapter of this thesis. As such, this theoretical chapter builds the foundation on which the first part of the research question regarding the structural place and impact of liminal spaces on the protagonist will be answered.

2.1 Liminality in Anthropology

The roots of the theoretical concept of liminality, which is central to this thesis, lie in the field of anthropology. The French-German anthropologist Arnold van Gennep researched rites of passage and coined the term liminality as the middle stage of these rites in *The Rites of Passage* (1909), which he also regarded as his most significant work (Zhang 121). Van Gennep outlines rites of passage from a large variety of cultures and from all stages of life and maintains that "the life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another" (2-3). Although transitional rites are frequently associated with coming-of-age and initiation rites, in many cultures they are also abundant during pregnancy

(41), childbirth (50), marriage (116) and funerals (146). The later anthropologist Victor Turner summarises van Gennep's view on rites of passage, as follows,

> Van Gennep has shown that all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or *limen)*, and aggregation. The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behavior signifying detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in social structure or a set of cultural conditions (a "state"); during the intervening liminal period, the state of the ritual subject (the "passenger") is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state; in the third phase the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more, … [and] has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and 'structural' type… (*Forest* 94).

In his approach to investigating rites of passage, van Gennep determines the underlying structure of such rites. Thus, he is of the same structuralist tradition as the scholars Joseph Campbell and Vladimir Propp discussed later in this chapter.

Victor Turner continued van Gennep's work on liminality within rites of tribes and world religions. According to him, "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (*Ritual Process* 95).[5] Turner discusses the positive and negative implications of liminal periods for the novices in his work *The Forest of Symbols*.[6] On this note he explicates that as mentioned above "the subject of passage ritual is, in the liminal period, structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (Turner, *Forest* 95). This invisibility of the respective passenger implies that they are "no longer classified and [at the same time] not yet classified" (Turner, *Forest* 96). This

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[5] More concretely, according to Turner the displacement of the liminal personae may imply that "they are secluded from the sphere of everyday life, … they may be disguised in pigments or masks, or rendered inaudible by rules of silence" (*Ritual Process* 169).

[6] Considering the literary application of the concept in the second chapter of this thesis, it is noteworthy, that in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, *liminal beings* are defined as "exist[ing] at the threshold of two states; this gives LBs [, i.e., liminal beings,] both wisdom and the ability to instruct, while also rendering them dangerous and uncanny" (Clute et al. 581). Thus, also in a fantasy context, liminal beings have positive and negative implications.

liminal state of invisibility evokes numerous negative associations. According to Mary Douglas, the subject in the liminal period may be seen as unclean due to the ambiguous status of the passenger (qtd. in Turner, *Forest* 97). Further, in societies where "sex distinctions have great structural importance" (Turner, *Forest* 98) the sexlessness or bisexuality of the subject represents a threat (Turner, *Forest* 96). In Turner's view, the persons situated in the liminal realm are also demarcated by "sacred poverty" (99), meaning they are stripped of all rights and ranks (Turner, *Forest* 96). Nonetheless, apart from those negative repercussions of the liminal realm in rites of passage, Turner also points out the positive features that go along with liminality. He states that "undoing, dissolution, [and] decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns" (99). Another positive aspect of the liminal period lies in the idea that all persons situated in liminality together are entirely equal, despite the hierarchical differences that might apply within the structure of the society they live in (99). In Turner's words "this comradeship transcends distinctions of rank, age, kinship, position and, in some cases kinds of cultic group, even of sex" (100). While during the liminal period of the rite of passage, the novice goes through a phase of reflection (Turner, *Forest* 105), they may "return to secular society with more alert faculties perhaps and enhanced knowledge of how things work, but [eventually] they have to become once more subject to custom and law" (106). Precisely this liminal sphere which is rich in developmental power for the individual or fictional character undergoing the rite of passage, will be central to the analysis of the three fantasy stories.

Taking more recent scholarly endeavours concerning the theoretical concept of liminality into account, one cannot help but notice a significant lack of research on liminality after van Gennep's influential work (Thomassen 6). In the words of anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen, "the fact that what is possibly (?) the first conference dedicated to liminality comes after a hundred years of intellectual history probably also indicates that the potentiality of that concept was for a long time left unexplored" (6). Shortly after the publication of van Gennep's

Rites of Passage his work was quickly disregarded by fellow anthropologists such as Durkheim due to "academic power politics" (Thomassen 7), which makes the consideration of van Gennep's work in this thesis even more significant. Only Victor Turner, whose contribution to the theoretical concept of liminality was presented above, considered van Gennep's work in his own research (Thomassen 14). Thomassen follows in Turner's footsteps and classifies different types of liminality maintaining that "liminality is applicable to both space and time" (16) as well as "both single individuals and to larger groups" (16). Based on this, he distinguishes on the level of the subject concerned with liminality between "single individuals … [,] social groups … [and] whole societies, entire populations, maybe even 'civilizations'" (16). The temporal aspect of liminality can pertain to "moments … [,] period … [or] epochs" (16), whereas the spatial aspect of liminality can concern "specific places [or thresholds] … [,] … areas or zones … [or even] … countries, larger regions, continents" (16). He further admits that "scale, referring to the 'degree' to which liminality is experienced, or, in other words, the intensiveness of the liminal moment or period" (17) could also be a useful way to classify liminality. To conclude his classification of liminality, Thomassen states that "liminal experiences can be 'artificially produced' as in rituals, or they can simply happen, without anyone planning for it, as in natural disasters or the sudden disappearance of beloved persons" (18). Since this thesis analyses the liminal experiences of the individual protagonists of the three novels, Thomassen's suggestion for the employment of liminality in other fields with regards to the individual are particularly valuable insights. He argues,

> At the level of the individual, liminality is used as a concept by some psychologists and therapists, and here the relevance speaks for itself: most (if not all) persons can recognize moments or periods in their lives as liminal, where the answers to the challenges one needs to face are simply not offered by any predefined 'structure.' (18)

This idea of liminal life phases will be picked up in chapter 3.4 in which the liminal spaces in the three fantasy stories will be interpreted as possible representations of liminal life phases.

2.2 The Structuralist Approach to Literature

The classic structural theories proposed by Joseph Campbell and Vladimir Propp will inform the analysis of liminal spaces in the context of the respective story structures in the third chapter of this thesis as well as in section 4.3. Due to this, the present section introduces the basic theoretical considerations of Structuralism, including a brief historical outline of the broad movement with regards to its development within literary studies as well as the general notion of the structuralist method which this thesis employs by distinguishing the role that the underlying structure of all three works plays with regards to the transformative power of liminal spaces in the works of fantasy.

The movement of Structuralism started with the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (Wittig 146). Susan Wittig describes three major influences of de Saussure on Structuralism. Firstly, in the eyes of de Saussure, all science including that of language, should be carried out both diachronically and synchronically (Wittig 147).[7] Secondly, de Saussure suggests along the same lines that "language acquires meaning along two axes of relationships: the syntagmatic or linear-temporal axis of unfolding speech…; and the paradigmatic axis–non-linear, non-temporally ordered–of associative meaning" (Wittig 147). De Saussure's third contribution consists of his distinction between *langue*, "the sum of word-images stored in the minds of all individuals (who speak the same language)" (de Saussure qtd. in Wittig 149) and *parole,* denoting "the momentary actualizations of the collective potential of the *langue*" (Wittig 149), thus the day-to-day use of language in a situational context.

Subsequently, the Russian Formalists incorporated these theoretical foundations of de Saussure into their work and passed them on to the structuralists that followed in their footsteps (Wittig 150). At first, the formalists from 1917 onwards (Wittig 150) concerned themselves with formal features of literature which were taken from linguistics (Wittig 150), and later their

[7] Diachronic research means taking the development over time into account, whereas synchronic research denotes the study of an object or system at a particular point in time (Wittig 147).

work became distanced from formalist considerations and explored the differentiation between literary language and practical language more generally (Wittig 151). The formalists maintained, “the secret to literariness … [is] that in poetry … ordinary language becomes defamiliarized” (Bertens 30). The formalist movement was, however, politically hampered as politician “Trotsky maintained that the Formalist approach to literature was incomplete, that it ignored the social context of the art work” (Wittig 151).

While most formalists analysed poetry, Vladmir Propp, whose theory will be further analysed in the last section of this chapter, contributed to the formalist analysis of narrative structure with his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (1928) (Wittig 152).[8] Due to the non-inclusion of the works’ historical context, Propp has been criticized by structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss for his lack of paradigmatic consideration in his research on folk tales, which represents a purely syntagmatic study (Wittig 153). Lévi-Strauss’ contribution to the field “go[es] beyond ‘structuralism’ to a phenomenological understanding of the ways in which we create the structures that become so real that they in turn can be empirically assessed and measured” (Wittig 157), for which he has been harshly criticised by anthropologists but also received praise (Wittig 158).[9]

Roland Barthes and Tzvetan Todorov led the second school of Structuralism in France (Wittig 161). Their research was mainly concerned with “rework[ing] Shklovsky's notion of plot (suzet) and story (fabula) into the concept of story (histoire) and discourse (discours)” (Wittig 161), where the former denotes the chronological order of events and the latter the arrangement of these events within the story itself (Wittig 161). Most writers reorder events in

[8] Although Susan Wittig does not mention the Prague Structuralists in her historical account of the structuralist movement, it shall be briefly mentioned at this stage as the Prague school of Structuralism is a continuation of the Russian Formalism (Bertens 44). On a time scale, they fall inbetween Formalism in Russia and Structuralism in France (Bertens 44). The Prague Structuralists were mainly concerned with “the literary text as a structure of differences” (Bertens 44).

[9] The recognition that Levi-Strauss received for his work shows in the abundant application of his theory for narrative structural analysis in France (Wittig 158-159), for instance in the work of Alexander Greimas (Wittig 159).

a story for artistic purposes, which particularly inspired the interest of Barthes and Todorov (Wittig 161). The brief historical outline of the movement shall be concluded with French structuralism at this stage. The structuralist method will be applied in chapter 4.3 and shall therefore be briefly laid out at this stage.

Structuralism shall be defined with the help Leonard Jackson's clarification, who explains that,

> … [It] is the practice of studying phenomena as different as societies, minds, languages, literatures and mythologies as total systems, or connected wholes – that is, structures – and in terms of their internal patterns of connection, rather than as sets of isolated items in terms of their historical sequence. (23)

Jackson continues to argue that structure within literary texts as such is not sufficiently informative since everything in the world consists of elements, whose connections make up their underlying structure (31-32). Rather, what makes the structuralist approach scientifically interesting is the analysis towards the functional context of structure within a literary text (32). A similar account of the particularly valuable perspective of structuralism is given by Robert Scholes, who argues that

> By moving from the study of language to the study of literature, and seeking to define the principles of structuration that operate not only through individual works but through the relationship among works over the whole field of literature, structuralism has tried – and is trying – to establish for literary studies a basis that is as scientific as possible (10).

Against this background, the frequently voiced criticism of the "formalist fallacy" (Scholes 11), that has been levied against structuralism, which charges the theory with "a lack of concern for 'meaning' or 'content' of literary works" (Scholes 11) loses its significance. In a structuralist analysis, structure is not investigated without concern for the text's respective meaning. As such, structuralist approaches to literature, such as the approach to analyse liminal spaces in the

context of their structural occurrence in the second chapter of this thesis, "far from being cut off from the world in a formalist prison, approaches it directly at several different levels of investigation" (11).

Before the novels can be analysed, the following two sections will sketch the structural approaches to myth and folk tales by the two scholars Joseph Campbell and Vladimir Propp.

2.3 Campbell's The Hero's Journey

Joseph Campbell's structuralist theory of the monomyth, or more famously known as the hero's journey, proposed in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) has been a highly influential structuralist approach to literary narratives. Campbell suggests a common structure of all myths produced by mankind which he derives from the structure of rites of passage. As such, Campbell's theory is part of the structuralist tradition within literature as previously elucidated. Due to this connection between the anthropologists and the Hero's Journey, the application of both these theories in this thesis appears even more fitting. Campbell writes that, "the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation–initiation–return:* which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (30). Campbell ascribes a number of specific events to the three phases of the monomyth, which shall be presented subsequently[10].

The first of the three stages in the hero's journey begins with what Campbell terms "the call to adventure" (49), during which the hero stumbles across another world (51). The hero's "familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; [and] the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand" (51). The call "signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual centre of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (58). Thereafter, the hero generally refuses the call (59)

[10] For a complete visualisation of the parallel structure of rites of passage the hero's journey see chapter 6.1.

as it takes courage to leave one's familiar surroundings, values and beliefs behind and to "give up what one takes to be one's own interests" (60). The heroes that take up the call and decide to venture on a journey into the unknown (69), meet a "protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (69). According to Campbell, this figure is a symbol of the good-naturedness of fate or destiny (71). With fate on the hero's side, he encounters "the 'threshold guardian' at the entrance to the zone of magnified power" (77). This crossing of the first threshold into the other world is always "a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown" (82) and the land that can be found beyond the boundaries of the familiar sphere "are free fields for the projections of unconscious content" (79). As a last stage of the departure, Campbell discusses the idea of the "Belly of the Whale" (90), into which the hero has disappeared from the world known to him. This image conveys the underlying idea that the hero discards himself of his self (92) and thus, "the passage of the threshold is a form of self-annihilation" (91) which gives way to self-reinvention and growth which the previous world could not offer.

After crossing the threshold, the hero has departed his own world and the initiation phase follows. During this phase, the hero faces a road of trials on which "dragons have…to be slain and surprising barriers passed–again, again, and again" (109). When the hero has stood his ground in all the trials and passed all the tests along the way (109), the "ultimate adventure … is commonly represented as a mystical marriage … of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World" (109). This symbolical marriage stands for the hero's proficiency in matters of life (120). What follows this is the so-called "atonement with the father" (126), which signifies the reconciliation with a father figure. This step in the hero's journey is essential as it allows the hero "a better balanced, more realistic view of the father, and therewith of the world" (130), thus only through atonement with the father does the hero ultimately outgrow his old self fully. This atonement or "at-one-ment" (130) as Campbell writes, is accomplished, when "the hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source

…, [then, he] beholds the face of the father, understands – and the two are atoned" (147). At last, the hero has reached "Apotheosis" (149), meaning he has obtained god-like status through the trials and tests he has passed (150-151). Closely tied in with the stage of Apotheosis is the idea that through his achievements, the hero has found "the ultimate boon" (172) which lies in the ever-lasting divine source. Campbell explains this as follows,

> The gods and goddesses…are to be understood as embodiments and custodians of the elixir of Imperishable Being but not themselves the Ultimate in its primary state. What the hero seeks through his intercourse with them is therefore not finally themselves, but their grace, i.e., the power of their sustaining substance. This miraculous energy-substance and this alone is Imperishable; the names and forms of the deities who everywhere embody, dispense, and represent it come and go (181-182).

At last, the hero has passed all tests and trials and has received the gift of the divine source itself.

After the hero has gone through all the trials and achieved the goal of his quest, "the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy" (193). Nonetheless, according to Campbell, not all heroes succeed in returning as in several myths, the hero is said to reside still with the gods (193). If the hero refuses the return, the transmitting of the newly gained knowledge and experience is also rejected. Those heroes that have won over the favour of the gods may return without being pursued (196-197). Nevertheless, if the hero returns with the trophy he has won against the will of the gods, Campbell presents two possible magical flights (197). Either one "in which objects are left behind to speak for the fugitive and thus delay pursuit" (200) or another "one in which a number of delaying obstacles are tossed behind by the wildly fleeing hero" (201). Campbell points out that the return of the hero is to be understood as a human rather than a divine achievement (207), in which we can "seek the practical teaching

for historic man" (207).[11] Another possible step in the return of the hero is the "Rescue from Without" (192), which denotes the possibility for the hero to be rescued or, in other words, that "the world may have to come and get him" (Campbell 207). The returned hero faces the challenges of accepting the simple world he left behind and of having to pass on his learnings. Campbell poignantly summarises these difficulties when he remarks that,

> The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real …, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life. Why re-enter such a world? Why attempt to make plausible, or even interesting, to men and women consumed with passion, the experience of transcendental bliss? (218)

Ultimately, the hero is obliged to fit himself back into society despite the growth and change he has gone through on his journey. In other words, "the returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world" (226). He has become the "master of the two worlds" (229) and is capable to distinguish between them effortlessly (229). This achievement endows the hero with "the freedom to live" (238). Without fearing the impact of his actions (239) he can "rest… them and their fruits on the knees of the Living God" (239). This unburdening of responsibility of the hero signifies freedom in life.

Although the steps of the hero's journey have been presented as a seemingly rigid order, it is necessary to clarify that they may differ from story to story. This is to say that certain elements might be enlarged while others may be merged (246), presenting a theory that can be widely applied. Campbell's theory is one of two structuralist theories employed to analyse the structural place of liminal spaces in the three fantasy works.

[11] This reveals the relevance that the second research question of this thesis has, as it will uncover the said potential "practical teaching" (Campbell 207) of the three fantasy stories for the reader.

2.4 Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale*

In this section, the structure of fairy tales as proposed by Vladimir Propp, in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale*, and Terence Patrick Murphy, in *The Fairy Tale and Plot Structure* (2015) will be presented. This theory, like Campbell's monomyth, will inform the structural analysis of liminal spaces in the three fantasy stories.

The folklorist and structuralist Vladmir Propp famously defined the basic structure of all fairy tales[12] as consisting of thirty-one functions.[13] According to Propp, a function is "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action" (21). Further, functions "constitute the fundamental components of a tale" (21). Just as Campbell's hero's journey, also Propp's theory of the thirty-one functions will be illustrated as pertaining to the three phases of rites of passage[14] as suggested by Van Gennep. Although, this grouping of the functions is not part of the original theory,[15] understanding the theory as such in connection to Campbell and van Gennep will simplify the use of all three theories alongside each other in the following chapter.

The first phase of separation contains the functions one to ten of Propp's theory. At first, a family member departs, which Propp terms "absentation" (Propp 26). Thereafter, the hero faces a prohibition which he violates (26-27). At this point in the fairy tale the villain enters the stage (27-28), "who may be a dragon, a devil, bandits, a witch, or a stepmother, etc." (27). The villain seeks out information from a victim that may help "finding out the location of children, or sometimes of precious objects" (28). After receiving this information (28), the villain masks himself "to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or of his belongings" (29) and the victim falls for the masquerade (30). Up until now, all the action described pertains to what

[12] For a brief historical outline of the genre of the fairy tale see 6.2.
[13] Propp's theory can be seen in the broader picture of Structuralism as Bertens remarks that "in a simple, chronologically told fairy tale without flashbacks or other narrative tricks, the *syuzhet* is identical with the *fabula*" (33). Bertens argues that Propp's theory is derived from this distinction made in early structuralism (33).
[14] It is noteworthy, that originally according to Propp the plot of a tale "could be broken down into six shorter plot sequences … [namely] Preparation, Complication, Transference, Struggle, Return and Recognition" (Murphy 35).
[15] See 6.1 for a visualisation of the parallels of all three theories.

Propp terms the "preparatory part" (31), the following eighth function, however, is decisive for the movement of the plot. At this point in the story, either the villain acts by inflicting damage unto a family, this may take the form of an abduction, sabotage, theft, physical injury, murder, enchantment and the like (31-34) or a family member recognises a lack or a wish for something (35-36). Thereafter, the "misfortune or lack is made known…[and] the hero is approached with a request or command" (36), upon which he is sent away or given permission to leave (36). In tales where the hero goes in search for something, the tenth function consists of the hero choosing or accepting his fate, otherwise this function is missing (38).

This second phase of separation or limen comprises Propp's functions eleven to nineteen. At the beginning of this stage, the hero ventures out, faces tests from the donor (39), which paves the way for gaining "either a magical agent or helper" (39). Subsequently, the hero responds to the donor's actions (42), whereafter, he "acquires the use of a magical agent" (43). The following function fifteen designates the hero reaching the other land that contains the object of his search (50). Here, "the hero and the villain join in direct combat" (51), in which the hero first suffers a visible injury (52-53) and eventually prevails over the villain (53). According to Propp, in the nineteenth function, in which the original affliction or deficiency is dissolved (53) "the narrative reaches its peak" (53).

The hero's return contains the last eleven functions of Propp's theory, functions twenty to thirty-one. On his return, parallel to the hero's journey,[16] "the hero is pursued" (56) and ultimately rescued on his flight (57). When the hero reaches home (60), he is initially not recognized and an untrue hero "presents unfounded claims" (60). Another trial awaits the hero, namely proving to be the rightful hero. Thus, he is given a test which he passes (60-62). Thereafter the wound that distinguishes him from the untrue hero is discovered (62). At last,

[16] Although Campbell distinguishes between a pursued hero that leaves without the gods' will on his side and one that is permitted to leave (185-186).

the hero "is given a new appearance" (63), the villain is penalised (63) and the hero, who has proven himself in all the trials, marries and takes his rightful place on the throne (63-64).

In Terence Patrick Murphy's *The Fairy Tale and Plot Structure*, the Proppian theory is applied to a number of fairy tales and ascertains, contrary to Propp's rigid structure consisting of thirty-one functions, that there are fairy tales with fewer functions. Based on Propp's theory, Murphy proposes plot genotypes, which allow for a "much more flexible interpretation of Propp's morphology" (161-162). According to Murphy, a plot genotype represents a variation to the thirty-one function plot (162), "such genotypes would include the 31-function structure of *Cinderella*; the 23-function plot structure of *Puss-in-Boots*; the 18-function plot structure of *Little Red Riding Hood*; and the 11-function plot structure of *The Story of the Three Bears*" (162) which Murphy analyses in his work. The variations or plot genotypes can occur through four different methods. These are

> *deletion*—some narratives are missing a short sequence of Propp's 31 functions; *repetition*—some narratives repeat functions within the same story; *inversion*—some narratives include functions reversed for narrative effect, for example, when a good character pretends to be bad or vice versa; and *translocation*—when motifs break off from a narrative and attach to other tales. (Ready 473)

In this thesis, the Proppian theory of fairy tale structure will be employed, similar to Murphy's interpretation, as a guiding framework rather than a strict doctrine that necessitates a one-to-one application. There are two underlying reasons for this approach. Firstly, while traditional fairy tales rigidly adhered to a moral framework, with heroes symbolizing the good and villains representing the bad, the analysis in this thesis will prioritize character development over morality. From this perspective, the inflexible structure of the Proppian theory becomes less crucial. Secondly, within the intricate modern world depicted in the three fantasy stories, morality has evolved into a complex entity that no longer adheres to a simplistic binary of good and bad. This further justifies the flexible application of the theory.

3 Liminality in the Three Works of Fantasy

In the following, the three fantasy novels will be analysed with regards to the structural place that the liminal spaces take within the respective plot structure, taking the concept of liminality as well as Campbell's and Propp's previously laid out structural theories into account. Further, the impact that these liminal spaces have on the protagonists' personal development will be illuminated. It is also important to mention at the beginning of this chapter that liminal spaces, meaning transitional spaces that promote personal growth, are not liminal per se, but liminal through their relationship with the individual, in our case the protagonists.[17] Since personal growth is highly individual, also those spaces that promote growth are individual. Therefore, in the analysis of liminality only those spaces that promote the personal development of the protagonists will be considered liminal. Those spaces in which no development occurs are static non-liminal spaces. The chapter will conclude with a brief discussion of the ways in which liminality in the three works of fantasy can be seen as representative of liminal life phases in general.

3.1 Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach*

At first, the liminal spaces of Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach* will be analysed. While the story begins in the liminal space of James' family home by the sea where development, the house of James' aunts which he moves into thereafter bears similarity to a liminal space but does not allow the necessary personal development to be considered liminal. The most significant liminal space of this work pertains to the peach itself with the help of which James goes on a journey. Subsequently, the crossing of the first threshold into the liminal space of the peach will be analysed. This will be followed by the analysis of the three trials that James passes on his journey, namely the shark attack, the Centipede Rescue and the Cloud Men attack. The

[17] This idea is taken from the anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen whose classification of the subject concerned with liminality is laid out in chapter 2.1 and includes "single individuals" (16).

section will conclude with investigating the peach's landing on the Empire State Building, representing the boy's return into society from the liminal space.

At the beginning of the story, before the Proppian absentation (26)[18] of James' parents through their death in the rhinoceros accident (Dahl 1), we learn that James grew up in a house situated at the shore. The "house beside the sea" (Dahl 1) represents a liminal space situated on the border between land and sea. Furthermore, the shore represents a horizontal liminal space in which movement and development are possible for young James as "there were always plenty of other children for him to play with, and there was the sandy beach for him to run about on, and the ocean to paddle in" (1).[19] Thus, this first liminal space has had a positive and developmentally sound impact on the young protagonist, standing in stark contrast to the hilltop where his aunts' house is situated.

Also, the house of Aunt Spiker and Aunt Sponge is a liminal space located in an in-between space of a hilltop between sky and earth. Within the story structure, this liminal space is situated before James' call to adventure in Campbell's theory but between the absentation and the interdiction[20] in the theory according to Propp. Noteworthy is the fact, that this "queer ramshackle house on the top of a high hill in the south of England" (2) is a vertical in-between zone which allows for little movement and almost no development of the "seven-year-old orphan who lives with two cruel aunts" (West 220).[21] The prison-like character of this second space reveals itself as "James [is] never allowed to go down off the top of that hill" (3) and the fact that "his room was as bare as a prison cell" (2). The contrast between the liminal space of James' family home, where the child developed, and the non-liminal space of the aunts' house,

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[18] See 6.1 for a list of all thirty-one function according to Propp.
[19] See Figure 1 in 6.3 for a Diagram depicting this horizontal liminal space of the house of James' parents.
[20] Although the interdiction and the violation thereof are non-essential for the discussion of the liminal spaces in James and the Giant Peach, it is striking that they both occur in the story making it resemble the beginning of a fairy tale. The interdiction is posed by the "old man in a crazy dark-green suit" (10), who gives James the green seeds and tells him, "Don't tear the paper" (13) of the bag as "whoever they meet first, be it bug, insect, animal, or tree, that will be the one who gets the full power of their magic" (13). Only moments later, "the paper bag burst[s] open…and the thousands of tiny green things [are] scattered in all directions" (13-14).
[21] See Figure 2 in 6.3 for a Diagram depicting the vertical and non-liminal space of the house that James lives in with his aunts.

where development is not possible, introduces the importance of liminal spaces which promote development. However, this stagnant non-liminal period in James' development ends soon with the arrival of the giant peach in the garden which sets the process of James' character development into motion.

Night-time constitutes another liminal space in Dahl's story, liminal in the sense as it denotes the unconscious time between two conscious moments of waking in a person's life. In terms of story structure, the first notable nocturnal scene takes place shortly before James crosses the first threshold and is taken from Campbell's theory (77). After a long day of hosting visitors for the attraction of the peach, the greedy aunts ask James "to go outside and pick up all the banana skins and orange peel and bits of paper that the crowd … left behind" (26). The narrator informs the reader about the influence that this type of liminal space usually has, namely that "most people–and especially small children–are often quite scared of being out of doors alone in the moonlight" (27) and this is also true for young James (27). The second night-time scene takes place on the peach as it is being flown by the seagulls across the Atlantic Ocean and structurally belongs to the road of trials. The child formerly scared of the night with "large frightened eyes, hardly daring to breathe" (27) has now evolved into a person that bravely acts against the attack from the Cloud Men[22] (104). Also, Mark I. West considers the night-time a transitional liminal space, as he remarks that,

> by the morning, [James] is ready to reenter society. He is no longer the miserable, guilt-ridden, withdrawn character that he was in the beginning of the book. He has become, instead, a cheerful and capable boy who desires the company of other children. (223)

Although it is not the liminal character of the night itself that teaches James responsibility and courage, the nocturnal setting of the whole story emphasises the importance of personal development for the protagonist's subconscious.

[22] The attack by the Cloud Men will subsequently be further discussed. Therefore, in order to avoid repetition, the discussion of this trial is omitted at this point.

Apart from the previously discussed liminal spaces, the major liminal space on which the majority of the story's events take place is unsurprisingly the giant peach itself. During this liminal period, James, like "the novices [experiencing a rite of passage, is] … outside society, and society has no power over them" (Gennep 114), which allows the boy to undergo a significant psychological development. Destiny seems to call James to the peach, "as though drawn by some powerful magnet" (28). In contradiction to Campbell's theory (see Campbell 59), the boy does not refuse the call to adventure and shortly after receiving it, starts crawling inside the giant fruit (30), thereby as according to Campbell crossing the threshold into the liminal space (77). On the inside of the fruit, the young child finds a "holistic family unit into which the orphan…can integrate" (Curtis 362). Moreover, "the magic vehicle of the peach transports James out of his miserable existence" (Tal 269). In the following, the three trials that James faces on his journey across the Atlantic Ocean will be discussed as they all take place on the peach. From these trials, another feature of Campbell's theory (97), the influence that the liminal space of the peach has on James' life can be deducted. During the whole journey across the Atlantic James "passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner, *Forest* 94) and he also finds himself in a "liminal period, [in which he is] structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (Turner, *Forest* 95). Further, despite experiential and age differences between the insects and James, they resemble a group of passengers during the liminal phase of a rite of passage as they are "a community or comity of comrades and not a structure of hierarchically arrayed positions" (Turner, *Forest* 100). Thus, James' traveling adventure strongly resembles the liminal phase in the anthropological rite of passage according to van Gennep and Turner.

The first test that James must pass is the shark attack out on the Ocean. After the peach has flattened James' aunts and has left the hilltop (49), it tumbles down and down until "it hit[s] the water with a colossal splash" (51). Soon after, sharks appear in the water (65). Thereupon, the previously scared young boy transforms into a brave character and the crew of insects relies

on him to devise a plan as "he was the captain know, and everyone knew it" (74). With his idea to attract seagulls with the Earthworm and subsequently tie them to the stem of the peach using thread made by the Silkworm and the Spider, James takes responsibility for his friends (70-71). Eventually, "James manages to turn the peach into an airship by tying hundreds of seagulls to the stem of the peach" (West 223) and saves his friends from the danger of the sharks. Thus, the first trial that James passes has a substantial influence on James' perception of his self-efficacy and autonomy in the world, which up until then have been entirely unused character traits in the monotonous, obedient and uneventful life with his aunts.

The second test that James is challenged with consists of the Centipede rescue. The overly excited Centipede falls off the peach whilst dancing (95) and without hesitation and "in an almost superhuman display of quick thinking" (Curtis 365), James decides to go after him with a thread from the Silkworm tied to him in order to save his new friend (Dahl 95). The boy tells the remaining insects, "The rest of you hold on to Silkworm so I don't pull her over with me, and later on, if you feel three tugs on the string, start hauling me up again!" (Dahl 95). The mission is successful and soon James and the Centipede return to the peach together. This incident reveals that "James continues to exhibit his own growth in terms of the responsibility that he assumes for his insect companions" (Curtis 365). It is necessary to put this growth into perspective. Even though taking care of one another is relatively new to James after living with his cruel and uncaring aunts, he shows love for his surrogate family without indecision. Taking the Centipede's character flaw of rudeness and egoism into consideration, which is the reason for the third and last trial that will be discussed in subsequent, James' self-sacrificial act of love reveals his unconditional devotion towards his new friends.

The third and last trial is the Cloud Men attack of the peach. After the Centipede insults the Cloud Men in a boastful manner (103), they "grab… great handfuls of hailstones and rush… to the edge of the cloud and start… throwing them at the peach, shrieking with fury all the time" (103-104). Thereafter, James orders his friends to seek shelter inside the peach (104). The

danger is not fully averted yet though, as the giant peach crushes into a rainbow that is being painted by the Cloud Men (109-110). In an unfortunate series of events, "the ropes that the Cloud Men had been using for lowering the rainbow [get] tangled up with the silk strings" (110) and one of the Cloud Men attempts a descend onto the peach using one of the silk strings (110). However, "it is up to James once again to think on his feet in order to save himself and his friends" (Curtis 366) and James orders the Centipede to bite through that string to avoid the danger (111). Once more, thanks to James' wit and autonomous thinking the danger is averted. All three of these trials which James undergoes during the transitional liminal period of his rite of passage reveal James' character development. Thus, the liminal space of the journey on the peach teaches James above all autonomous thinking, taking responsibility and action for his friends and loving them unconditionally.

At last, James crosses the return threshold which is a feature of rites of passage as well as Campbell's and Propp's theory. He intended their landing differently, as he asks the Centipede "to cut loose a few seagulls" (122-123) to slowly lower the peach; instead, James is symbolically "detached from the umbilical cord" (West 223) when a passenger plane "slice[s] right through each single one of the silken strings" (126) and the peach lands on top of the Empire State Building. Upon re-entering society, James, too, takes the lead and ensures the company's friendly nature to the police in form of a poem (134-139).

Initially, liminality is set out to have the potential to influence James' development positively as in the living situation with his parents which stands in stark contrast to the development inhibiting living situation with James' aunts on the hilltop. The liminal space of night-time, despite not teaching James anything, helps to underlines the importance of personal growth for the protagonist's subconscious. The three trials that James is challenged with on the liminal space of the giant peach structurally pertain to Campbell's road of trials in the hero's journey (97) have been difficult, "but he bravely and cleverly solves each one" (West 222-223). The praise he receives from the Grasshopper and the Ladybug for his problem-solving, "helps

James gain a sense of self-respect that he never had while he was living with the aunts" (West 223). According to Curtis, "it is magic that accomplishes James's transition from abused orphan to autonomous leader…" (361), or in other words magic has brought James the liminal space of the peach which enables him to develop into a self-reliant and autonomous boy in a safe yet challenging environment. Not only does this major liminal space teach James autonomy, self-confidence, taking responsibility for others and loving his new friends unconditionally, but he also carries these skills with him as he returns to society from his adventure, which as according to Campbell constitutes a major difficulty for a returning hero (218).

3.2 Le Guin's *The Beginning Place*

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* is abundant with liminal spaces. In the novel, two young adults Hugh and Irene are both stuck in the liminal space of the unstimulating suburbia. They individually discover an inspiring magical land and frequently cross the threshold into the liminal space of the beginning place, a forested borderland between reality and the magical place of Mountain Town that also constitutes a liminal space. At last, Hugh is chosen for a quest to free the people of the town from an unnamed fear and the two leave for a journey up the mountain, another liminal space, to fulfil the quest. Also, the whole of the magical world constitutes a liminal space through which the two characters pass, on their way to adulthood that symbolically lies in the city.

Similar to Dahl's novel, in which James finds himself trapped in the house on the hilltop, the two main characters in Le Guin's novel, Hugh and Irene, are trapped in the prison of suburbia that lies in-between the city and the open countryside. This space like the hilltop bears similarities with a liminal space due to its in-betweenness but lacks the central feature of a developmental zone which a liminal space must constitute to the individual. Structurally, suburbia is part of the initial situation according to Propp (25-26) and it dominates the first

section of the departure[23] according to Campbell up until Hugh and Irene set off for their adventure. To the protagonists, suburbia "is a place of stagnation, of being stuck in unproductive patterns of behavior" (McLean 136). Brian Attebery remarks on this topic that

> *The Beginning Place* opens in a setting that is sharply detailed and yet impossible to locate, for it is set in standardized American suburbia. Its supermarkets, freeways, and apartments, its Kensington Heights, Pine View Place, and Raleigh Drive might encircle virtually any medium-to-large city in America. All is bland, uniform, ersatz. It is a horrible place, but no one in the story seems consciously to recognize the horror, not even the hero, Hugh, a young supermarket checker. (114)

Hugh "would rather live in town … [,] get along without a car" (2) and become a librarian (89), but his mother keeps him tied to their suburban living and controls his life due to her mental illness. The empty and consumerist existence that Hugh leads in suburbia, is also evident in his day-to-day work. It is described that "all day he … handled things for sale and the money that bought them, until his mind held nothing else because his hands never held anything else, and yet kept none of it" (2). Eventually, one evening Hugh feels the need to break out of his miserable existence and as a type of subconscious call to adventure, he runs until he reaches the beginning place (4-5). Irene's suburban living situation is doomed, too. Her roommates "Rick and Patsi [are] breaking up, and so no arrangement that involved them as a couple could be good" (69). Later, the reader also learns that her mother lives with an abusive new husband, Victor (72), who has also been sexually assaultive towards Irene several times in the past (72-73). Although Irene's mother is supportive about her moving to the city, telling her daughter that "… [She] ought to move downtown. This is a dump out here" (75), the young woman feels

[23] It is important to note that the structure of the novel is complex in the sense that two different structural claims can be made. On the one hand, it can be argued that the departure begins with the crossing of the threshold into the beginning place and the separation period constitutes the entire time that Hugh and Irene spend in the magical world before returning home to reality. On the other hand, also a threshold is crossed when Hugh and Irene leave Mountain Town for the liminal space of the mountain in order to fulfil the quest. The two differing structural approaches, however, join up again as the crossing of the return threshold is the same moment for both interpretations.

the obligation to live close by, so that "her mother … [has] somebody around to depend on" (73). Interestingly, Irene found the beginning place years before Hugh and at the time it represented a safe haven to the girl whose friend "Doris … [was] raped" (90). To sum it up, both Irene and Hugh lead unhappy and lonely lives, "stuck in suburbia, in the realm of disenfranchised mothers, and in adolescence–unable to get to the desired 'city', which represents the place where they can be sexual, loving adults" (Franko 307). The subsequent discovery of the beginning place as the doorstep to another world that enables personal development brings a sense of relief to the two young adults.

The entirety of the magical world, starting with the woods behind which Mountain Town lies and reaching over the Mountain and the lands in-between to the city of the king, constitutes a liminal space that Hugh and Irene enter by crossing the threshold and venture through on their way to maturity. Characteristic of the magical land, which is also referred to as the evening land (63), is its "eternal twilight" (63). This feature further underlines the liminal character of the place as twilight is the light between day and night or vice versa. Also characteristically, time passes slower (24) on the other side of the threshold, giving the two young adults additional time to grow as people in the liminal space. The journey through this magical land structurally pertains to the second phase, the initiation of the rite of passage as proposed by Arnold van Gennep. Parallel to this, in Campbell's hero's journey the magical world takes on the story's events from the crossing of the threshold until the crossing of the return threshold in Propp's functions eleven to nineteen as pointed out in section 2.4. Initially, as in Campbell's theory, Hugh refuses the call (Campbell 59) and claims that he is not who the people of Tembreabrezi think he is (86). Subsequently, he at last promises to return in order to fulfil the task and free the world from the unnamed and ambiguous fear (90). Before Irene and Hugh's eventual departure[24] from Mountain Town, with which their road of trials begins, Hugh

[24] The departure mentioned here refers to the second interpretation of the novel's structure as indicated above.

is given a sword by Lord Horn which can be understood as the magical agent from the donor with which the heroic deed is fulfilled.

It appears that the characters journey into their own subconscious, face their fears and eventually overcome them. This psychological reading is based on the twice occurring sentence in the novel, “There is more than one road that leads to the City” (123; 183). First uttered by Lord Horn in conversation with Irene, it refers to the city in the magical land. Strikingly, this same sentence also concludes the novel when Hugh and Irene drive into the city and leave their suburban lives behind.[25] This suggests that the entire journey undertaken by the protagonists has been a steppingstone on their way to the city. Susan McLean argues in a similar way that “the City, which lies to the north, represents growth and maturity …, [and] … [u]ntil Hugh and Irena have faced their own fears by journeying west … the road north is closed to them” (McLean 136). Moreover, the boundaries between magic and reality are already blurred at the beginning of the novel, when Hugh arrives in the suburbs and sees “the city in a golden haze” (3). This description of the real city gives it a magical character and additionally supports the ambiguous and psychological reading of the fantasy story. With regards to the influence that the liminal space of the magical world has on the lives of the two protagonists, it can be said that it provides the protagonists a space to face their inner monsters. They resurface from the magical world having gained autonomy and agency with matters regarding their own lives tools which help them move to the city.

The beginning place denotes the zone between reality and the magic world. It can be seen as a borderland and indicates another liminal space that both characters discover while “running away” (90). The entrance to it is fittingly referred to as the "threshold” (19) the translation of the Latin noun ‘limen’ from which ‘liminal’ derives. This threshold clearly

[25] In the eyes of Mclean, “the plot involves a circular journey” (134), like many of Le Guin’s stories (134). Hugh and Irene travel from suburbia via the magical world to the city which lies adjacent to suburbia. This circular journey underlines the necessity for the protagonists to travel via the magical world although someone else might not have had to take the detour, as “there is more than one road that leads to the City” (Le Guin 123; 183). See 6.4 for a diagram that shows this circular journey.

represents that in Campbell's theory and the crossing thereof represents "a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown" (82). Frequently visited by Hugh after his discovery, the space allows both protagonists a peaceful refuge when their lives begin to complicate. For Irene this complication begins at age thirteen (30). The influence that this liminal space has had on her life is that of providing a space where "she did what she felt like" (30) and further where "she was her self,[26] her own" (30) and would "dance the endless dance" (30). Therefore, Irene also calls the place the 'ain country' derived from a Scottish folk song (110), meaning "my own country" (110). Hugh discovers the beginning place much later at age twenty. He formerly "had never got anywhere before, no place to hide, no place to be" (10) and thus the calmness of the woods allows him to think. For a person whose "mind would not work in a hurry, would not rush" (57), the additional time in the beginning place in which time passes slower is a gift and permits him to "think things out" (57).

In the view of Brian Attebery,

> By escaping to the other world, both are granted respite from the demands of others and an opportunity to examine their lives from a distance. The inner strength that both possess is allowed to surface. Within the twilight world Irene and Hugh can be seen to stretch and straighten like newly emerged seedlings. (118)

Furthermore, the revitalising character of the place is also expressed in the refreshing water, which both Hugh and Irene consume upon entering the beginning place as a kind of "ceremonial first drink" (108) and the deep sleeps that the place allows its visitors. Hugh sleeps so deeply in the beginning place, after waking up "he could hardly raise his hand at first" (66). As a space for Hugh and Irene to recover and reflect on their lives, the beginning place constitutes a liminal space as according to Turner, in which "those ideas, sentiments, and facts that had been hitherto

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[26] The self is to be understood in the Jungian sense as "a totality consisting of conscious and unconscious contents that dwarfs the ego … in scope and intensity" ("self"). Further, "the maturation of the self is the individuation process, which is the goal of the healthy personality" ("self").
[26] This perspective has been discussed in chapter 3.4.

… bound up in configurations and accepted unthinkingly are, as it were, resolved into their constituents" (Turner, *Forest* 105). The beginning place represents an escape and refuge from the dangers and expectations of the real world. It allows Hugh and Irene to shut down and enjoy the quiet, calm break from their complicated, conflict-ridden and anxious young adult lives.

The victory over the evil monster that keeps Mountain Town in fear and cuts it off the rest of the magical world takes place on the liminal space of the mountain. Structurally, this battle with the villain represents functions sixteen to eighteen in Propp's theory (51-53).[27] Symbolically, the two young adults face "the monster that demands human sacrifice [which] is the image of what Hugh and Irena may become if they continue to live for their parents' sake instead of for their own" (McLean 140). Thus, the unexplained fear that haunts Mountain Town and the fact that "all the gates of Tembreabrezi are locked" (40) metaphorically express the fear within Hugh and Irene that keeps them from leaving their instable mothers behind in suburbia and take the road to the city. Therefore, all the roads in the magical world are blocked. The symbolical meaning of the fight with the monster is also expressed through Hugh's initial dejection upon suffering defeat against it. "Nothing mattered. He was defeated. He had run away and hid, again, and he was safe and always would be safe and never free" (149-150). Hugh fears that he might be forever trapped in his suburban life. At last, the two characters find the monster hiding away in a cave on the mountainside. Also, Irene is ready to move on, she lures the monster out of its cave and admits "I was sick of being frightened. I got mad" (162). She, too, has had enough and is ready to move past her fear for her mother's home life and her personal fear surrounding sexual abuse (McLean 135). Finally, "Hugh pushe[s] the sword upward into the white, wrinkled belly and drag[s] the blade down with all his strength" (155). Carol Franko supports the argument that they each fight their own personal monster (312) by pointing out that to Irene the monster appears female as she believes that it has "a woman's

[27] See 6.1 for a list of all the Proppian functions that put functions sixteen to eighteen into context.

arms” (156) and “breasts, pointed like a sow’s teats” (156), whilst Hugh believes the creature to be male (162-163). Our hero, Hugh, is branded in the fight (Propp 52-53) with the monster suffering “one broken [rib] and one cracked” (181) and an unshakable cold feeling in his body (159; 170). Nevertheless, Hugh and Irene have grown personally, have faced their fears and gained willpower and personal strength. Finally, they can detach themselves from their mothers.

The liminal spaces of the beginning place, the mountain and the magical land as a whole are transitional steps on the protagonists’ way to the city. As such they resemble the middle section in a rite of passage. These liminal spaces give Hugh and Irene the space, time and necessary distance from their home lives to reflect on them and eventually grow out of their toxic living situations. The two have always wanted to move to the city but their respective lives have trapped them in the non-liminal static space of suburbia where they cannot develop the necessary tools to escape and instead, stagnate in a sphere of young adulthood like the aunts’ house in James’ case. The magical world allows them to learn these necessary tools. While the beginning place provides a calm space and allows them to relax and recover from their strenuous, hectic young adult lives, the quest they go on in order to free the roads to Mountain Town makes them face and overcome their personal fears and reveals their own willpower to them. In the end, they reach the long-awaited city which represents the maturity of adulthood together and with this re-entering into society, their rite of passage into adulthood is concluded.

3.3 Gaiman’s *Coraline*

Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline* tells the story of a young curious girl, an only child to workaholic parents. Stumbling upon another world, the girl soon is forced to fight the evil other mother in order to free her parents from captivity in the other world, thereby learning to love her flawed caretakers unconditionally and to defend her own identity against outside threats. The story includes several liminal spaces situated in the *other world*. These take the form of a corridor between the worlds, a mirror and an empty apartment. In the following, these liminal spaces

will be analysed in this order, starting with the major liminal space of the other world. Again, the focus of the analysis lies on the structural place of the liminal spaces as well as the impact they have on the life of the protagonist Coraline.

The work's major liminal space, pertaining to the initiation phase which "has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (Turner, *Forest* 94) in van Gennep's theory, is the phase of adventure in which Coraline has escaped her boring life and has entered a new sphere namely that of the *other world.* Like a rite of passage, this phase is characterized "by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns" (Turner, *Forest* 99). After entering the other world, Coraline realises that "she [knows] where she [is]: she [is] in her own home" (33), thus the alternative reality the girl has entered is a mirrored version of her very own familiar surroundings. This liminal space mainly impacts Coraline's identity formation. In the words of David Rudd, the novel "is centrally concerned with how one negotiates one's place in the world; how one is recognised in one's own right rather than being either ignored on the one hand, or stifled on the other" (160). This influence of the other world on Coraline's identity is conveyed through the recurring theme of names.

At the beginning of the novel, the neighbours repeatedly "get … Coraline's name wrong" (4), pronouncing it Caroline instead of Coraline (4). This mispronunciation indicates that the character's identity is not established enough yet to be recognized as such by others. Furthermore, when Coraline attempts to draw the mist that surrounds the house before going on her adventure (20), "Coraline writes the word MIST on the blank page, but the 'I' has fallen out of the word" (Parsons et al. 377), underlining that the self of the young character remains yet to "be aligned with the rules of symbolic culture" (Parsons et al. 377). Coraline's establishing of her identity in the liminal space also shows in her determination to change back into her own clothes (116). According to Hosseinpour et al., "wearing her own clothes, she feels more confident because she realizes who she is and how important it is to keep and establish her identity" (99). After her adventure, "the characters in the real world now all get Coraline's

unusual name right" (Parsons et al. 382). This suggests that the character's identity formation was successful and Coraline is now perceived by the world for her own unique personality.

Although not a liminal space, another significant indicator of Coraline's search for identity in the other world are the button eyes of all the characters in the alternative reality (34-35; 50). Eyes are commonly associated with being the windows to the soul.[28] The characters in the other world are puppet-like and lack souls, hence also their eyes are missing. Coraline, who promises the other mother to give up her eyes should she fail to find her imprisoned parents and the souls of the three children, establishes her identity by protecting it against the outside threat of her other mother. David Rudd supports this argument (163) and further adds that in this context the homophone of "eye" and "I" (Rudd 163) is significant. Therefore, the loss of the eye also signifies a loss of the I or self. To sum it up, the liminal space of the other world, to which Coraline's explorer spirit gravitates, crucially helps her establish her own identity against the threat of losing herself completely in a cold and hostile world.

The door and the corridor that lies behind it that leads into the other world and the realm of the evil other mother represents another liminal space of the in-between of the real world and the other world. Coraline is called to adventure by stumbling across the entrance to the alternative world whilst she is "count[ing] all the doors and windows" (8). This action of counting is an explorer's game that Coraline's father invents in order to occupy his daughter (8) so that she "leave[s] … [him] alone to work" (8). During the game, the young girl discovers one locked door and learns from her mother that formerly "when this place was just one house…that door went somewhere" (9). Now, however, the house is sectioned off into apartments and the door is out of use (10). Connected to this first discovery of the door and the call to adventure is the interdiction "don't go through the door" (19), which Mr. Bobo delivers to Coraline from his mice. This interdiction and the violation thereof pertain to function two

[28] The association between the eyes and the soul is often traced back to the biblical verses in Matthew 6:22-24.

and three in Propp's theory. The protagonist crosses the threshold and subsequently "returns to her own home and locks the door behind her, blocking the other world out and refusing the call into the liminal space" (McQuinn 17). Coraline only embarks on her adventure and travels through the corridor again when she finds her parents have disappeared from her own world.

Structurally, according to Campbell, the corridor itself takes on the elements of the first crossing of the threshold (77) and the magic flight (196).[29] Initially, the door to the other world is enticing to the bored young girl who thinks it thrilling to be "in danger" (25). Like the beginning place in Le Guin's work, the corridor promises the child an escape from her boring life in which she is perceived to *pester* and *bother* the adults (6; 21). Moreover, "there is a sense of fate that she is meant to find her liminal space there" (McQuinn 15). Coraline's destiny to enter this liminal space is intensified by the fact that the passage is closed off with bricks when her mother first unlocks the door (9), as if it opens only to those that are meant to enter. Parsons et al. argue for a Freudian reading of the novel and claim that the corridor on the return journey home represents a birth channel (382). Nonetheless, it appears as a rather mystified, ambiguous, "very old and very slow" (33) space that also varies in length at each of Coraline's crossings, appearing the longest on her journey home where "it went on for a longer distance than anything could possibly go" (160). Although Coraline hopes she has found a more exciting life through the corridor into the other world, it proves to facilitate her personal growth and identity formation instead, by providing a route into the liminal space of the other world and back.

The mirror, a symbol of identity, represents another liminal space delineating the transition between the self and the other. It first occurs shortly before Coraline crosses the threshold into the other world for the second time in order to find her parents. Coraline discovers her parents trapped in the mirror in her own desolated home "[standing] awkwardly in the reflection of the hall" (63) and asking her for help (63). The sight of her scared parents causes

[29] The magic flight, is also a function in Propp's theory, namely function twenty-one (56).

Coraline to recall the instance when her father got stung by wasps in order to protect her "when … [she] was a little girl" (66). Nonetheless, the only act of bravery was when her father knowingly returned to this place in order to fetch his lost glasses (68).

Similarly, Coraline returns to the other world in order to find her lost parents, because "when you're scared but you still do it anyway*, that's* brave" (69). Locked away in the mirror as a punishment of the other mother, Coraline encounters three children that have suffered the same fate as her. In term of structure, this scene inside the mirror is part of Coraline's road of trials. The children tell the girl that, "'she [(the other mother)] stole our hearts, and she stole our souls, and she took our lives away, and she left us here, and she forgot about us in the dark'" (100). They are stuck in a limbo between life and death, as they are not alive anymore and not dead yet. According to McQuinn, "identity is found or evolves in one's liminal space, but it can also be lost if care is not taken, as Coraline learns from the three ghostly children she meets" (17). Learning of the fate of the children, Coraline makes it her mission not only to find and free her parents but also to reclaim the souls of the children. Thus, "she selflessly helps other children who are in need" (Parsons et al. 375). Returning their souls to the empty hulls of their bodies and thus freeing them from behind the mirror symbolises returning their reflections and selves to them. The liminal space of the mirror teaches Coraline bravery in the first instance in which she sees her parents trapped behind the mirror glass. Experiencing the dark and vacuumed existence of the children in limbo ensures that she feels compassion and takes on responsibility which are important steps on her path of establishing her own identity.

The empty apartment that Coraline enters, which is in-between tenants, can also be seen as a liminal space. The liminal character of the empty apartment becomes clear in the following passage, "There was no furniture in there, only places where furniture had once been. Nothing decorated the walls; there were discoloured rectangles on the walls to show where paintings or photographs had once hung" (128). There are visible signs of the place having been lived in despite its current desolate state. According to Parsons et al., Coraline "knows this help is likely

to be a ‘trick’…but her determination to enter the empty flat regardless indicates the necessity of facing the demon within” (381). This bears similarities to the atonement with the father from Campbell’s theory. In the view of Campbell, atonement with the father figure is characterized by the hero “hav[ing] a faith that the father is merciful” (Campbell 130) and thereby arriving at a “better balanced, more realistic view of the father, and therewith of the world” (Campbell 130). Coraline realises that the other father is a “poor thing” (132) trapped in the claws of the other mother. This helps her understand the other father better and despite his eventual fault of attempting to trap Coraline with him, she still has faith in him as she encourages him to “be brave” (132), just as her real father has taught her (69). The inevitable encounter with Coraline’s other father in the empty apartment teaches the girl to love and appreciate her other father despite his flaws, which is a skill that she takes back into the real world where she can love her parents despite their faults.

To sum up the impact that the liminal spaces have on Coraline’s life, the other world is the sphere that enables Coraline’s identity formation. She becomes her own unique person and is perceived as thus when she re-enters the real world. Similar is the impact that the door and the corridor that lies behind it has on Coraline’s life. They, too, promote the girl’s growth by calling her for her adventure and facilitating a return home when her quest is completed. The mirror teaches Coraline about the consequences of identity loss and changes Coraline in a positive way to a more reliable and empathetic person. In the confrontation with her other father, Coraline learns forgiveness, love and understanding for her imperfect other father.

3.4 Liminality as Representative of Liminal Life Phases

In all the three fantasy novels, the liminal spaces can be seen as fantastic representations of liminal phases in life. This understanding of liminality connects the analysis of the literary works for the purpose of answering the first research question to the potential of those liminality depictions to teach readers the power of liminal spaces for their own life which is the focus of

the second research question. When approached with an understanding of their abundant potential for personal growth, it becomes evident that navigating through unstable and oftentimes unsettling liminal spaces in life can yield a beneficial effect on the individual. Arnold van Gennep writes on this subject, "And there are always new thresholds to cross: the threshold of summer and winter, of a season or a year, of a month or a night; the threshold of birth, adolescence, maturity, and old age; the threshold of death and that of the afterlife – for those who believe in it" (189-190). The undercurrent idea being that life consists of several phases and the bridges in-between are liminal phases. The anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen also points out that liminal phases are part of life. He maintains that "most (if not all) persons can recognize moments or periods in their lives as liminal, where the answers to the challenges one needs to face are simply not offered by any predefined 'structure' (18). In the following, the liminal phases of the three fantasy stories analysed in the previous chapter will be read as representations of liminal life.

In Dahl's work, young, orphaned James Henry Trotter is enslaved and stripped of his autonomy by his cruel aunts. His development into a young autonomous self-reliant boy can be seen representative of the liminal life phase and rite of passage that bridges the time between young childhood, characterized by little to no responsibility, and school age childhood. On his way to the latter, James learns to take responsibility for his insect friends on their transatlantic journey.[30] Furthermore, *Coraline* is set in the summer holidays (191-192), depicting the liminal phase between two school years that all school children experience. This break from school in which Coraline develops, is characterised by a lack of structure which makes the child "structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'" (Turner, *Forest* 95) just as a subject during a rite of

[30] Although it bears little importance for this thesis as the liminal phase of birth is not a stage in which character development occurs, which is the main focus of this thesis, for the sake of presenting a complete argument, the following is noteworthy. Both, the peach and the other world in Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* are regarded by scholars as representations of the womb to which the characters return for a transitional safety and from which they emerge again (Parsons et al. 382; West 220-221). Thus, in these two novels, a representation of the liminal life phase of birth, as also described by van Gennep as a liminal life phase, can be found.

passage. Unlike in *Coraline* and *James and the Giant Peach*, the characters in Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* are not children, but young adults trapped in lives that revolve around their mothers. The work portrays the threshold between young adults and autonomous adults responsible for their own decisions and taking charge of their future. In other words, Hugh and Irene experience the liminal phase between adolescence and mature adulthood. In *The Beginning Place* metaphorical travel language is frequently used such as "choos[ing] pathlessness as if you knew your way" (166). This notion renders the liminal space traversed by Hugh and Irene as symbolic of travel, embodying a transitional stage between the familiar home and the eventual return that many individuals encounter at various points in their lives.

All novels explore the liminal phase of losing one's sense of identity, self and autonomy and regaining it. This process of establishing a more stable and resilient identity can be summarised under the collective term of identity formation. All four protagonists have difficulties regarding their first name which reveals underlying identity issues. While Coraline struggles with people mispronouncing her name (4), James' aunts "never call…him by his real name, but always refer…to him as 'you disgusting little beast' or 'you filthy nuisance' or 'you miserable creature'" (Dahl 2). According to McLean, "initially, both… [Hugh and Irene] dislike their names, he because his name reminds him of the father who abandoned him and she because she prefers her mother's nickname for her, Irena, to her given name of Irene" (138). Although, in the three novels the identity formation rite of passage occurs in the lives of younger protagonists, for whom, perhaps, questions of identity are more pressing and abundant, it can be seen as representative of any stage in life characterised by redefining and rediscovering one's own identity.

4 Learning Potential of Literary Liminality Depictions

In this chapter, as pointed out in the introduction, the focus shifts from the first research aim of determining the structural place of liminal spaces and analysing their impact on the development of the protagonists to the potential that the literary depictions of liminality have with regards to the reader. In order to find a theoretical answer to the second research question, the concept of Literary or Narrative Imagination as proposed by Martha C. Nussbaum, which elucidates the potential of literature to teach its readers empathy, will be used. Also, the learning theory of Constructivism according to Jean Piaget will be presented in order to reveal how the active reading of literature can foster learning. Based on these theoretical considerations, the last section will reveal the learning potential that lies in literary manifestations of liminal spaces for the reader. It appears that readers can, by experiencing the personal development that the protagonists go through in the liminal spaces, learn for themselves how important liminal spaces are for personality growth.

4.1 The Power of Literature according to Nussbaum

As pointed out by Amy Kind, "In various places across her vast corpus, Nussbaum has repeatedly relied on the claim that literature helps to cultivate our capacities for empathy and imagination" (263).[31] This power inherent to literature shall be briefly elucidated taking into consideration two of the philosopher's major works. In *Poetic Justice – The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1995), Nussbaum maintains that novels have the power to teach their readers empathy. In this work Nussbaum is primarily concerned with the value of literary imagination for legal policy makers. She believes that considering the struggles that fictional

[31] Kind regards Nussbaum's theory of the Narrative Imagination a mere claim. Nonetheless, the link that will be drawn between Nussbaum's theory and Piaget's Constructivism at the end of section 4.2 will reveal how Nussbaum's theory is not only solidly founded in itself and manifested in two extensive works namely her *Poetic Justice* and *Cultivating Humanity* but also stands the test of combining it with an unrelated theory from developmental psychology.

characters face can reveal an ethics that should precede legal regulations (xvi). Nussbaum borrows the idea that literature "can provide essential ingredients in a rational argument" (xiii) from Walt Whitman[32]. On the power of literature she manifests that

> Literature focuses on the possible, inviting its readers to wonder about themselves. … Unlike most historical works, literary works typically invite their readers to put themselves in the place of people of many different kinds and to take on their experiences. In their very mode of address to their imagined reader, they convey the sense that there are links of possibility, at least on a very general level, between the characters and the reader. (5)

Thus, from her point of view, literature can offer the lessons of self-reflection and empathy to its readers. Even though there might be novels with more or less value to their readers, the genre of the novel "generally constructs empathy and compassion in ways highly relevant to citizenship" (10).[33] She concedes that "novel-reading will not give us the whole story about social justice" (12), and yet maintains that it may facilitate the process by revealing possible paths to a more socially just world (12). Against this theoretical background, the potential for the reader to learn from the liminality representation of the fantasy works by Dahl, Le Guin and Gaiman becomes apparent.

In *Cultivating Humanity - A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997), Nussbaum argues that Colleges and Universities ought to prepare students to become responsible world citizens. World citizenship, coined by Diogenes the Cynic (Nussbaum 56) signifies "a stance of detachment from uncritical loyalty to one's own way [, nationality and

[32] Walt Whitman understood the poets as the political pioneers of his country, which had only recently with the end of the British-American war become independent from England (Fluck 10) and thus was a young democracy at the time of his work. He ascribed a particularly powerful role to the poet namely that of "the arbiter of the diverse" (Nussbaum xiii) and "the equalizer of his age and land" (Nussbaum xiii). In her *Poetic Justice* Nussbaum continues Whitman's argument concerning the essential role of literary imagination for the democratic citizen.

[33] In her work, Nussbaum focusses on "the realist Anglo-American novel, and in particular on a group of novels with social and political themes" (Nussbaum 10). Nonetheless, based on her argument "that the genre [of the novel] itself, on account of some general features of its structure, generally constructs empathy and compassion in ways highly relevant to citizenship" (Nussbaum 10), the application of her theory to the genre of the fantasy novels can be justified.

culture] [which] promotes the kind of evaluation that is truly reason based" (Nussbaum 58). In order to cultivate humanity, she regards "three capacities" (9) as indispensable. These are "the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions" (9), the ability to view oneself "as human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (10) and narrative imagination, meaning "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself" (10). Thus, in this work, the potential that lies in literature is extended from its value for legal concerns as laid out above to its power of forming cosmopolitans. According to Nussbaum, citizens need to acquire knowledge about "how to be a human being capable of love and imagination" (14); to this end, "literature makes an especially rich contribution" (86). Nussbaum draws on the nursery rhyme "Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are" to show that narrative can already teach young children this crucial empathy (89). She expounds that "Children wonder about the little star. In so doing, they learn to imagine that a mere shape in the heavens has an inner world, in some way mysterious, in some ways like their own" (89). On a more general level, literature "inspires intense concern for the fate of characters and defines those characters as containing a rich inner life, not all of which is open to view" (90). This has the potential to imbue readers with insight into the profound subjective experience of others, fostering a compassionate understanding of those individuals whose concealed emotional landscapes may evade casual observation. Nussbaum illuminates that even the ancient tragedy changed the perspective of its spectators by

> ask[ing] the future male citizen of ancient Athens to identify himself not only with those he might in actual fact become—beggars, exiles, generals, slaves—but also with many who in some sense he can never be, such as Trojans and Persians and Africans, such as wives and daughters and mothers. (Nussbaum, *Citizenship* 152)

With an active Literary or Narrative Imagination, it does not only become possible to negotiate interests and enter discussions "in a pluralistic democratic society that is part of an even more complex world" (Nussbaum, *Citizenship* 154) but also to accept and appreciate differences with

regards to personalities and personal or political opinions, all of which are important skills for democratic citizenship.

In the context of this thesis, Nussbaum's theory becomes pertinent as it sheds light on the potential impact of liminal spaces within fantasy literature on the reader. Her argument regarding the literary imagination reinforces the notion that literature possesses the ability to enact transformation within readers and foster empathy. From this, the potential for readers to learn about the transformative power of liminal spaces for their own lives but also for the lives of others can be deducted.

4.2 Piaget's Learning Theory of Constructivism

In the learning theory of Constructivism, the process of learning is understood as a process in which the individual learner constructs knowledge (Vollmers 75). Overall, constructivist theories of learning emphasise the importance of the learner's active involvement (Vollmers 75). In the following, the main features of Jean Piaget's Constructivist epistemological theory and their implications for teaching contexts will be outlined due to the theory's major influence on education up to this day. The section will conclude with an explanation of the compatibility between Nussbaum's Literary Imagination and the learning theory of Constructivism.

The Swiss scholar Jean Piaget, who began his scholarly endeavours in the field of biology (Hergenhahn 271),[34] is one of the major theorists for the learning theory of Constructivism. Piaget conceptualised intelligence as an organism's ability to adapt to external circumstances (Hergenhahn 274). Therefore, Piaget's theory of Constructivism is also referred to as genetic epistemology (274), in which a child's[35] "potential to act [on external

[34] To enhance the accessibility of Piaget's theory, which can be perplexing due to his frequent revision of ideas, this paragraph will mainly draw upon B. R. Hergenhahn's reinterpretation of Piaget's work as presented in his *An Introduction to Theories of Learning* (1976). Hergenhahn's reworking of Piaget's theory offers a clearer exposition of Piaget's Constructivism.

[35] Although Piaget's theory predominantly discusses the learning process in children and determines four stages of a child's intellectual development (Hergenhahn 278-281), it will be applied to learning in general as growth

circumstances of the world] in a certain way [is] labelled schema" (274). These schemata or "the potential to perform a class of behaviours" (274) available to the individual undergo changes as the person grows older and external conditions shift (275). The sum of all schemata makes up the individual's "cognitive structure" (275) or in other words the personal temporary learned construct of the world.

In Piaget's theory learning processes pertain either to assimilation or accommodation. If a person makes a new experience, this piece of information may be assimilated into an existing schema which "refers to a kind of matching of the cognitive structure and the physical environment" (Hergenhahn 275). However, the new experience might not fit into any of the existing schema in which case the individual is compelled to modify the cognitive structure to accommodate for the newly gained information of the world (275). It is noteworthy that the process of accommodation "provides a major vehicle for intellectual development" (275). A third process that constitutes "the driving force behind intellectual growth" (276) and thus behind the two processes of assimilation and accommodation is that of perpetual equilibration or balance that the individual naturally strives for between itself and the environment (276), which makes learning the organisms' adaptation process. In Hergenhahn's words, "It is the dual mechanism of assimilation and accommodation, along with the driving force of equilibration, that provides for slow, but steady intellectual growth" (277). It is worth emphasising that intellectual growth and knowledge in the constructivist theory by Piaget is a highly individual enterprise as knowledge of the world does not consist of facts and figures but rather of the individual's growing network, the content of which cannot be deemed right or wrong at any given moment. Thus, "one must determine for each individual learner what kind of cognitive structures they have available and slowly change these structures" (Hergenhahn 281), which leads directly to the teaching implications that can be deducted from Piaget's theory of learning.

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continues throughout a whole person's life even though perhaps with fewer major accommodating processes occurring the older a person becomes.

According to Schunk, there are four implications for successful learning in educational contexts that result from Piaget’s theory. These are firstly, “understand[ing] the cognitive development” (451), which aims at teachers gaining information about the individual stages of knowledge of their respective pupils. This will enable the teacher to choose learning materials according to the individual pupil’s learning progress (Schunk 451). Secondly, it is essential to “keep students active” (Schunk 451) as only in an active mindset, pupils will be able to construct knowledge (Schunk 451). Thirdly, it is advisable for teachers to “create incongruity” (Schunk 451). On this point Schunk elaborates that “ideally, material should not be too readily assimilated but not too difficult to preclude accommodation” (451). In connection to the first implication for classroom instruction, several levels of incongruity might have to be established to allow students with differing learning stages to further their knowledge. Lastly, it is necessary for teachers to “provide social interaction” (Schunk 451), in the classroom. Although Piaget does not make this point explicit in his theory, cooperative tasks in the classroom foster students’ awareness of various viewpoints and promote their skills of negotiating ideas (Schunk 451). Through Schunk’s contextualisation of Piaget’s Constructivism within the practical learning context of individuals, the theory’s application to the learning situation of novel reading, around which the second research aim of this thesis revolves, becomes more accessible.

In the context of this thesis, Piaget’s learning theory of Constructivism can provide insights into the learning potential of liminal spaces that readers may exploit. It becomes clear that reading about the psychological growth that takes place within liminality can, in a constructivist sense, provide new information that the readers may assimilate or accommodate in existing schemata of their knowledge of the world. Piaget's theory reinforces the notion that liminal spaces in fantasy literature hold significant potential for learning.

In the following, the compatibility of Nussbaum’s Literary Imagination and Piaget’s Constructivist learning theory will be revealed. Considering the brief overview of Piaget's

learning theory of Constructivism, it can be argued that Nussbaum's concept of Literary Imagination aligns with the principles of constructivist theory. Due to the fact, that the reader is actively involved in the lives of others through the reading activity, the reader’s cognitive structure grows. Frequent reading thus may have the potential to challenge the reader with experiential incongruities (Schunk 451) that go beyond real-world experiences. Compared to watching television or listening to music or audiobooks, reading constitutes a more active endeavor. Through the Literary Imagination pertaining to situations, places and characters, the reading experience becomes close to lived experience and the reader actively takes part in the story, which constitutes a prerequisite for constructivist learning according to Schunk (451). It is impossible to say which aspects of a novel the individual reader can assimilate into existing schemata (Hergenhahn 275), which ones require accommodation (Hergenhahn 275) and which aspects potentially do not strike a chord within the reality of the reader and thus do not lead to learning. Goldberg argues in a similar vein that “the text is to be approached as a mimetic object, a perceptual stimulus gaining at least part of its power from familiar cognates in the real world of its readers” (278). It may be argued that fantasy stories such as those discussed in this thesis do not present enough overlap with the real world of the reader to foster learning due to their fantasy character. Nevertheless, this argument can be challenged by invoking Goldberg's insight regarding the subject matter. She asserts that “Even if the novel is set in New Guinea, or outer space, or an imagined center of the earth, … [the readers] recognize people acting in predictable human ways, and they can usually accommodate whatever is new without too much effort” (279). In both Piaget’s theory of Constructivism and Nussbaum’s concept of Literary Imagination, through reading the reader’s perception of the world may change. The reading experience may thus become a space of learning.

4.3 Learning Potential of Literary Liminality

Subsequently, the result of the analysis from chapter three will be combined with the theoretical considerations of Nussbaum and Piaget in order to show that liminality in the three stories has the potential to teach readers fundamental lessons concerning personal growth and social development. The focus will lie on the lessons that the reader may learn from the three stories either pertaining to fostering empathy or gaining specific new insights into the value of liminal spaces. To conclude the chapter, a connection will be established between Jean Piaget's Constructivist theory of learning and the Structuralist Method discussed in section 2.2. This connection will unveil the shared underlying structure of the three stories, that stem from the story structures of the instructional stories of fairy tales and myths. By invoking the traditional story structures of fairy tales and myths, the central lesson concerning the transformative impact of liminal spaces in the three fantasy works is reinforced.

Nussbaum contends that literature has the potential to teach readers Literary Imagination, meaning the ability to imagine the emotions, motives and beliefs of others and thus to be compassionate about the struggles of others. From this, two things can be deducted. On the one hand, directly linked to Nussbaum's concept, liminality as depicted in the three stories may help the reader develop more empathy towards people experiencing challenging liminal phases in life. For instance, when the fantasy stories are read by parents of children during puberty, they have the potential to assist them in comprehending their children's challenges during this liminal phase, which fosters more empathy on behalf of the parents. On the other hand, taking from Nussbaum's general assumption that reading can be an instructional undertaking, it can be argued that the three fantasy stories have the potential to teach readers the value of liminal life phases for their own lives. In the following paragraphs, the lessons that readers can glean from the liminal spaces portrayed in Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach*, Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* and Gaiman's *Coraline* will be presented, beginning with the primary lesson that the three novels have in common. As mentioned previously, these lessons

can be directly applicable to readers' personal lives or serve to deepen their empathy towards others.

All three stories depict the inherent transformative power of liminal spaces in relation to psychological development which constitutes their major learning potential. This can also explain why the literature analyzed in this thesis is often popular among younger audiences, as they are more likely to be engaged in identity formation processes compared to adults. The young, scared and passive James develops into a brave, matured action taker on his journey with the peach. Hugh and Irene finally address their inner monsters on the mountain top and as a result have developed enough independence from their mothers to overcome their grasp and move to the city. While bored and overlooked Coraline returns from her adventure in the liminal space of the other world with a heightened sense of identity and love for her flawed parents. As mentioned in the introduction, readers may learn to exploit the developmental potential of the liminal spaces they find themselves in or they may be encouraged to seek out liminal spaces by for instance deliberately leaving their known environments in order to grow personally.

James and the Giant Peach revolves around the identity formation process of orphaned James Henry Trotter's, who is held back in his development by his loveless aunts. As discussed in chapter 3.4, the story is representative of the liminal phase between young childhood and school age childhood. As such, Dahl's work fosters empathy towards orphanhood and has the potential to teach its readers that orphaned individuals apart from liminal experiences require a tight-knit and loving family replacement in order to grow on a personal level and regain a sense of self that was lost through the lack of parental guidance. Furthermore, in a constructivist vein, it is noteworthy that James' personal development progresses as soon as he leaves the unstimulating environment of his aunts' home for a challenging outside world full of incongruities, which stimulates the individual's learning in a constructivist sense as maintained by Schunk (451). To sum it up, readers cannot only learn empathy with orphanhood and the toll it takes on identity formation but also that if one is prepared to leave one's stagnant

surroundings, which in James' case constitutes his living situation with his aunts, one may find that personal growth and character development await in the liminal space beyond.

The Beginning Place is representative of the rite of passage between young adult and adulthood. As such the fictional lives of Hugh and Irene who are facing a late cutting of the chord away from their mothers enable the reader to become more empathetic towards young adults on their journey to becoming adults. Hugh and Irene must venture away from their familiar suburban lives into the liminal zone of the magical land in order to find the strength to leave their mothers behind and finally move to the city. Like James, they too progress on a personal level in the liminal space outside of their limiting and worrisome lives. As pointed out in chapter 3.4, *The Beginning Place* contains a symbolic journey during which identity formation processes take place. As such it may encourage readers to be compassionate with the numerous people undertaking a journey of self-discovery in the hopes that distance to their static every-day lives may initiate a process of self-discovery. This empathy with *travelling souls* that the reader can learn from the experiencing of fictional characters' emotional struggle directly pertains to Nussbaum's Literary Imagination. Additionally, Le Guin's fantasy literature has the potential to ignite inspiration within readers, motivating them to create their own "liminal experiences … [which are] 'artificially produced'" (Thomassen 18) by embarking on a travel adventure that can contribute to personal growth.

Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* tells the story of a bored only-child going on an adventure into the liminal parallel *other world* in which she defends her identity against outside threats and in this way establishes her self. This can teach especially parent and adult readers patience with children during identity formation processes. While Coraline's career driven parents see their daughter as an annoyance, they fail to understand that the girl's desire for games and play represents a child's need for a stimulating surrounding and new experiences, from which it learns and develops personally as according to Constructivism in practice (Schunk 451). Furthermore, parents may learn that this need is enhanced in the structureless period of the

summer break, in which the story is set.[36] Coraline finds this stimulating space in the fantasy world of the other world, in which she develops into her own person and from which she resurfaces as a character with a strong sense of her own identity. Child readers of the story can take a hopeful message from it.

Although Coraline's lacked development in her own world, the opportunity to develop presented itself to her in the form of the *other world*. Thus, if one keeps their eyes open, a life altering adventure might come one's way after all. To put it in a nutshell, Coraline's rite of passage through the liminal space of the other world has the potential to readers about stimulating environments that children require to flourish and develop as well as giving readers hope that their personal adventure will present itself to them.

The common structure of the three fantasy stories promotes learning in a Piagetian sense as the new experiences from reading can easily be assimilated or accommodated to the schemata of fairy tales and myths. Subsequently, this said shared pattern will be presented, which so far has been indirectly hinted at through the consideration of the structural place that liminal spaces took on within each fantasy story. Since this approach "seek…[s] to define the principles of structuration that operate not only through individual works but through the relationship among works" (Scholes 10), it is an application of the Structuralist Method, presented in chapter 2.2. Thereafter, the learning potential of this underlying common structure will be outlined.

Strikingly, in all novels, the protagonists are initially stuck in a stagnant place, be it the cruel aunts that James lives with, the bland suburbia in Le Guin's novel or the boring home life of Coraline. In all these stagnant places, personal development is limited, and all heroes are called to adventure (Campbell 49). In *James and the Giant Peach* and *Coraline* also an interdiction and a violation thereof occur, which are elements from Propp's theory concerning

[36] This perspective has been discussed in chapter 3.4.

the structure of folk tales (26-27). Thereafter, the crossing of the threshold (Campbell 77) takes places with which all heroes enter the second phase of separation or limen in the three-tiered model by van Gennep[37]. Physically, the spaces entered through the crossing of the threshold are respectively, the peach, the magical world where Tembreabrezi is situated and the other world. It is also noteworthy, that both in Le Guin's and Gaiman's work the way into the liminal period is a liminal space of its own, namely the beginning place and the corridor. In all three fantasy stories the heroes face a road of trials (Campbell 97) that consists of more liminal spaces, apart from *James and the Giant Peach*. All characters, however, undergo a social and psychological development as in a rite of passage and they finally return to their worlds by crossing the return threshold as matured persons. There, they finally enjoy the freedom to live (Campbell 238) having progressed in their identities and selves.

Combining the structural analysis of the three works with Jean Piaget's Constructivism reveals that the use of familiar story structures taken from myths and fairy tales has the power to teach readers the value of liminal spaces. With the help of familiar structural elements, the stories become accessible. As a result, the new experiences regarding the schema of fairy tale and myth can be assimilated and accommodated (Hergenhahn 275) and thus facilitate learning. Without the use of familiar structural elements, the fantasy stories might be too dissimilar to the reader's perceived world. In such cases, the learning potential may be hindered or dismissed. Readers are motivated to take up their call, in order to leave their comfort zone and develop socially and personally in a liminal space. Further, the structural similarities between the fantasy stories and myths and fairy tales also reveal to the reader that heroes and heroines can be ordinary just like James, Hugh, Irene and Coraline. This serves as a positive boost and reminder that everyone can venture off into unknown liminal spaces and develop personally, there is no

[37] See 6.1 for a visualisation of the connections between the theories of van Gennep, Campbell and Propp.

need to be a knight in shining armour or a beautiful princess in order to broaden one’s horizon and grow into one’s character.

5 Conclusion

The research aim of this thesis has been twofold. Chapters two and three explored the first research aim of determining the structural place of the liminal spaces and their impact on the respective protagonist of Roald Dahl's *James and the Giant Peach*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Beginning Place* and Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. Also, as part of the first research aim, the liminal spaces were interpreted as representative of liminal life phases. The second research aim centered on exploring the potential impact that reading about liminal spaces holds for the reader and was addressed in chapter four. As stated in the introduction, this thesis has filled a research gap by exploring the developmental impact of liminal spaces on the protagonists as well as the potential that lies in the representations of liminality for the reader.

By embracing the transformative power of the liminal space, James undergoes a profound personal development journey. Initially characterised as a fearful and obedient boy, James emerges from the liminal space as an autonomous and responsible child. The major liminal space of the work constitutes the peach with which James crosses the Atlantic and faces three character building trials. While the shark attack teaches James autonomy, responsibility and self-efficacy, the Centipede rescue reveal the power of unconditional love for his friends to him and the Cloud Men attack reiterates the lessons of autonomy and responsibility. *James and the Giant Peach* symbolically depicts the crucial phase between young childhood and school age childhood, characterized by a growing understanding of autonomy and the needs of others.

The personal development that Hugh and Irene experience with the help of the liminal spaces in *The Beginning Place* was shown to be more specific than that in James' case. The journey through the major liminal space of the magical world is symbolical of their psychological journey of facing and overcoming their fears. As such the liminal space teaches the protagonists maturity, autonomy and agency. Situated within the magical world is the liminal space of the beginning place which forms the borderland between reality and Mountain Town. It presents a refuge and escape to the young adults and provides a space in which they

can assess their lives from afar. Also, the Mountain represents a liminal space to the protagonists. It allows them to surpass their personal fears in the guise of the monster and transforms them to individuals with willpower and strength, necessary skills on their way to adulthood. The novel can be read as representative of the phase between young adulthood and mature adulthood as well as representative of the self-discovery that takes place on a journey.

Among the three works examined, Neil Gaiman's *Coraline* emerged as containing the highest number of liminal spaces. The transmuting energy of the liminal spaces in this work facilitate Coraline's identity formation as the major liminal space of the other world challenges Coraline to defend her identity against the threat of the other mother. While the liminal mirror significantly teaches Coraline about the consequences of identity loss and transforms her into a more reliable and empathetic person, in the liminal zone of the empty apartment, Coraline learns forgiveness, love and understanding for her imperfect other father. *Coraline* can be read as representative of the unstructured liminal phase of holidays in the lives of children which often boosts a child's psychological development.

In order to explore the second part of the research question concerning the potential of liminal spaces in literature for the reader, the concept of Literary Imagination and the theory of Constructivism were drawn on. Through the combination between Nussbaum's theory of Literary Imagination and Piaget's learning theory of Constructivism, reading was established to have the potential to teach readers empathy with others but also lessons for the reader's personal life. The two theories have been proven to complement each other suitably.

The following learning potential of liminal spaces in the three novels was deducted. All three stories explore the transformative power inherent in liminal spaces and their profound impact on psychological development. From this, readers may learn to seek out liminal spaces in their own lives for the sake of personal growth. In *James and the Giant Peach* readers glean the significance of a surrogate family unit for orphaned children, during liminal phases of orphaned children. This narrative not only cultivates empathy towards orphanhood and its

influence on identity struggles but also emphasizes that leaving stagnant environments for liminal spaces can lead to personal growth and character development. *The Beginning Place* symbolizes journeys of self-discovery, from which readers learn to empathize with individuals navigating the liminal space of a transformative journey while also recognizing the positive impact such a journey can have on personal development. *Coraline* imparts lessons about the need for stimulating liminal environments that foster children's flourishing and development. It further instills hope for readers. If they maintain an open mind, adventures in liminal spaces will await them.

Combining the Structuralist Method with Piaget's Constructivism revealed that the common structure of the three novels underscores the learning potential of liminal spaces. With the help of the Structuralist Method in the analysis of liminality within the stories their common structuration resembling that of fairy tales and myth as in the theories by Campbell and Propp was revealed. Thus, these archetypal instructional stories are invoked. Through this invocation of familiar story structures, the newly gained insights from the reading experience can be more readily incorporated into existing schemata. Thus, the fantasy literature examined epitomizes contemporary instructional narratives that take the increasingly complex modern world which individuals face during personal growth processes into account. Heroic characters are no longer bound to exceptional beauty or physical strength, instead they can be ordinary individuals that exhibit the necessary bravery and willingness to enter unstable liminal spaces that pave the way for personal growth.

While this thesis sheds light on the transformative power of liminal spaces in fantasy literature for protagonists and readers there are still promising directions for future research. For instance, it would be insightful to continue the second research aim pertaining to the theoretical learning potential of liminality depictions in fantasy literature to a study of the real responses of readers to the liminal spaces of the three novels. Further, the study could be extended to include more examples of liminal spaces in fantasy literature. In this way, the

universal character with regards to the developmental impact of liminal spaces and the story structures that they occur in could be tested.

On a meta-level, it can be stated that the reading process of a novel resembles that of a rite of passage. When a reader departs from the real world into the fictional world of the novel, a threshold is crossed, and the liminal space entered. Within this space, the reader witnesses the character development of the fictional protagonist and reemerges from this experience back into reality with new insights that the reading experience offered. As such, the reading experience mirrors the rite of passage that the protagonists experience. Further, the reader like the protagonist traverses a liminal sphere. While the learning of the protagonist remains within the fictional bounds, the reader may take the lessons beyond the fictional level on the return from the liminal space of the reading experience. This meta-level reflection aligns with the findings with regards to the learning potential of liminal spaces.

To conclude with, although liminal life phases might appear scary and uncomfortable at first, due to their unstable and unfamiliar nature, the growth and the potential to further a person in their development through new challenges that lies within them is immense. Perhaps, through research projects like the present one, in the future, more people will regard literature just like Nussbaum as a powerful tool to teach its readers new aspects of life. If so, the reading of the three fantasy works by Dahl, Le Guin and Gaiman could help readers to grasp the value of liminal spaces in life as well as teach them to be more empathetic and imaginative with regards to their fellow human beings. It is humbly hoped that readers of this thesis will return to reality with a deeper understanding of the transformative power of liminal spaces that can be encountered in fantasy literature and life.

6 Appendix

6.1 Visualisation of Parallels in the Theories by van Gennep, Campbell and Propp

Arnold van Gennep	Joseph Campbell	Vladimir Propp
	1. Call to Adventure	1. Absentation
	2. Refusal of the Call	2. Interdiction
	3. Supernatural Aid	3. Violation
	4. Crossing of the First Threshold	4. Reconnaisance
	5. Belly of the Whale	5. Delivery
Separation		6. Trickery
		7. Complicity
		8. Villainy or Lacking
		9. Mediation
		10. Beginning Counteraction
	6. Road of Trials	11. Departure
	7. Meeting with the Goddess	12. First Function of Donor
	8. Meeting with the Temptress	13. Hero's Reaction
	9. Atonement with Father	14. Magical Agent
Limen	10. Apotheosis	15. Guidance
	11. Ultimate Boon	16. Struggle
		17. Branding
		18. Victory
		19. Liquidation
	12.Refusal of the Return	20. Return

Aggregation	13. Magic Flight	21. Pursuit
	14. Rescue From Without	22. Rescue
	15. Crossing of the Return Threshold	23. Unrecognized Arrival
	16. Master of Two Wo	24. Unfounded Claims
	17. Freedom to Live	25. Difficult Task
		26. Solution
		27. Recognition
		28. Exposure
		29. Transfiguration
		30. Punishment
		31. Wedding

6.2 Brief Definition and Historical Outline of the Fairy Tale

In the following a brief definition of the folk tale genre will be given followed by a historical outline of the development of the genre. This serves as context to the theory of Vladimir Propp which is applied in this thesis.

According to Marina Warner, fairy tales or folk tales[38] can be defined through their fulfilling of five distinctive criteria. Firstly, "the fairy tale is a short narrative, sometimes less than a single page, sometimes running to many more" (Prologue), that in any case does not reach the length of a novel (Prologue). Secondly, Warner manifests that fairy tales are recognizable stories, either through their long oral tradition or due to their similarity to another fairy tale (Prologue). As a third feature that demarcates fairy tales, Warner describes "the necessary presence of the past [which] makes itself felt through combinations and recombinations of familiar plots and characters, devices and images" (Prologue). Fourthly, the scholar brings up the specific "narrative grammar" (Byatt qtd. in Prologue) of fairy tales which consists of "certain kinds of characters (stepmothers and princesses, elves and giants) and certain recurrent motifs (keys, apples, mirrors, rings, and toads)" (Prologue). As a fifth and last defining feature of fairy tales Warner mentions that "supernatural agency and the pleasure of wonder are interwoven in the characters of fairy tales" (Prologue).

After a long oral tradition of folk tales, the fairy tale as a literary genre emerged unsurprisingly, in the eyes of fairy tale scholar Jack Zipes, in Italy, where due to a flourishing economy during the 15th and 16th century, the rate of literacy had largely increased (11). Also, in England the literary fairy tale tradition emerged early with Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (12). Nonetheless, the tradition in England was hampered by "the Puritan hostility toward amusement during the seventeenth century …" (Zipes 12). While England did not constitute a

[38] Scholars use these two terms of the folk tale and the fairy tale synonymously. Nonetheless, within fairy tale research a distinction is made between the folk tale which is generally the oral and undated version of the story and the literary or art fairy tale, which denotes the dated story recorded in writing (Prologue).

fertile ground for the genre, "[it] had more propitious conditions in France and virtually bloomed in full force toward the end of the ancien régime from 1609 to 1714" (Zipes 12), where it also received its name of the fairy tale from the French *conte de fée* (Zipes 13). In Germany, the transcription of fairy tales took place later where Johann Karl Musäus compiled the *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* between 1782 and 1786 (Zipes 18) followed by the *Kinder und Hausmärchen* compiled by the Brothers Grimm between 1812 and 1815 (Zipes 13). From then on, the fairy tale was "a critique of the worst aspects of the Enlightenment and absolutism" (19). Although fairy tales are widely associated with a child audience[39], only "from 1830 to 1900, during the rise of the middle classes, … the fairy tale came into its own for children" (Zipes 20). According to Zipes, "by the beginning of the twentieth century, the fairy tale as institution had expanded to include drama, poetry, ballet, music and opera" (23). After a period of suffering for the genre which "was interpreted and produced according to Nazi ideology, … [with] numerous examples of *völkisch* and fascist fairy tale products, even in France" (Zipes 24), it has become an integral part to society today with its countless fairy tale adaptations in moving picture, including perhaps most famously the Disney adaptations (Zipes 26-31).

[39] According to J.R.R. Tolkien this association between fairy tales and children is wrong (16). More precisely he thinks of it as "at best an error of false sentiment, and one that is therefore most often made by those who, for whatever private reason (such as childlessness), tend to think of children as a special kind of creature, almost a different race, rather than as normal, if immature, members of a particular family, and of the human family at large" (16).

6.3 Diagrams to the Homes of James Henry Trotter

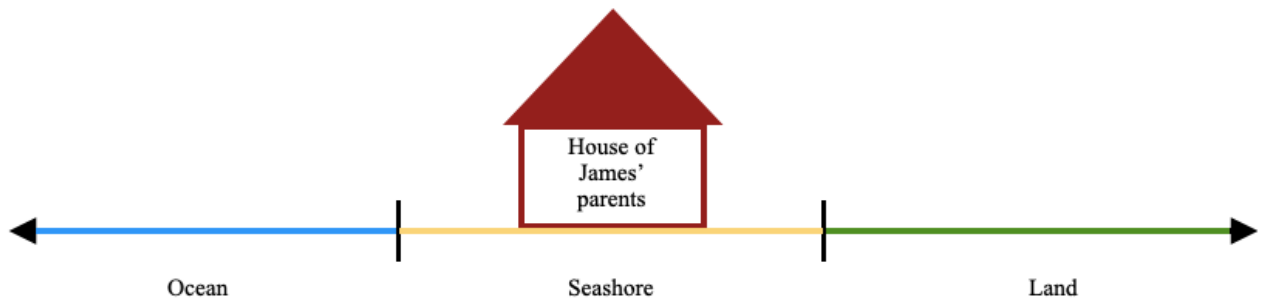


Figure 1: Home of James' parents

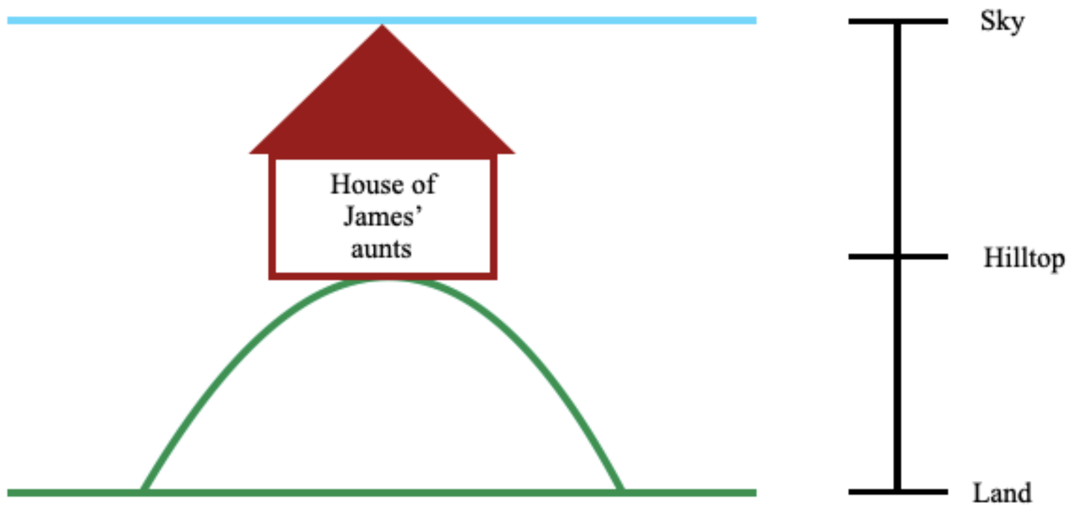
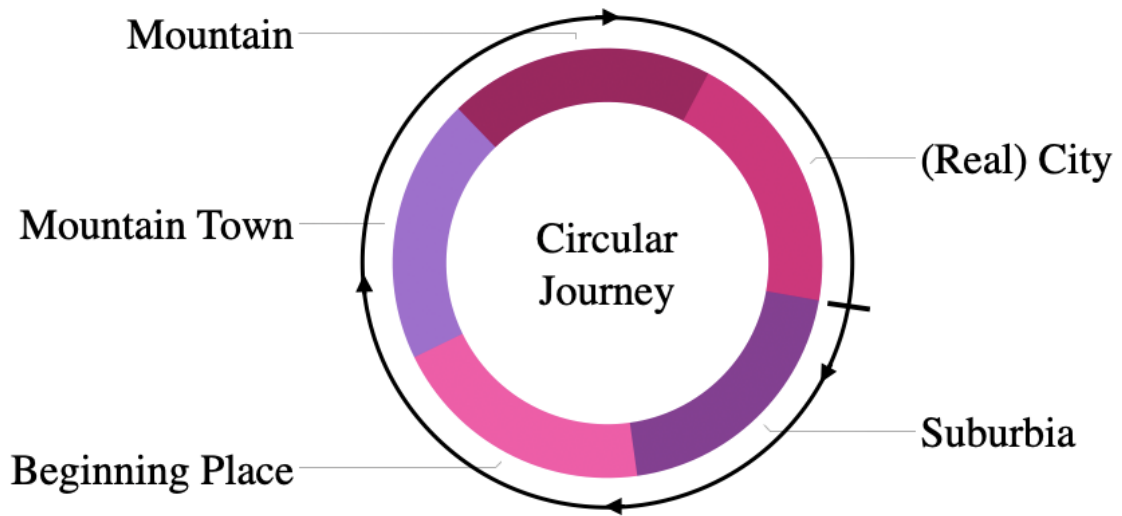


Figure 2: Home of James' aunts

6.4 The Circular Journey in *The Beginning Place*



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