

**Metafictional literature and interactive
storytelling:**

**Interaction with Dramatic Laws in Michael Ende's
*Unendliche Geschichte***

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Bachelor thesis

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Date: 7th of February 2012

Abstract

Die Unendliche Geschichte is a novel about the importance of fantasy. While reading a book called "Die Unendliche Geschichte", the main protagonist, Bastian, enters a world called Phantásien. His creative ability allows him to make stories and wishes that reshape Phantásien. The workings of Bastian's creative ability can be understood by studying the way in which certain events help to expose dramatic laws.

Dramatic laws limit the possibilities and success of characters to make events dramatic. The concept is originally used to create interactive stories; systems or video games where users are part of, and creator of stories. Dramatic laws are used to make these stories dramatic. In this way, a user's options for interaction are limited.

In *Die Unendliche Geschichte*, Bastian is less limited by dramatic laws than the characters who are part of Phantásien. Due to his creative ability, he is not limited by one character type and he is able to change the influence of dramatic laws. Creating stories is vital for the progression of his journey through Phantásien. However, these stories need substance in the form of a balance between good and evil. Characters without this balance are severely limited by dramatic laws in their behaviour and success.

Bastian's new knowledge about story creation helps him to solve the problems in his own reality. Treating life as a story may help to see new possibilities, by switching between character types. The balance between good and evil in stories may also help to understand bad things in life. Through storytelling, Bastian is able to help himself and others to have a more meaningful life. This influence may be extended to the actual reader. The actual reader may just be another character in a book reading a book. In that sense, life may be an interactive story that changes under the influence of the human imagination.

Contents

Introduction	4
1. Three Magic Gates	7
1.1 Große Rätsel Tor.....	7
1.2 Zauber Spiegel Tor & Ohne Schlüssel Tor.....	9
1.3 Conclusions about interpretation problems.....	12
2. Bastian's Adventures in Phantásien	15
2.1 Exposure of dramatic laws in Bastian's adventures.....	15
2.2 Bastian's creative ability	17
2.3 Creating stories in a responsible way.....	19
3. Translating Bastian's lessons about stories to reality	21
3.1 Back to reality	21
3.2 Harold and the Purple Crayon.....	22
3.3 Haroun and the Sea of Stories.....	23
Conclusion	26
Appendix: Summary of <i>Die Unendliche Geschichte</i>	29
Works cited.....	30

Introduction

Die Unendliche Geschichte (1979) by Michael Ende is a metafictional novel about the importance of fantasy and the imagination. A boy called Bastian is literally sucked into a book called "Die Unendliche Geschichte" and wakes up in Phantásien, the world of human imagination. In Phantásien, Bastian has the ability to create things by making wishes. That allows him to change Phantásien and create his own path. Storytelling has always been one of Bastian's favourite activities. Therefore, I will not treat Bastian's adventures in Phantásien as a mental journey, but as him telling his own story. His story may be called an interactive story as Bastian is both creator of and character in the story.

To understand Bastian's adventures as an interactive story, I will be referring to the concept of *dramatic law* or *law of drama* as discussed by Chris Crawford in his article *Interactive Storytelling*. In this case, interactive storytelling refers to storytelling through interactive media, and not interaction with human storytellers.

Crawford's approach to interactive storytelling is based on the idea that "If we are to achieve interactive storytelling, we must concentrate all our energies on two factors: interactivity and storytelling." (Crawford 262)

His idea is to create a system that allows users to make "dramatically interesting choices" (262-263). To keep this system manageable, Crawford suggests that a user's number of options can be limited in a natural way, because

The laws of drama do not permit arbitrary behavior; they constrain the actions of characters in stories to a tiny set of choices. Romeo discovering the apparently dead Juliet does not have the option to say, "Bummer. I think I'll go play badminton." When Captain Kirk bravely declares, "Ignore the danger – we'll risk the whole ship to save that crewman!" there is no dramatic force in the universe that will cause the Enterprise to be destroyed. (263)

Crawford indicates that dramatic laws structure drama in literature and film. Instead of using the concept for the creation of interactive stories, the concept may also be used to better understand the workings of dramatic events in literature or film. Further study on the concept is needed, because Crawford has indicated that "it will be centuries before we achieve a Unified Field Theory of Narrative." (264)

Besides reading certain forms of literature as interactive stories, the study of dramatic laws may help to understand differences between literary genres: "Some fundamental laws of drama are universal, applying to all stories, while others are specific to a particular story." (Crawford 268)

In this essay, I will primarily focus on *Die Unendliche Geschichte* and limitations by dramatic laws. By studying the ways in which Bastian is limited or not limited by dramatic laws, I hope to get a better understanding of Bastian's creative ability.

In the first chapter, I will try to confirm the existence of dramatic laws in *Die Unendliche Geschichte*. My theory is that *gaps* may help to expose dramatic laws to the actual reader. Wolfgang Iser writes that "these gaps give the reader a chance to build his own bridges, relating the different aspects of the object which have thus far been revealed to him. It is quite impossible for the text itself to fill in the gaps." (Iser 11)

Gaps may allow the reader to use her/his imagination. However, gaps may also cause frustration when expectations are not fulfilled by the text. The following passage represents a reaction to the way in which the character Atréju successfully passes the Rätsel Tor, the first of three magic gates:

*Andreas von Prondsczynsky geht in seiner wortreichen Kritik an Ende sogar so weit zu sagen, dass er sich "von der Willkür des Autors auf den Arm genommen" fühlte. Ende überstrapaziert in diesem Falle wohl doch die Toleranzen des Unfassbaren: es bleibt in jeder Weise unerklärlich – und nicht allein nach logischen, sondern explizit auch nach imaginativen Kriterien –, was diesen Schritt durch das Rätsel Tor ermöglichte."*¹ (Rindler 68)

Von Prondsczynsky is unable to "build his own bridges"; to make sense of what happened. He points to the passage being unexplainable on both logical as well as imaginative grounds. Without this foundation, other forms of logic such as dramatic laws may become exposed. This exposure is something that comes forward in Crawford's article:

In the universe of narrative, the laws of drama are as adamant as the laws of physics in the real world. An interactive storytelling system that incorporates such laws naturally and automatically constrains the player's options without appearing intrusive or overbearing. (Crawford 263-264)

Von Prondsczynsky's reaction shows that *Die Unendliche Geschichte* does not always incorporate its dramatic laws naturally for every reader. I will examine the events surrounding the Three Magic Gates to see whether Atréju's success really remains unexplainable within the story. Without such an explanation, the only thing that protects Atréju may be the fact that he is a hero, like Captain Kirk in Crawford's earlier example.

The reason why I start by examining Atréju's adventures is that his adventures may be compared with Bastian's adventures. Both are given the amulet AURYN. However, the amulet works differently for each wearer. Atréju is just guided and protected, while Bastian has an additional power that makes his wishes come true. This difference is probably the product of their origins. Atréju is from Phantásien, while Bastian is human. Still, I would like to explore this difference further. A comparison between Atréju and Bastian may help to better understand the workings of Bastian's creative ability.

¹ Andreas von Prondsczynsky goes as far to say that he "felt tricked by the author's indifference. In this particular case, Ende overstretches the tolerance of the unknowable: it remains unexplainable in any way – and not just on logical, but also explicitly on imaginative grounds –, what enabled the passage through the Great Riddle Gate."

In the second chapter, I will try to find events that expose Bastian's interaction with dramatic laws. I will then continue to explore in what way his interaction is different from Atréju's interaction with dramatic laws. I will also try to give an explanation for this difference.

In the third chapter, I will take a brief look at Bastian's adventures when he is back in his own world. I will also include a short comparison with two other metafictional works, to see whether they share similar themes and logic. The works are *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (1955) by Crockett Johnson and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) by Salman Rushdie.

At the end of this essay, I hope to have answered this question: In what way are dramatic laws exposed in *Die Unendliche Geschichte* and how does this help to understand the workings of Bastian's creative ability?

1. Three Magic Gates

In this chapter, I will look at the events concerning the three magic gates. I will explore to what extent these events are hard to interpret.

1.1 Große Rätsel Tor

The first half of *Die Unendliche Geschichte* describes the events in Phantásien as they are read by Bastian. Phantásien and its ruler, the Kindliche Kaiserin (Childlike Empress), are slowly diminishing due to a strange force called the "Nothing". Phantásien needs a hero to find a cure. This job is given to Atréju, a boy from the Greenskin tribe. Atréju goes out on a Great Quest, piecing together the information that he needs. The oldest creature in Phantásien, Morla, tells him that the Kindliche Kaiserin needs a new name. To find out how she can get her new name, Atréju travels to the Southern Oracle to ask Uylúla. He also meets the luckdragon Fuchur who will help him during his adventures.

To meet Uylúla, Atréju needs to pass through three magical gates. Atréju learns about the gates from a gnome called Engywuck. Engywuck has studied the gates for many years. His comments will be used to introduce the gates.

The first gate is the Große Rätsel Tor. Engywuck explains:

*[Kann] niemand durch, (...) außer die Sphinxen schließen die Augen. (...) Wir sehen die Welt. Aber eine Sphinx sieht nichts, sie ist in gewissem Sinne blind. Dafür senden ihre Augen etwas aus. Und was ist das, was ihr Blick aussendet? Alle Rätsel der Welt. (...) Und nun stell dir vor, was aus einem wird, der es einfach wagt, in den Blickwechsel dieser beiden hineinzulaufen! Er erstarrt auf der Stelle und kann sich nicht wieder rühren, ehe er nicht alle Rätsel der Welt gelöst hat."*²
(Ende 91)

Atréju can only get past the sphinxes when they close their eyes. The problem is that he cannot be sure when they will close their eyes. Sphinxes never sleep and Engywuck is unable to tell what makes them close their eyes. The sphinxes do not select people on their goodness, because Engywuck has

*mit eigenen Augen beobachtet, und mehr als einmal, daß sie gerade irgendeinem albernen Schwachkopf oder einem niederträchtigen Halunken den Zutritt erlaubt haben, während die anständigsten und vernünftigsten Leute oft monatelang vergebens warteten und zuletzt unverrichteter Dinge abzogen.*³ (Ende 92)

² no one can get through (...) unless the sphinxes close their eyes. (...) We see the world. A sphinx sees nothing. In a sense she is blind. But her eyes send something out. And what do her eyes send out? All the riddles of the universe. (...) So try to imagine what happens to one who ventures into the area where those two gazes meet. He freezes to the spot, unable to move until he has solved all the riddles of the world.

³"seen them admit stupid fools and treacherous knaves, while decent, sensible people have given up after being kept waiting for months."

This indiscriminate attitude towards good and evil is an important theme in *Die Unendliche Geschichte* which I will discuss later.

When Atréju tries his luck at the Große Rätsel Tor, he is let through. How and why he is left through remains unclear, because he was not looking at them:

Er wußte nicht, ob die Sphinxen ihre Augen geschlossen hatten oder nicht. (...) Und gerade in dem Augenblick, als er glaubte, alle Kraft seines Willens reiche nicht mehr aus, um ihn auch nur noch einen einzigen Schritt vorwärts zu tragen, hörte er den Widerhall dieses Schrittes im Inneren des Felsenbogens. Und zugleich fiel alle Furcht von ihm ab, so völlig und ohne Rest, daß er fühlte, er würde von nun an nie wieder Furcht empfinden, was auch geschehen mochte. Er hob den Kopf und sah, daß das Große Rätsel Tor hinter ihm lag. Die Sphinxen hatten ihn durchgelassen. ⁴ (Ende 98-99)

It is unclear what made the sphinxes close their eyes. Engywuck studied the sphinxes for years without discovering any selection criteria. However, it is not even certain that they did close their eyes. Atréju was not looking at the sphinxes when he passed through the gate. Perhaps there is something that made Atréju resist the glare of the sphinxes. One explanation could be that he is protected by AURYN, the amulet he received from the Kindliche Kaiserin. According to Engywuck, it is impossible that they closed their eyes for AURYN, because they are unable to see it. This does not exclude the option of them having an extra-visual way of sensing AURYN. It also leaves open the possibility that Atréju is protected from their glare by AURYN's powers.

Protection by AURYN would not give answers on how others managed to pass through. AURYN's protection would also make the episode less exiting. Atréju is expected to pass through the gate unprotected, just like the people who preceded him. Most of the episode's tension stems from the depiction of Atréju's own uncertainty about a successful ending.

It may prove to be impossible to solve the riddle of the Große Rätsel Tor. The reader's urge to explain the events may stem from Engywuck's attempts to explain the gate's features. However, Engywuck is himself unable to solve the mystery. Perhaps it is not meant to be solved at all. Elena Wagner identifies Engywuck's failure as a critique on theoreticians, who limit themselves to theory without experiencing things in practice.

Hiermit wird die Sinnlogigkeit des ausschließlich theoretischen Forschens angeprangert. Man kann nicht alles messbar und zählbar machen was sich dem rationalen Denken entzieht, obwohl die naturwissenschaftliche Weltsicht dies versucht und nur das Beweisbare für das einzig Wahre ansieht. Das Vorgehen der Sphinx beim Einlassen ins Südliche Orakel entzieht sich dem kausallogischen

⁴ He didn't know whether the sphinxes had closed their eyes or not. (...)

At a certain point he felt sure that he had not enough will power left to carry him a single step forward. And just then he heard the echo of his footfalls within the great vaulted gate. Instantly every last shred of fear fell from him, and he knew that whatever might happen he would never again be afraid.

Looking up, he saw that the Great Riddle Gate lay behind him. The sphinxes had let him through.

Denken und lässt sich aus diesem heraus nicht lösen. Obwohl Professor Engywuck dies jahrelang versucht, muss er letztendlich scheitern. ⁵ (Wagner 78)

This solution will be taken into account in the discussion of the other events.

1.2 Zauber Spiegel Tor & Ohne Schlüssel Tor

Engywuck gives the following introduction to the Zauber Spiegel Tor:

wenn man davorsteht, dann sieht man sich selbst -aber eben nicht wie in einem gewöhnlichen Spiegel, versteht sich. Man sieht nicht sein Äußeres, sondern man sieht sein wahres inneres Wesen, so wie es in Wirklichkeit beschaffen ist. Wer da durch will, der muß - um es mal so auszudrücken - in sich selbst hineingehen. ⁶ (Ende 94-95)

At this point, Atréju remarks that this gate does not seem very challenging to him. The gnome disagrees.

Ganz gewaltiger Irrtum, mein freund! Habe erlebt, daß gerade solche Besucher, die sich für besonders untadelig hielten, schreiend vor dem Ungeheuer geflohen sind, das ihnen in dem Spiegel entgegengrinste. (...) [Andere] haben offenbar noch viel Schrecklicheres gesehen, hatten aber den Mut, trotzdem durchzugehen. Für manche war es auch weniger erschreckend, aber Überwindung kostete es jeden. Man kann darüber nichts sagen, was für alle Geltung hätte. Ist für jeden anders. ⁷ (Ende 95)

Again, Engywuck's explanations are of little help. He cannot tell what Atréju will see in the gate's reflection. Atréju prepares himself for the worst when he walks towards the Zauber Spiegel Tor.

Er rechnete damit, daß ihm, wie Engywuck es beschrieben hatte, irgendein Entsetzen erregendes Bild seiner selbst in diesem Spiegel entgegentreten würde, doch das erschien ihm nun - da er alle Furcht zurückgelassen hatte - kaum noch der Beachtung wert.

Indessen, statt eines Schreckbildes sah er etwas, worauf er ganz und gar nicht gefaßt gewesen war und das er auch nicht begreifen konnte. Er sah einen dicken Jungen mit blassem Gesicht - etwa ebenso alt wie er selbst - der mit

⁵ This denounces the pointlessness of exclusively theoretical research. Not everything that evades rational thinking can be made measurable or countable. The scientific worldview still attempts to achieve this while only holding the demonstrable for true. The Sphinx's procedure of allowing entrance to the Southern Oracle evades rational thinking and does not allow itself to be solved. Even though Professor Engywuck has tried to solve the mysteries for many years, in the end he has forfeit.

⁶ when you stand before it, you see yourself. But not as you would in an ordinary mirror. You don't see your outward appearance; what you see is your real innermost nature. If you want to go through, you have to - in a manner of speaking - go into yourself.

⁷ Dead wrong, my friend! I've known travellers who consider themselves absolutely blameless to yelp with horror and run away at the sight of the monster grinning out of the mirror at them. (...) [Others] appear to have seen something even more horrible, but had the courage to go through. What some saw was not frightening, but it still cost every one of them an inner struggle. Nothing I can say would apply to all. It's a different experience each time.

*untergeschlagenen Beinen auf einem Mattenlager saß und in einem Buch las.*⁸
(Ende 99)

What Atréju sees, is Bastian reading *Die Unendliche Geschichte*. By reading about himself in the book, Bastian is made aware that he is the one who can save Phantásien. The Kindliche Kaiserin will later explain to Atréju what he saw and why he saw it:

*Du hast seinen Schreckensschrei am Tiefen Abgrund gehört, als du mit Ygramul redetest, und du hast seine Gestalt gesehen, als du vor dem Zauber Spiegel Tor standest. Du bist in sein Bild hineingegangen und hast es mit dir genommen (...) Und nun versteht er vielleicht, daß all die große Mühsal, die du, Atréju, auf dich genommen hast, ihm galt, daß ganz Phantásien nach ihm ruft!*⁹ (Ende 167)

The gate's original function, blocking the way by confronting people with their inner self, has been replaced by a new function. The new function is to make the reader aware of her/his influence on the story. It functions at another level of logic which disrupts its function within Phantásien. Since Bastian's image is not very frightening, the gate is no longer able to fulfil its original function. Instead of the actant of opponent, the gate now fulfils a more neutral role. It is possible to argue that the gate was never an opponent in the first place, but a test and therefore neutral. However, things become more complicated when Atréju passes through the gate.

*Als er nämlich auf der anderen Seite des Zauber Spiegel Tors stand, da hatte er jede Erinnerung an sich selbst, an sein bisheriges Leben, an seine Ziele und Absichten vergessen. Er wußte nichts mehr von der Großen Suche, die ihn hierhergeführt hatte, und kannte nicht einmal mehr seinen eigenen Namen. Er war wie ein neugeborenes Kind.*¹⁰ (Ende 100)

Atréju's amnesia comes as a surprise because this effect is never predicted by Engywuck. This can either mean that Uyulála's earlier visitors did not experience the same amnesia or did not tell Engywuck about it. It is less likely that they have forgotten about it. Atréju speaks to Uyulála in his state of amnesia and remembers everything they discussed when he is back to normal.

This state of amnesia is vital to Atréju's progression towards Uyulála, because it enables him to pass the third gate, the Ohne Schlüssel Tor. This is what Engywuck has to say about the third gate:

⁸ After what Engywuck had said, he expected a terrifying image of himself to come toward him out of the mirror, but now that he had left all fear behind him, he hardly gave the matter a thought.

What he saw was something quite unexpected, which wasn't the least bit terrifying, but which baffled him completely. He saw a fat little boy with a pale face -- a boy his own age -- and this little boy was sitting on a pile of mats, reading a book.

⁹ You heard his cry of fear when you were talking with Ygramul beside the Deep Chasm, and you saw him when you stood facing the Magic Mirror Gate. You entered into his image and took it with you (...) Perhaps he even understands that all the hardship you, Atréju, took upon yourself was for his sake and that all Fantastica is calling him.

¹⁰ For when he emerged on the far side of the Magic Mirror Gate, he had lost all memory of himself, of his past life, aims, and purposes. He had forgotten the Great Quest that had brought him there, and he didn't even know his own name. He was like a newborn child.

Phantásisches Selen reagiert nämlich auf unseren Willen. Gerade unser Wille ist es, der es so unnachgiebig macht. Je mehr einer hinein will, desto fester schließt die Tür. Aber wenn es einer fertigbringt, jede Absicht zu vergessen und gar nichts zu wollen - vor dem öffnet sich die Tür ganz von selbst. ¹¹ (Ende 96)

At this point, Atréju has forgotten about himself and his quest to find a cure for the Kindliche Kaiserin. Without a clear goal he is able to open the gate. This makes it even stranger that Engywuck never mentions the amnesia. He mentions that the experience is different for everyone. Still, there must have been people who, in some way, lost the will to enter the third gate. Forgetting everything is essential to passing the third gate and the second gate provides this kind of forgetting. In that sense, the Great Zauber Spiegel Tor appears to be helpful instead of frightening.

Eva Rindler has the following explanation for Atréju's amnesia:

Indem Atréju sein Spiegelbild akzeptiert und mit ihm eins wird, wird er neu(-geboren). Doch dadurch verliert er auch jegliche Erinnerung an sein bisheriges Leben, ja sogar an seinen eigenen Namen, ohne es zu bemerken.

Absichtslos wie ein Neugeborenes streicht Atréju eine Weile um das dritte Tor herum, das sich nach seiner zärtlichen Aufmerksamkeit von selbst einen Spalt breit öffnet und ihm somit Einlass gewährt. In dieser Episode klingt die fernöstliche Haltung der Absichtslosigkeit, das Loslassen des Willens als Ziel der Meditation, an.

Das Selbst öffnet sich Atréju freiwillig, nachdem er wie ein neugieriges Kind, ohne auf etwas hinauszuwollen, darauf zugegangen ist. Der neue Atréju und der alte teilen also noch immer den Wahren Willen. ¹² (Rindler 69)

There are some problems with this explanation. The text does not provide any information about what Atréju thinks or feels when he sees his inner image. This makes it hard to tell whether he really accepts his inner image or not. That acceptance alone is also not enough to reach a child-like state of mind. He only acquires this state of mind when he has gone through the gate. The second gate plays a vital part in reaching the state of amnesia and thus in Atréju's success with the third gate.

It is unexplainable why the second gate would help Atréju if the gates have the objective to test people. It could be that the three gates are not three separate tests, but one test with different components. The text mentions that Atréju has lost all fear after passing the first gate. This may have prepared him for whatever he would see in the second gate. Unfortunately that would not answer the question how Atréju managed to pass the first gate.

¹¹ Fantastican selenium reacts to our will. It's our will that makes it unyielding. But if someone succeeds in forgetting all purpose, in wanting nothing at all -- to him the gate will open of its own accord.

¹² When Atréju accepts his mirror image and becomes one with it, he is reborn. That causes him to lose all memories from the former life. He even loses his own name without noticing. Intentionless like a newborn child, Atréju wanders around the gate for a while. At his gentle attentiveness, the gate opens up to a gap which allows him to enter. In this episode resounds the Far eastern attitude of purposelessness, letting go of the will, which is attempted through meditation. The self opens up freely to Atréju after he had entered it like a newborn child without expecting anything from it. The new Atréju and the old still share the True Will.

I hope that I have now made my interpretation problems with these events clear. In 1.3, I will attempt to give a solution for of these problems.

1.3 Conclusions about interpretation problems

I already mentioned one of Elena Wagner's explanations for the interpretation difficulties. She argued that Engywuck's failure is a critique on scientists who do not test their ideas in practice. This could mean that these events are not meant to be explained at all. This explanation matches with Ende's concept of art. He did not believe that art could be interpreted by science.

*Nach Michael Ende last sich das Wesen der Kunst nicht beschreiben, da man nicht etwas in Begriffen ausdrücken kann, was sich seinem Wesen nach den Begriffen entzieht. Kunst und Dichtung könne nur mit Kunst und Dichtung erklärt werden.*¹³
(Wagner 14)

Perhaps that is what Von Prondszynsky meant by Ende relying on the Unknowable (*das Unfassbare*).

Wagner also mentions that Ende's beliefs show the influences of Reception Theory. He and his father, the painter Edgar Ende, did not want to force a meaning on their audience. They believed that the meaning of art only exists in its interaction with its audience. (Wagner 38-39) Ende has mentioned that he tries to make the reader actively contribute to the story. "Während es mir gerade darum zu tun ist, Bildergeschichte zu finden, die genau das offen lassen, d.h. die den Leser eintreten lassen, um ihn zum Mitwirkenden zu machen."¹⁴ (Wagner 42)

Ende's concepts of an open place may be similar to Iser's concept of the gap. Ende specifically mentioned that he wanted to let the reader enter by the use of open places. This is exactly what happens with the magical gates. When Atréju passes through the Zauber Spiegel Tor, he takes Bastian with him.

The indeterminacy of the events may also inspire the actual reader to contribute to the story. Engywuck's attempts encourage the reader to look for an explanation. At the same time, the events may not be meant to be interpreted. Some readers may feel tricked, while others accept that some things are *Unfassbar* (Unknowable). However, it may also draw attention to other layers of logic, like dramatic laws. The shifting function of the Zauber Spiegel Tor already points to other layers of logic.

There are more events in which attention is drawn to other layers of logic. For instance, when Bastian makes eye contact with the Kindliche Kaiserin when reads about Atréju's meeting with her. Atréju asks why he

¹³ According to Ende, art does not allow itself to be described. It cannot be translated into words, for its being evades being conceptualized.

¹⁴ It is my goal to create a picture story, that leaves open that which allows the reader to enter and will make him into a contributor.

did not see Bastian. The Kindliche Kaiserin answers: "Oh, es gibt noch manches, was für dich unsichtbar ist, (...) aber du kannst es mir glauben. Noch ist er nicht in unserer Welt. Aber unsere Welten sind einander schon so nah, daß wir uns sehen konnten." ¹⁵ (Ende 166)

The seven powers of the Kindliche Kaiserin are another example of things that are invisible to Atréju.

Du kannst sie nicht sehen, noch hören, und doch sind sie alle bei mir in diesem Augenblick. Drei von ihnen will ich bei dir und Fuchur lassen, damit sie euch betreuen. Vier nehme ich mit mir und sie werden mich begleiten. ¹⁶ (Ende 174)

The fact that they are magically healed or transported by invisible powers may draw attention to the usual treatment of less dramatic events. In the universe of drama, it is not uncommon to skip less dramatic events. In that way, it may seem as if characters are instantly healed or transported from one place to another.

With these references to invisible forces, it is possible that the events of the Three Magic Gates also draw attention to other levels of logic. Atréju succeeds, because there is a law that ensures that "the hero will not die" or that "the hero will succeed". The status of hero is assigned to Atréju and not something he achieves. The centaur Caíron, who will deliver AURYN to Atréju mentions the need of a hero:

Die Suche danach erfordert einen Fährtenfinder, der Wege im Unwegsamen zu entdecken vermag und vor keiner Gefahr und keiner Anstrengung zurückweicht, mit einem Wort: einen Helden. Und die Kindliche Kaiserin hat mir den Namen dieses Helden genannt, dem sie ihr und unser aller Los anvertraut. ¹⁷ (Ende 38)

Caíron expects this hero to be an experienced person:

"Gibt es da nicht vielleicht noch einen anderen, einen erwachsenen Mann, einen erfahrenen Jäger dieses Namens?"

"Nein, Atréju bin ich und kein anderer."

Der alte Caíron ließ sich auf das Lager zurücksinken und keuchte:

"Ein Kind! Ein kleiner Junge! Wahrhaftig, die Entscheidungen der Kindlichen Kaiserin sind schwer zu begreifen." ¹⁸ (Ende 41)

If a hero is not someone who earned this title for her/his achievements, then it might mean something else. Atréju is singled out to be the hero in the coming events. This may be a prediction for future successes.

¹⁵ Oh, the world is full of things you don't see. You can believe me. He isn't in our world yet. But our worlds have come close enough together for us to see each other.

¹⁶ They cannot be seen or heard, and yet they are with me at this moment. I shall leave three of them with you and Falkor to look after you, and I shall take the other four with me as my escort.

¹⁷ The search for this savior calls for a pathfinder, someone who is capable of finding paths in the pathless wilderness and who will shrink from no danger or hardship. In other words: a hero. And the Childlike Empress has given me the name of this hero, to whom she entrusts her salvation and ours.

¹⁸ "Isn't there someone else of the same name? A grown man, an experienced hunter?"

"No. I and no one else am Atréju."

Sinking back on his bed of furs, old Caíron gasped: "A child! A little boy! Really, the decisions of the Childlike Empress are hard to fathom."

Atréju's hero status is assigned to him by the story. The structure of Atréju's quest may also support his hero status. Maria Nikolajeva compares Atréju's quest with Vladimir Propp's model of a donor trial. A donor trial is "a series of *trials*, where the hero encounters different donors – characters who through advice, a magic agent or in some other way assist him on his journey." (Nikolajeva 36) The purple buffalo in a dream, Morla, Ygramul, Fuchur, Engywuck, Uyulála and the werewolf Gmork are examples of characters who act as a donor. (Nikolajeva 43)

Finally, the hero status is reinforced at the Zauber Spiegel Tor. The reader, Bastian, singles out Atréju as the hero, because he identifies himself with Atréju. This identification is made physical when Atréju passes through Bastian's image.

In the next chapter I will discuss whether Bastian's adventures are in a similar way affected by higher layers of logic.

2. Bastian's Adventures in Phantásien

In 2.1 I will try to give examples of events that expose Bastian's interaction with dramatic laws. In 2.2 I will present examples of events in which Bastian's interaction with dramatic laws is more complicated than with Atréju. 2.3 will be used for explaining this difference.

2.1 Exposure of dramatic laws in Bastian's adventures

The first example of dramatic laws guiding Bastian is the very first moment when he touches the book:

Er konnte einfach seine Augen nicht abwenden davon. Es war ihm, als ginge eine Art Magnetkraft davon aus, die ihn unwiderstehlich anzog. (...) [E]r berührte das Buch - und im gleichen Augenblick machte etwas in seinem Inneren 'klick!', so als habe sich eine Falle geschlossen. Bastian hatte das dunkle Gefühl, daß mit dieser Berührung etwas Unwiderrufliches begonnen hatte und nun seinen Lauf nehmen würde. ¹⁹ (Ende 10)

He has not looked at the title yet. He knows nothing about the book's contents. The sensation that he has, is not something that grows on him. The text mentions a magnetic force (*Magnetkraft*) and a trap that sets off something irrevocable. His love for books is not enough to steal the book, for he feels bad immediately after stealing it.

There is a dramatic rule that decides that Bastian will steal the book. There are often dramatic laws behind Bastian's actions. He would not have run into the store if he had not been pursued by bullies. He cannot go home after stealing the book, because he does not want to disappoint his father. Out of habit, he unconsciously walks the way to school. What makes his first contact with the book stand out is that it remains unexplained what he feels even though these feelings motivate his later actions.

My next examples concern the way in which Bastian's journey through Phantásien progresses. When Bastian wakes up in Phantásien, he is wearing AURYN, the symbol of the Kindliche Kaiserin. At the back of the amulet he finds the text "TU WAS DU WILLST" (Do What You Wish). (Ende 199)

AURYN works different for Bastian than for Atréju. It protects him, and makes his wishes come true. The Kindliche Kaiserin encourages him to make many wishes. His wishes will restore Phantásien. "Bastian dachte nach, dann fragte er vorsichtig: 'Wieviele Wünsche habe ich denn frei?'"

¹⁹ He couldn't take his eyes off it. It seemed to have a kind of magnetic power that attracted him irresistibly.

He (...) touched the book. In that moment something inside him went click!, as though a trap had shut. Bastian had a vague feeling that touching the book had started something irrevocable, which would now take its course.

'Soviele du willst- je mehr, desto besser, mein Bastian. Um so reicher und vielgestaltiger wird Phantásien sein.'" ²⁰ (Ende 194)

She does not tell him that every wish will make him forget something from his own world. He is also supposed to wish for the thing that he most deeply desires. Without a clear goal, Bastian starts wishing for anything that comes to mind.

In theory, Bastian can shape his own path and story. He can wish for anything and these wishes shape Phantásien. Still, the story contains glimpses of a preset path. After failing to crown himself Emperor, Bastian comes by "Die alte Kaiser Stadt" (The city of old Emperors). Here, he is confronted with humans who lost all of their memories. These people crowned themselves emperor or used up all of their wishes.

Bastian realizes that he could end up the same way. He asks Argax, a monkey who supervises the city, what he should do to leave Phantásien. Argax answers: "Vielleicht findest du ja Yors Minroud, die letzte Rettung für manche wie dich." ²¹ (Ende 369)

There may be a preset path for leaving Phantásien, for others have taken the same path past Yors Minroud. Unless they all have the same true wish, their individual wishes would lead them down different paths. It could also be that Phantásien filters out people with the same wish as Bastian. People are forced to find this wish within them. If they do not succeed, they end up like the people in The City of Old Emperors.

Yors Minroud's comments may also point to a preset path. Bastian is unable to see in the darkness of Minroud's mine. Yors asks him:

"Hat man dir denn kein Licht gegeben auf deiner weiten Reise? (...) keinen leuchtenden Stein, gar nichts, was dir jetzt helfen könnte?"

"Doch" antwortete Bastian traurig, "aber ich habe Al'Tsahir zu etwas anderem gebraucht." ²² (Ende 403)

Al'Tsahir is a stone that Bastian discovers at the door of a library. By naming it Al'Tsahir, Bastian opens the library and becomes owner of the stone. The way he uses Al'Tsahir will be discussed later.

The library has been there for ages. The stone reveals that the library was founded to store Bastian's stories. It also mentions the darkness of Minroud's mines. This raises the question whether or not the library was really founded for Bastian. It is possible that both stone and library are part of a larger plan. Another explanation would be that Bastian has no full control of what he wishes for. His wishes would then be altered to fit with the dramatic laws behind the story.

²⁰ Bastian thought a moment. Then he inquired cautiously: 'How many wishes have I got?' 'As many as you want -- the more, the better, my Bastian. Fantastica will be all the more rich and varied.'

²¹ Maybe you'll find Yors Minroud, that's the last hope for people like you.

²² Weren't you given a light for your long journey? (...) A sparkling stone or something that might help you now?

"Yes," said Bastian sadly. "But I used Al'Tsahir for something else."

2.2 Bastian's creative ability

Some events are more complex, because of the role that Bastian has in the story. The first examples concern the events influenced by the magic sword Sikánda. Bastian receives Sikánda from the lion Graogramán for telling the lion about the purpose of his life. Naming it Sikánda makes the sword only answer to Bastian. Eva Maria Rindler compares this relation with the relation between King Arthur and Excalibur:

Beide Schwerter sind ausschließlich für ihren Besitzer bestimmt und werden am Ende, nachdem ihre Handhabung Unheil angerichtet hat, wieder an die Natur zurückgegeben: Excalibur wird in einen See geworfen, Sikánda dagegen wird in der Erde vergraben. ²³ (Rindler 33-34)

Every time when Bastian is in danger, Sikánda will automatically fly into his hand and guide him during battle. However, Graogramán warns him that he should never take the sword from its sheath. That would bring great misfortune upon himself and Phantásien.

Nur wenn es von selbst in deine Hand springt wie jetzt eben, darfst du es gebrauchen - was auch immer dir drohen mag. Es wird deine Hand führen und aus eigener Kraft tun, was zu tun ist. Wenn du es aber je nach deinem Willen aus seiner Scheide ziehst, dann wirst du großes Unheil über dich und Phantásien bringen. ²⁴ (Ende 223)

Sikánda's guidance and bad luck prophesy seem to point to a power outside of Bastian's will. However, Bastian does have a hand in his own misfortune. When Bastian wants to crown himself emperor, Atréju intervenes. Bastian and Atréju end up facing each other in battle. Still, Sikánda remains in its sheath:

Bastian riß an seinem Schwertgriff, und mit seiner riesigen Kraft gelang es ihm tatsächlich, Sikánda aus seiner Scheide zu ziehen, ohne daß es ihm von selbst in die Hand sprang. Doch im gleichen Augenblick, als das geschah, war ein Laut zu hören (...) Es war das schreckliche Knirschen, das er gehört hatte, als Graógramán zu Stein wurde. Und das Leuchten Sikándas erlosch. Ihm schoß durch den Kopf, was der Löwe ihm angekündigt hatte, falls er diese Waffe je aus eigenem Willen ziehen würde. Aber nun konnte und wollte er es nicht mehr rückgängig machen.

Er schlug auf Atréju ein, der sich mit seinem Schwert zu decken versuchte. Doch Sikánda zerschnitt Atréjus Waffe und traf seine Brust. Eine tiefe Wunde klaffte auf, und Blut quoll hervor. Atréju taumelte rückwärts und stürzte von der Zinne des großen Tores hinunter. ²⁵ (Ende 356)

²³ Both swords only belong to one owner. At the end, they are both returned to nature: Excalibur is thrown into a lake, while Sikánda is buried in the earth.

²⁴ Whatever may threaten you, you may wield it only if it leaps into your hand of its own accord as it did now. It will guide your hand and by its own power will do what needs to be done. But if your will makes you draw it from its sheath, you will bring great misfortune on yourself and on Fantastica.

²⁵ Bastian tugged at the hilt of his sword. He tugged with all his might and finally managed to draw Sikanda from its sheath. But it did not leap into his hand of its own accord, and at the same moment a sound was heard (...) It was the hideous cracking and grinding he had heard when Grograman turned to stone. Sikanda's light went out. And then Bastian remembered how

Forcefully removing the sword causes a loud noise that reminds Bastian of the lion's warning. Sikánda protects him when he is in danger. This implies that unsheathing the sword could cause unnecessary harm. Up to that point, Sikánda has not yet physically harmed a person. This changes now that Bastian has broken its rules.

It may seem as if this prophesy about misfortune is self-fulfilling. This, however, does not have to be the case here. It is still up to Bastian, whether to use the sword or not. Attacking Atréju is his own choice for his hand is no longer guided by Sikánda.

The way he uses the glowing stone Al'Tsahir is also his own choice. The stone comes with "guidelines", just like the sword:

Ich halte die Tür verschlossen, bis der mein Licht erweckt, der mich bei meinem Namen nennt. Ihm leuchte ich hundert Jahre lang und will ihn führen in den dunklen Tiefen von Yors Minroud. Doch spricht er meinen Namen noch ein zweites Mal vom Ende zum Anfang verstrahl ich hundert Jahre Leuchten in einem Augenblick. ²⁶ (Ende 261)

Like mentioned before, Bastian does not use Al'Tsahir in the mines of Yors. Instead, he uses it to show the attic where he had been reading the book before entering Phantásien.

Just like Atréju's adventures, Bastian's journey is structured like a donor trial. The difference is that Bastian behaves like a false hero. Nikolajeva writes:

Bastian is the hero and Atréju his helper. There is no villain, and the Childlike Empress is a dispatcher and donor, who presents Bastian with a magic amulet and sends him off on his adventures. But she is not the only donor here; Bastian acquires a magic sword from Grogaman the lion, a magic jewel from the inhabitants of the Silver City, an invisibility belt from Xayide the enchantress. Bastian misuses all these magic objects in the same way as the false hero in fairy tales. He draws the sword from the scabbard by force, uses the stone to satisfy his vanity, eavesdrops while invisible on his friends, and in all cases brings grief to himself and the whole country. (Nikolajeva 36-37)

Bastian behaving like a false hero does not necessarily mean that he is a bad person. He misbehaves, because he is not limited to a character type like the fantasy character Atréju. His imagination allows him to create his own stories. These stories are not limited to being good or evil, because fantasy exists of both good and bad things. The guidelines that come with Al'Tsahir do not specify that its light will show Bastian's world. It is something he invents for himself. He has always had this creative ability,

the lion had predicted what would happen if someone were to draw the sword of his own will. But by then it was too late to turn back.

Atréju tried to defend himself with his own sword. But wielded by Bastian, Sikanda cut it in two and struck Atréju in the chest. Blood spurted from a gaping wound. Atréju staggered back and toppled from the wall.

²⁶ I shall keep the door locked until my light is rekindled by him who calls me by name. For him I will shine a hundred years. I will guide him in the dark depths of Yor's Minroud. But if he says my name a second time from the end to the beginning, I will glow in one moment with the light of a hundred years.

for he has been telling stories in his own world. Now that he has come to Phantásien, he needs to learn to control this ability.

2.3 Creating stories in a responsible way

The creation of stories is very important in *The Neverending Story*. Bastian is encouraged to make many wishes. His creative ability will make the world of Phantásien richer. The Kindliche Kaiserin does not make judgements based on good or bad. If Phantásien has a moral code, than it is one based on the importance of creating stories.

At one point, Bastian stops making wishes to prevent himself from making a foolish wish. Without this creative impulse, he and his friends start travelling in circles. To achieve something in Phantásien, one has to make wishes and create new stories. It is for this reason that the Nothing, un-fantasy, is the negative force in *Die Unendliche Geschichte*.

His next wish is not much better. "Er wollte gefährlich sein, gefährlich und gefürchtet!"²⁷ (Ende 301) This wish creates the sorceress Xayide and her army of empty knights. She explains that her knights are hollow, because that makes them controllable by her magic. The hollowness can also serve as a metaphor for the kind of adventure he has created. He has created a set of faceless, empty characters with the only purpose of being defeated. A good analogy would be the unlimited amount of opponents that are beaten in chivalric romances or video games during travels from castle to castle. They are unimportant characters: their only purpose is to show the hero's strength.

When Bastian leaves Xayide behind, her knights turn against her. She is killed and the suits of armour are left to rust away. Their story collapsed without Bastian's creative impulse. In that sense, Xayide and her knights were all empty and under Bastian's control.

Xayide is destroyed, because she is incomplete too. Her behaviour is more human than the behaviour of other inhabitants from Phantásien. Like those inhabitants she wants a purpose. What makes her human is that she seeks this purpose in acquiring material things and power. She has a green and a red eye. These are the colours in which *Die Unendliche Geschichte* was (originally) printed. Events in the human world are written in red and text for Phantásien is green. Xayide's eyes reflect a mixture between human and Phantásiens reality.

Stories need substance. This is also the reason why Bastian is not immediately allowed to leave. He first needs to complete all of the stories he has created. Luckily, Atréju offers to finish these stories in his place even though it may take ages. But what makes a good or complete story?

The first things that Bastian creates are the night forest Perelin and the desert Goab. His wish for company creates the lion Graogramán with whom he stays for days. He learns of the lion's faith: Graogramán dies every evening. He tells the lion that his death will enable Perelin to grow,

²⁷ He wanted to be dangerous, dangerous and feared.

because the desert dies with him. Bastian gives the lion's life and death a purpose and is rewarded, because he receives Sikánda. At first Bastian had been sad about the lion's death, but he understands that good and evil can coexist in a symbiotic relationship.

The same happens when he comes to the silver city Amargánth. The people of Amargánth want to hear a story from him and he provides them with the history of Amargánth. Their ancestors had to build the most beautiful city or their tribe would die out. They called in the help of the Acharai, creatures who come out at night to make silver structures. The Acharai were willing to help them if the Amargánthians would promise to make songs and stories for them. It is for this reason that the Amargánthians created a library to preserve all of their stories. Amargánth is now a city that drifts on an acid lake, for the Acharai's tears filled the valley around Amargánth. They use these tears to clean the silver for their structures.

Bastian is also rewarded for this explanation, because he is given the stone Al'Tsahir. His story is again a symbiosis between good and bad. The unhappy, ugly looking Acharai are responsible for creating the most beautiful city in Phantásien. The importance of such a symbiosis becomes evident when Bastian tries to change the Acharai's fate. He is sorry for their sadness and decides to help them by making them into careless, happy, funny looking creatures.

His plan backfires. The Acharai no longer make silver structures and the lake beneath Amargánth evaporates. By changing one part he broke the balance of the story. When Bastian is not around, the story collapses, just like the story of Xayide and her knights. Bastian is the only one who can defy the dramatic laws, because of his human fantasy. He can help others to have a worthy existence. Without a well balanced story, they care about nothing or seek a purpose in material things. They never have control over their lives. Their existence comes with dramatic laws that work against them. One rule decides that the transformed Acharai will never achieve anything serious. Another decides that Xayide will die, for Bastian created her to be defeated.

In the next chapter, I will explain the relevance of the things that Bastian has learned in Phantásien.

3. Translating Bastian's lessons about stories to reality

3.1 Back to reality

The things that Bastian has learned during his journey through Phantásien may still be useful when he is back in his own world. When Bastian has returned from Phantásien, he is still in the school attic where he started reading. The school is closed and he needs to find a way out. "Luckily", there is some scaffolding next to the school. Bastian uses this to leave the school: "Für einen, der Herr von Perelín gewesen war, gab es hier überhaupt kein Problem - auch wenn er nicht mehr über die fabelhaften Körperkräfte verfügte und das Gewicht seines dicken Körpers ihm doch ein wenig zu schaffen machte." ²⁸ (Ende 421)

His fantasy helps him to climb down the scaffolding. In Phantásien, he had been strong, because he wanted to be strong. By treating his climb down as a story, he finds strength beyond his physical abilities. It is also important to notice the dramatic law behind this scene. Bastian is somehow supposed to leave the school. This is why the dramatic law provides Bastian with some scaffolding. It is less likely that Bastian would have noticed this opportunity before his visit to Phantásien.

Awareness of the close relation between fantasy and reality may help to better understand things in life. Being aware of the need of a balance between good and evil in stories can help to accept negative aspects of life.

Psycho-analytical approaches have explored the ways in which Phantásien can be seen as Bastian's mental process of dealing with his problems. The death of his mother has been troubling to both him and his father. His need for motherly love may be represented by Aiuóla. *Das Phantásien Lexicon* calls her "das phantasievolle Spiegelbild von Bastian Balthasar Bux' verstorbener mutter". ²⁹ (22) Aiuóla fulfils his need for motherly love until he feels that he can go on without it. Aiuóla and the lion Graogramán also help him to see that death does not have to be horrible. They both lead a life of death and reincarnation. Their lives help Bastian to see that death does not have to be the end.

The limitation of this interpretation is that it is not certain whether his trip to Phantásien has prepared Bastian for future problems. Treating life as a story may solve this problem. Awareness about the balance between good and evil in stories may make it easier to accept bad things in life. Knowing about the power of stories can help to enrich people's lives. Telling his father about his adventures in Phantásien re-establishes their communication. They rarely talked with each other since the death of

²⁸ To someone who had been lord of Perelin, this was no problem, even if he had lost his fabulous strength and even though the weight of his little fat body was making things rather hard for him.

²⁹ The fantasy mirror image of Bastian's deceased mother.

Bastian's mother. Bastian also visits Mr. Koriander, the man from whom he had stolen the book. Mr. Koriander appeared grumpy at first, but he may have acted that way because he is like Bastian. Perhaps he has been bullied too for his love for books and visits to Phantásien.

Treating life as a story does not have to be unnatural in *Die Unendliche Geschichte*. The boundaries between reality and fantasy are not always clear. For instance, characters in Phantásien can hear Bastian's shout of terror, when he reads about the monster Ygramul. The Zauber Spiegel Tor's reflection also points to a connection between the worlds of fantasy and reality.

This connection is further symbolized by the use of the colours green and red. The book is printed in red for reality and green for Phantásien. For instance, Bastian tries to make contact with the human world in the desert Goab. He does this by laying out his initials with red sand on a blue hill. These initials "BBB" (Ende 211) are also printed in red ink while the surrounding text is in green. Red is used to mark the existence of a human in Phantásien.

As mentioned before, Xayide's eyes may reflect that she is a Phantásier with human traits. It may also remind of the balance that a Phantásier needs. She is created as evil, without any history of her own.

During his battle with Atréju, Bastian is again painfully reminded of the reality of his actions. He slashes Atréju with his sword. This bloody wound marks a turning point. Up till this point, nobody had been hurt. After the attack on Atréju, people are wounded and even killed. Phantásien is no longer a peaceful fantasy, but a bitter reality. Atréju's blood shows that he is not just some fantasy character but a real person. This is again reflected in colours. The red blood pouring from Atréju's green skin reminds of the red B's coming forward from the green text.

Treating life as a story allows Bastian to get more control over his life. It may allow him to see opportunities provided by dramatic laws. Understanding the balance between good and evil can help him deal with problems and help others to get a more meaningful life. A similar message can be found in the metafictional or metafantasy works *Harold and the Purple Crayon* and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*.

3.2 Harold and the Purple Crayon

There are other books in which creative abilities and its consequences are important. *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (1955) by Crockett Johnson is a picture book about a little boy, who goes out for a walk in the moonlight. Everything Harold experiences is his own creation. He creates the moon and a road to walk on. The beach that Harold creates makes him want to have a picnic. When Harold becomes tired, he starts drawing windows to find his own bedroom. Finally, he realises that his bedroom window is always around the moon. He draws a window in front of the moon and creates his own room. It is not likely that there ever was a reality besides the one he creates.

This can also lead to problems. Much like Bastian, Harold is not always aware of the consequences of his creation. He creates a dragon to guard an apple tree. But it is so terrifying that it scares Harold. He shivers and the crayon creates a sea beneath his feet. According to Philip Nel "Harold's purple-crayon universe hangs together by dint of chance and imagination; for Harold (...) there is both possibility and peril in this 'fact.'" (Nel 5)

Later, Harold creates a mountain to get a better view. He climbs to the top and falls, because he has not created the other side. Nel continues: "Here, too, Harold finds himself at the mercy of forces he cannot control. Again, his skill at responding to an ever-changing situation saves him: 'But, luckily, he kept his wits and his purple crayon.'" (Nel 6)

"Forces he cannot control" may well be the dramatic laws that guide a story along. These laws become exposed when nearly everything Harold does leads to unforeseen dangers and adventures. Just like Bastian, Harold is able to change the course of events through his creative ability. If he would have been a regular character without this creative ability, he would not have been able to defy these laws. For example, he asks a police officer for directions. The officer can only point in the direction in which Harold was heading, because he was drawn this way.

3.3 Haroun and the Sea of Stories

Bastian had problems dealing with the death of his mother and his mourning father. The story about Haroun starts with his mother, Soraya, leaving his father for a man who despises stories and imagination. Haroun's father Rashid, a renowned storyteller, loses his ability to tell stories. One night, Haroun wakes up to discover a water genie called "Iff" in his room. Iff controls Rashid's Word Supply. Iff's intention is to shut Rashid's water supply of words, but Haroun stops him by stealing his tool.

Haroun wants to know more about the business with the story water. He travels with Iff to the moon Kahani. Kahani consist of a vast ocean which contains all stories. This ocean is divided into two parts, a light side called Gup and a dark side called Chup. Haroun learns that the people from Chup have poisoned the ocean to destroy the supply of stories. Their leader, Khattam-Shud, wants to destroy all stories and create complete silence. Eliminating stories will help him to control the world.

"Why do you hate stories so much? ... Stories are fun ..."

"The World, however, is not for Fun," Khattam-Shud replied. "The World is for Controlling."

"Which world?" Haroun made himself ask.

"Your world, my world, all worlds," came the reply. "They are all there to be Ruled. And inside every single story, inside every Stream in the Ocean, there lies a world, a story-world, that I cannot Rule at all. And that is the reason why." (Rushdie 161)

In *Die Unendliche Geschichte*, the werewolf Gmork tells something similar about the Nothing. Things swallowed by the Nothing become lies.

*... sobald die Reihe an dich kommt, ins Nichts zu springen, wirst auch du ein willenloser und unkenntlicher Diener der Macht. Wer weiß, wozu du ihr nützen wirst. Vielleicht wird man mit deiner Hilfe Menschen dazu bringen, zu kaufen, was sie nicht brauchen, oder zu hassen, was sie nicht kennen, zu glauben, was sie gefügig macht, oder zu bezweifeln, was sie erretten könnte. Mit euch, kleiner Phantásien, werden in der Menschenwelt große Geschäfte gemacht, werden Kriege entfesselt, werden Weltreiche begründet.*³⁰ (Ende 144)

Access to fantasy or stories allows people to have control over their own lives. Without this fantasy, they become controllable like Xayide's knights. Bastian learns to deal with his problems with the aid of fantasy. Saving Kahani helps Haroun to solve his problems at home. Stories again find their way into the human world which affects multiple things. People become happy again and remember the name of their city, Kahani. This may symbolize the return of meaning to their lives.

Soraya returns to Rashid and Haroun, abandoning the man she had been seeing. This man turned out to be the human equivalent of Khattam-Shud. He tried to destroy fantasy by destroying Rashid's family.

Rashid regains his ability to tell stories and the first story he tells is "Haroun and the Sea of Stories". Hearing about Khattam-Shud makes people realise that they are similarly controlled by their leader. Their revolt is yet another example of people taking back control over their lives because of a story.

They realize that not all things are based on solid laws. Laws may include room for changes through imagination. Someone's position as a leader does not have to be a given fact. Divisions between good and evil do not always have to be natural. Haroun saves Kahani by wishing that the moon will rotate again. The division between darkness and light was created by scientists from Gup. The two sides became estranged from each other, because they were no longer able to experience day or night. Haroun's wish brings balance to Kahani and people are again able to live a normal life.

Before continuing to my conclusion, there is one last thing that needs to be made clear. I have stated that Bastian, Harold and Haroun may learn to see their lives as stories. Harold seems to have no trouble with that, because reality and fantasy appear to be the same during his adventures. He is able to create his own life and deal with the problems that might occur.

It is less clear whether Bastian and Haroun are aware of their use of their creative powers within reality. They would have to recognise that there are dramatic laws in both their fantasy and reality. Furthermore,

³⁰ When your turn comes to jump into the Nothing, you too will be a nameless servant of power, with no will of your own. Who knows what use they will make of you? Maybe you'll help them persuade people to buy things they don't need, or hate things they know nothing about, or hold beliefs that make them easy to handle, or doubt the truths that might save them. Yes, you little Fantastican, big things will be done in the human world with your help, wars started, empires founded. . .

they would need to compare their successes with those of fictional characters.

It may not be likely for them to notice all of these things. This, however, does not have to mean that nobody will learn these lessons. The fact that these stories are metafictional, that is, a reflection on fiction itself, helps to expose dramatic laws. *Die Unendliche Geschichte* is a book about someone reading a book. This premise raises questions about the boundaries between fiction and reality. A reader reading *Die Unendliche Geschichte* might just as well be a character in a book reading a book. This repeating model of reading a book about reading a book is another way in which *Die Unendliche Geschichte* is endless.

Die Unendliche Geschichte may inspire readers to think outside of their own reality. Once they realise that not everything in life has to be a given thing and that humans are not necessarily limited to one character type, they may start to explore new possibilities in their lives by using their imagination.

Conclusion

In this essay I tried to answer the following question:

In what way are dramatic laws exposed in *Die Unendliche Geschichte* and how does this help to understand the workings of Bastian's imagination?

Engywuck's attempts and failures to solving the mysteries of the Three Magic Gates may inspire the reader to look for a solution of their own. The descriptions of the events leave many things open to the imagination. For instance, it is not clear what makes the Sphinxes close their eyes or if they closed them at all. The Zauber Spiegel Tor easily allows Atréju to pass and even helps him with passing the Ohne Schlüssel Tor.

Taking Engywuck's approach will not likely provide any solid results. Finding an explanation may be impossible without discarding some of the conflicting elements that are part of the events. Eva Rindler's argument that the events are a critique on Engywuck's theoretical approach may suggest that the events are not meant to be understood at all. They are at least not meant to be understood through scientific approaches.

Without an explanation within the story's logic, attention is drawn towards laws at other levels of logic. A dramatic law, a law that helps to create dramatic events, decides that Atréju will overcome all of his challenges. Another example of different layers of logic is the Zauber Spiegel Tor's function of informing the reader about her/his influence on the story. Atréju's hero status can also be seen as established by the narrative. He is named a hero before achieving anything and his adventures mirror the donor trial taken by heroes in folktales. The events of the Three Magic Gates may function as a reference for the way a fantasy hero interacts with dramatic laws.

Bastian's adventures are similarly guided by laws outside of his influence. The magnetic force that Bastian experiences when he discovers the book sets off a whole series of events. It inspires him to steal the book, to skip school, to walk away from home and perhaps even to travel into Phantásien. Even though Bastian is able to wish for anything, his adventures in Phantásien seem to follow a preset path. There is either a specific path for leaving Phantásien or his wishes are executed to fit existing dramatic laws.

The way in which Bastian makes use of the magical objects he receives, reveals a more complex interaction with the dramatic laws than Atréju's interaction. He uses his sword to attack a friend, uses his stone to show off and uses his invisibility belt to spy on friends. Nikolajeva identifies Bastian as a false hero. His adventures form a donor trial, but he misuses the objects that he receives. He is not limited to a position as a hero or anti-hero. His creative ability allows him to create his own stories. He is not limited to one clear role within the story.

Die Unendliche Geschichte's moral code is based on the importance of the creation of stories. Creating stories allows Bastian to move around

and Phantásien to grow. His ability to tell stories allows Bastian to create a meaningful life for Phantásiers. However, he needs to make sure that their story contains a balance between good and evil. Making the sad Acharai into purely happy creatures results in a dramatic law preventing them from achieving anything serious. Making Xayide purely evil causes her to look for meaning in obtaining power and material things. Her sole purpose is being defeated by Bastian. This dramatic law causes her death as soon as Bastian leaves her behind. Knowing about the balance between good and evil can also help to understand that some bad things may lead to good things.

The things that Bastian learns in Phantásien can also be applied to his real life. He is not limited to a character type like a fantasy character. This allows him to see himself as something more than the things that his bullies called him. Climbing out of the window is something that he might not have considered doing before his trip to Phantásien. Bastian's ability to create stories can also help people in the real world. His relation with his father improves and he finds a friend in Mr. Koreander. Bastian may also be an inspiration to the readers that read his stories. They may learn to treat their lives as stories as they become more aware about their creative abilities.

Harold and the Purple Crayon and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* confirm the theme of shaping a life through the imagination. Harold's reality can be seen as fictional, because Harold shapes everything with his purple crayon. Forces outside his control cause him to fall from one adventure into another. His creative ability allows Harold to change the course of events and maintain control over his life.

There are many similarities between *Die Unendliche Geschichte* and *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Both protagonists visit a world of imagination that is threatened by a destructive force. The people behind these forces want to destroy fantasy to gain control over the human world. Saving the world of fantasy helps them to deal with their own problems at home. Their stories also inspire others to assign more meaning to their lives.

Bastian's adventures in Phantásien may be seen as an interactive story. He is both part of and creator of stories, while fantasy characters like Atréju or Xayide are limited to behaviour and success depending on their character types. Imagining things or interactive storytelling may help to understand how to use one's imagination in a responsible way. However, it may be more important to tell these stories to others as it may improve the lives of others. In that sense, interactive storytelling through media is unable to replace traditional interactive storytelling between people.

I will end with a quote by Elena Wagner about Ende's beliefs regarding reality.

[Das kausallogische Denken] zerreit die Einheit der Welt, die in frheren Zeiten geherrscht hat, in eine objektive Wirklichkeit und eine subjektive Innerlichkeit. Fr Michael Ende sind jedoch Phantasie und die uere Welt der Menschen, also die

*Realität, zwei Seiten ein und derselben Medaille. Er glaubt, dass die Realität bestimmte Vorstellungen sind, die man sich von der Wirklichkeit macht. Da man in anderen Kulturen andere Vorstellungen vom Faktischen hat, erleben die Menschen dort auch eine andere Wirklichkeit.*³¹ (Wagner 6)

The Nothing can be seen as Science replacing fantasy with the things that it “discovers”. The assumption that there is one objective reality limits people in seeing their potential. It prevents them from thinking outside rules established by science or mass culture. Using their imagination may help to maintain a reality in which they are in control of their own lives.

³¹ Causological reasoning tears apart the unity of the world, which ruled earlier ages. The world is divided into an objective reality and a subjective inner life. To Michael Ende, fantasy and the outer world of humans, reality, are like the two side of a medal. He believes that reality consists of certain ideas about reality. Other cultures may have different ideas about reality, which means that people who belong to that culture have a different reality.

Appendix: Summary of *Die Unendliche Geschichte*

A boy called Bastian has problems dealing with the death of his mother, the sadness of his father and bullying at school. One day, he flees into a book store to get away from a couple of bullies. He meets the store's owner, Mr. Koreander, and steals a book called *Die Unendliche Geschichte*. He walks to school, hides himself in the attic and starts reading about a world called Phantásien.

Phantásien and its ruler, the Kindliche Kaiserin, are threatened by a force called the Nothing. A boy called Atréju is sent on a quest to find a cure. He is given AURYN, the symbol of the Kindliche Kaiserin, which gives him protection and allows him to act as her substitute.

The Kindliche Kaiserin needs a new name. Atréju travels to the Southern Oracle to ask Uyulála about that name. First, Atréju has to pass three magic gates. After the third gate he meets Uyulála who tells him that a human can give the Kindliche Kaiserin a new name.

With the luckdragon Fuchur, Atréju searches for the world of humans. During a storm, they become separated and Atréju loses AURYN. Atréju meets a werewolf called Gmork, who is sent by people behind the Nothing to sabotage Atréju's Quest. Fuchur saves Atréju and they return to the Ivory Tower to tell the Kindliche Kaiserin about Atréju's.

She, however, tells Atréju that he has been successful as Atréju's adventures have attracted Bastian's attention. Bastian is forced to give the Kindliche Kaiserin a new name after which he enters Phantásien.

Through wishes, Bastian can rebuild Phantásien. Bastian first makes himself handsome and strong. He then wishes for company and meets a lion called Graogramán. From him, Bastian receives a magic sword and the advice to start looking for his deepest desire.

With the desire to meet Atréju, Bastian travels to the city of Amarganth. Here, Bastian receives a magic stone and he meets Atréju and Fuchur. Atréju and Fuchur discover that his wishes make Bastian forget about his world. However, Bastian is only concerned with basic desires. They meet a sorceress called Xayide, who tries to use Bastian for her own goals. From her, Bastian receives an invisibility belt.

Bastian tries to meet the Kindliche Kaiserin again. When they do meet her, Xayide tells him to become Emperor himself. Atréju interferes and is wounded by Bastian. Bastian leaves everyone behind. He visits a city whose inhabitants have tried to crown themselves emperor. Shocked by their lives, Bastian starts looking for a way of leaving Phantásien. In the picture mine of Yors Minroud, he finds an image that reminds him of his father. With that image, Bastian is able to find his way home.

Back in his own world, he is still in the attic at school. Bastian climbs through a window and returns to his father. They have a happy reunion. His father wants to treat him on a day to the zoo, but Bastian first wants to apologise to Mr. Koreander. Mr. Koreander remembers nothing about the book, but has been to Phantásien himself. They become good friends.

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