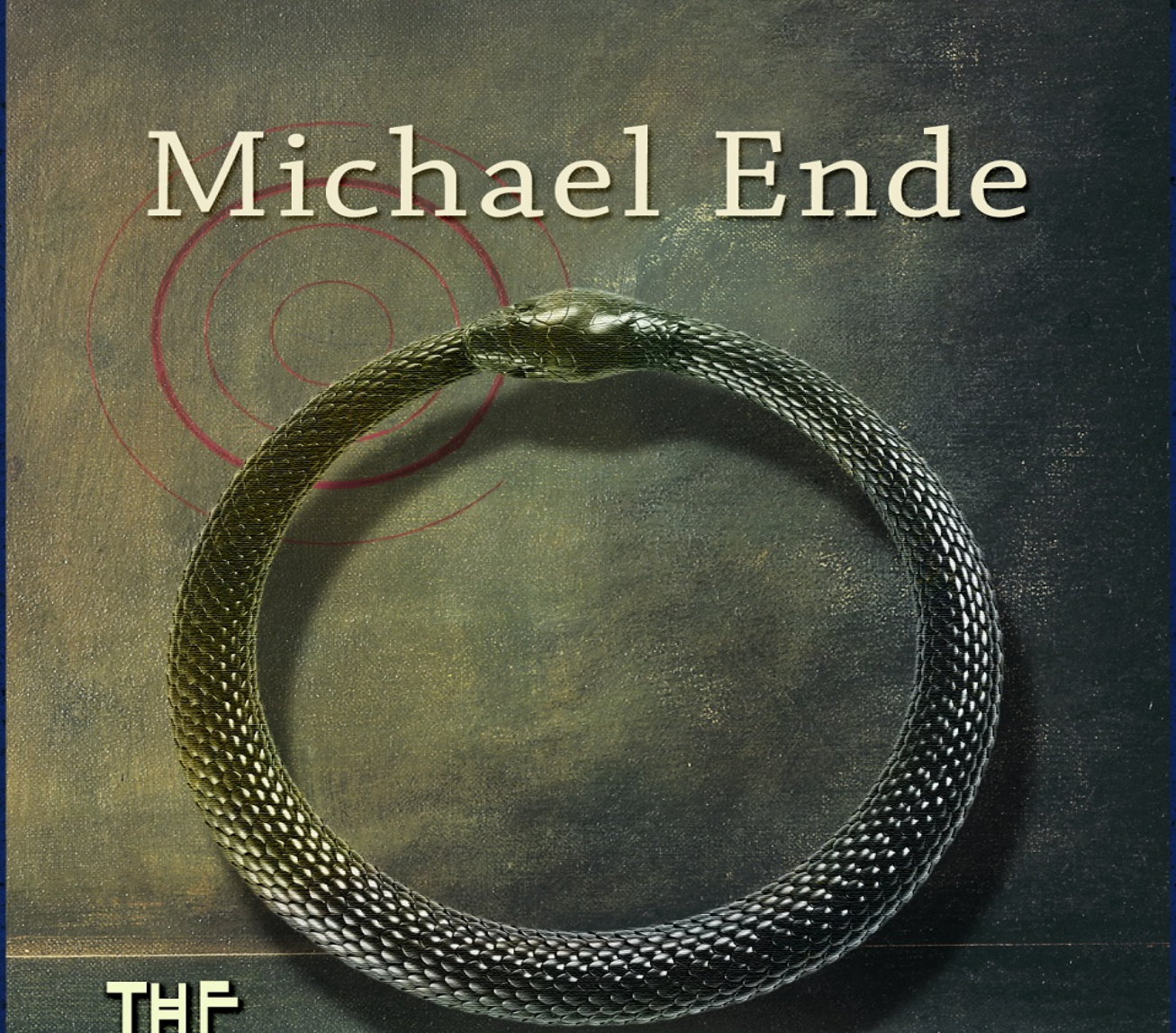
Michael Ende



THE NEVERENDING STORY

The Encyclopedia of Fantastica

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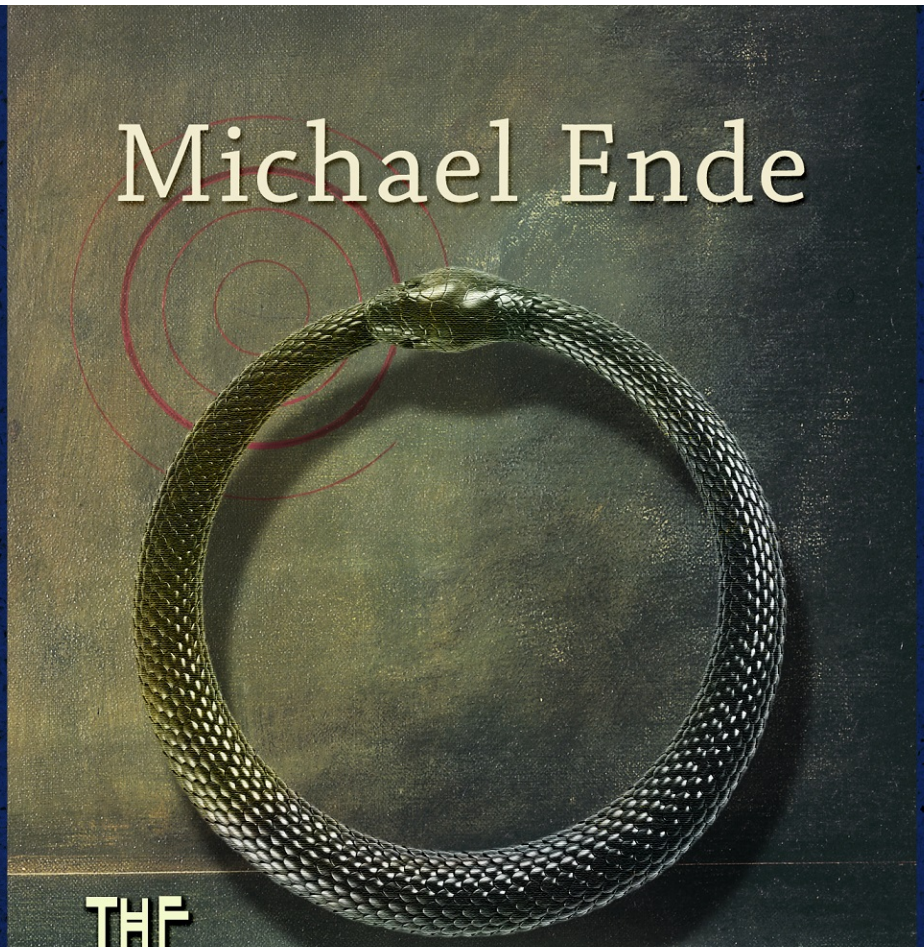

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The Neverending Story

The Encyclopedia of Fantastica

Edited by Patrick Hocke and Roman Hocke

Translated from German by Marshall Yarbrough

You don’t just plant a tree to get apples from it; no, a tree is simply beautiful, and it’s important that it be so, not just that it be useful for something. And that’s what many writers, not many, but still some writers and artists try to do, namely to simply create something which will then be there and can become the shared possession of humanity – simply because it’s good that it’s there.

Michael Ende

Foreword

The encounter between a reader and a book can be an adventure that changes the course of the reader's life. For this reason it's necessary to say a few words here at the start. Fantastica is a realm without borders. This encyclopedia, on the other hand, is not neverending. The selection of entries necessarily had to be kept within certain limits. Therefore, if you cannot find a specific entry for one topic or other, do what Michael Ende would suggest: Use your own imagination. Maybe it'll help you find a link with a related entry. Or maybe your imagination itself will provide the answer to your question.

The inhabitants of Fantastica are assembled here. What's more, terms that are important to Michael Ende's poetic concept also make an appearance. They're all jumbled up together and subject only to alphabetical order – because for Fantastica they are all of equal importance. Maybe this mix will inspire readers to dive deeper into Michael Ende's imaginative world.

"The sacred book of the imagination" – this is what the Polish scholar Alicja Baluch called *The Neverending Story.* And indeed, this book, like Michael Ende's other books, is characterized by an enormous wealth of imaginative invention. The same quality that continues to excite readers the world over drew suspicion from literary critics when the book was first published: The author was accused of escapism. The interplay between different narrative levels, the immersion in the world of imagination, the wealth of meaning – together they were interpreted as lacking any connection to reality. In a time when books had to be relevant, the critics didn't know what to do with the

imagination. Ende's talent for painterly inspiration, his interplay of self-reflexive imagery, meant to avoid any one-sided or narrow interpretations of the world he'd created, was as incomprehensible to the critics as it was captivating to readers.

For his part, Michael Ende saw the imagination being threatened by the forces of disenchantment – forces working on behalf of a functional worldview that kill the imagination and seek to prevent journeys to Fantastica. These forces take their clearest form in the "Grey Gentlemen" that appear in *Momo.* In *The Neverending Story* they are the unknown persons or creatures behind the werewold Gmork's mission who are seeking to destroy Fantastica.

In other cultures and in earlier times, however, people knew that poesy was part of the self. For Michael Ende it was the very basis of life, more important than eating and drinking:

> Poesy is the creative capacity of a person to experience and rediscover themselves in the world, and the world in themselves, again and again, and always in new ways.[1]

Ende's imaginative world carries on the legacy of German Romanticism and should be seen in the context of figures like E.T.A. Hoffman and Novalis. "When no more numbers and figures / hold the key to all creatures […] And when one sees, in tales and poems / Eternal stories of the globe […]"[2]. In his play *Das Gauklermärchen* ("The Trickster's Fairy Tale") Ende has Jojo say: "You mean that imagination isn't real? It is from imagination alone that future worlds grow: Inside what we create, we are free."[3]

As was the case with his notion of "magical theatre," Michael Ende's aim was to create something that does not instruct, but rather "enchants," and transports the reader

to another world.[4] Perhaps this book can also help a little bit on that score.

Fantastica – Finding Your Bearings in a Borderless Realm

Fantastica is the realm of myths and fairy tales, the realm from which all stories come, as well as the urge to tell them and to listen to them. Not for nothing is the journey through this realm called *The Neverending Story*. Because, like the human imagination, Fantastica is boundless:

> In this world there are no measurable outer distances, and thus the words “near” and “far” have a different meaning. All these things are subject to the inner state and the will of whichever person is travelling a particular route. Since Fantastica is boundless, its centre can be anywhere – or rather, it is no nearer or farther than anywhere else. It depends completely on the person who wishes to get to the centre. And this innermost centre of Fantastica is of course the Ivory Tower.[5]

True, in Fantastica there is occasional mention of the cardinal directions (Southern Oracle, Wind Giants), but these are not absolute; rather they shift depending on wherever you happen to be standing. Similarly, just as a house rests on a foundation, so Fantastica rests on the forgotten dreams of humankind, which are stored in the Picture Mine. But this too should not be understood visually – in a realm without borders there can be no “up” or “down.”

Time, too, is neverending in Fantastica: Everything that happens is written down by the Old Man of Wandering Mountain. But does it happen because he writes it down, or

does he write it down because it happens? Morla the Aged One says of the Childlike Empress that her existence is not measured in time but rather in names. She must continually be renamed by human beings or else she dies – imagination incarnate[6]. By that same token, Fantastica has no history that can be told chronologically, neatly chronicled by date and place of occurrence.

So how are we to navigate such a realm? We humans live in both worlds: in the world outside, which Michael Ende called the “Outer World,” and in the world of dreams and wishes, as well as fears and nightmares, namely “Fantastica.” There, many things are different than in the human world.

In Fantastica, for example, no distinction is made between good and evil: All creatures are equally important. If we take a close look at Ende’s poetic concept, we start to understand why that is: Art is like a dream. It doesn’t instruct; it only portrays. What would Shakespeare’s Othello be without Iago, or Macbeth without the evil Lady Macbeth? One cannot judge dreams from a moral standpoint. The portrayal of evil is not itself evil; the portrayal of the sacred is not itself sacred.[7]

The inhabitants of Fantastica are thus as motley and diverse as the imagination from which they come. Over and over, we encounter figures that we recognize from other books, for they are bouncing around in Bastian’s head together with his own inventions. The authors of the great masterpieces of literature, art, and music throughout the ages have all been enthusiastic travellers in the realm of Fantastica.

But how do you enter or leave a world that has no borders? Over and over again, magical portals turn up that make the journey possible: hidden doors, secret corridors, or invisible train platforms … Bastian finds the entrance

while reading in the attic of his school. This entrance, however, is not located in the attic itself, which is part of the Outer World. It is also not located in the book. Only through the act of reading itself does Bastian manage to reach Fantastica:

> “Michael Ende, the attuned receiver of the keenest reflections, sets out on the greatest of all adventures, that of a mirror-book, in which the different levels of reality are carefully brought into alignment: the world of the reader and that of the book are united, without negating each other, and thus come to form a nameless third entity. It is this third entity that plays the most important role in the novel; it is the story of this third entity that the book tells.”[8]

The act of reading is an immensely personal, even intimate, matter. And so Fantastica looks different to every traveller. “Every real story is a Neverending Story … There are many doors to Fantastica.”[9]

The individual counts, not the collective. The subjective imagination is the path to Fantastica; there is no perfect formula for entry. Michael Ende was mistrustful of all ideologies. To him the idea that society generates consciousness was deeply suspect. He couldn’t have been farther removed from Brecht and the notion of *littérature engagée* that was dominant well into the 1980s than he was in one particular respect: in Ende’s view, only a new type of consciousness could create change in society. And in accordance with this view, Bastian has no use for books in which “a writer tried to convince him of something”[10]. They won’t help you find the way to Fantastica.

This touches on one of the central points in Michael Ende’s imaginative world: Everything that is essential bears its purpose within itself – and this includes art. It doesn’t explain the world, rather it portrays it.[11] For that

reason, it doesn’t have to justify itself with a message. An artist considers “‘*Erkenntnis-Ideen’* – ‘ideas of knowledge’ or ‘revelatory ideas,’ such as, for example, a message – not as his aim, but rather as part of his material.”[12] “One can admire palaces of thought – but artists are nomads: Once they’ve exhausted one worldview, they move on.”[13]

But what is Fantastica? An alternative world, onto which we can project our longing for peace and a world made whole? A place where silly little fat boys like Bastian Balthazar Bux suddenly become handsome, strong, brave heroes? It is none of these things. Bastian’s heroism does not consist solely in his making neat, good, and noble choices. He falls for the wiles of the sorceress Xayide, even raises his magic sword against his friend Atreyu, and only barely escapes the City of the Old Emperors, which is gloomily reminiscent of an insane asylum. Lying in wait within Fantastica itself are deadly swamps, indifferent giant turtles, and dangerous monsters like the spider-like creature Ygramul or the werewolf Gmork. And unlike those found in the works of fantasy literature, these creatures are not there simply to be defeated by the hero. Atreyu kills neither Ygramul nor Gmork. They aren’t the ones who pose a danger to Fantastica; there is no reason to do away with them.

It wasn’t Ende’s intention to flee from the human world into a better world called Fantastica, as he was often accused of in the course of the escapism debate. After all, the Nothing that threatens Fantastica, that banal, meaningless world in which the imagination is disavowed or ridiculed as the invention of screwballs or nitwits, has as its mirror image the equally meaningless and banal City of the Old Emperors, where those humans who can’t find their way back out of Fantastica end up. The Nothing and the City of the Old Emperors, banality and creativity, are mirror

images of each other. From nothingness arises the will for creative action.

Fantastica and the human world are two sides of the same coin, inside and outside, which could not exist without each other. The realm of the Childlike Empress is not a transcendental one, but rather part of this world. Imagination, indeed, is not just a feeling, but rather a complete whole, which also encompasses the intellect and the senses. Carl Conrad Coreander describes this interaction between worlds: “There are people who can never go to Fantastica […] and others who can, but who stay there forever. And there are just a few who go to Fantastica and come back. Like you. And they make both worlds well again.”[14]

It is a challenge not only to reach Fantastica, but also to leave it again, because the true driving force in Fantastica is the will. “Do What You Wish”: These are the words written on the back of AURYN. Ende took this device, which passed from St. Augustine to Rabelais and on into the modern era, from Aleister Crowley *(“Do what thou wilt”)*, an advocate of modern occultism who lived from 1875 to 1947. And it isn’t just in *The Neverending Story* that Michael Ende uses this device. In *Die Zauberschule* (“The School of Magic”) for example he writes:

1. You can only truly wish for that which you consider possible.
2. You can only consider possible that which is part of your story.
3. Only that which you truly wish for is part of your story.[15]

Those who allow themselves to be led merely by superficial desires and wants will lose themselves, forget their former lives, even their names, and finally end up in

the City of the Old Emperors. When the will that drives you is extinguished, you cannot find your way out of the land without borders. Like the wickerwork ships of the Yskalnari that are powered by pure thought-power, the traveller in Fantastica moves forward only by the force of their will. The will as driving force in a land without borders, the real threat posed to the self by its own interior life – here Michael Ende goes far beyond conventional children's book fare. But then again, must we draw so sharp a distinction between books for children and books for adults? Doesn't Bastian find *The Neverending Story* in a store where, according to Carl Conrad Coreander, there are no books for children? And isn't Coreander himself immersed in this book before Bastian steals it?

Throughout his life, Michael Ende refused to draw a distinction between literature for children and literature for adults. And indeed, *The Neverending Story* has been cherished by children and adults alike. Ende said of himself:

> I am a primitive man and hail from a Central European reservation […]: Children's literature. It's one of those places that are tolerated with a mild smile of condescension by those who inhabit the desert of civilization; that are coddled by certain do-gooder organizations; but that, in the main, are scorned by all – like most things, incidentally, that have to do with children.[16]

And yet, Ende continued, all these different classifications – children's and adult literature, realism and fantasy – are pure nonsense. They only came to be in a "stripped-down, functional world," in which "everything mysterious has been explained away."[17] Since the boom in the natural sciences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it seemed to have become possible to find an explanation for everything. The world: a pile of space dust.

Human ideals: nothing but biochemical processes. Today only children are still allowed to live in a world full of magic and purpose, a world which adults and children used to inhabit together. The great works of world literature contain many fantastic elements. If *Faust* or *The Odyssey* were to be published today, said Ende, they would probably be dismissed as children's literature.

But it is precisely in the unintentional play of a child that Ende – in the tradition of Schiller, but also of Nietzsche – sees the embodiment of art's ideal. Therefore, a children's book can equally be a book for adults, just as a book for adults can also be understood by children.

Regarding his motivations for setting stories in the realm of the fantastic, Michael Ende wrote:

> What moves me to do it […] is nothing other than that which moves the unconscious in each of us to express what is happening within our souls in the images of a dream. This form of expression readily suggests itself, because for me, poesy and art consist in nothing else but the effort to transform exterior images into interior images and interior images into exterior images (as was once the norm in all cultures, incidentally). In my view it is only through this "Poeticization" (Novalis) that the world becomes inhabitable for people. What I mean by that is, only when a person recognizes themselves in the world around them – and conversely, when they find the images of the world in their own soul – can they feel at home in this world. Precisely therein lies the essence of all culture.[18]

Translator's Note

It may be of help to readers who set out to explore the boundless realm of Fantastica in English to learn something of the name's etymology. "Fantastica" is translator Ralph Manheim's rendering of Michael Ende's *Phantásien*, a word which combines *Phantasie*, or "imagination," with the suffix *-ien*, commonly found in German names for countries, such as *Spanien* (Spain) and *Italien* (Italy). *Phantásien,* then, in an etymological sense, is the "Land of Imagination."

Michael Ende's writing is rich with such wordplay and allusion. Throughout this book, there are instances where a deeper examination of Ende's original German may provide readers of English with additional insight into the world of *The Neverending Story.* In these instances, I've inserted footnotes for further clarification.

In general, the entries in this book are based on Ralph Manheim's 1983 translation of *The Neverending Story.* All page references are to the 2005 Firebird edition.

A

A, a

The first letter of the Latin alphabet, which consists of a total of twenty-six letters. All the stories in the world, whether they be fantastic or realistic, invented or almost true, are written using a combination of these twenty-six letters. Is that not a miracle?

Acharis

The Acharis are likely the ugliest creatures in the entire boundless Fantastican world. Their ugliness is so incomprehensible that they must cry thousands of tears over it. For this reason, they are also called the “Everlasting Weepers.” But a great secret is hidden in their salty teardrops: with them the Acharis are able to wash the most beautiful silver in Fantastica from the depths of the earth and transform it into the most wonderful filigree. A long time ago the Acharis fashioned the material out of which the splendid silver city of Amarganth was built. The city floats in the middle of the lake of Moru, which was formed by the flood of their tears. Bastian transforms them into butterfly-clowns, also known as Shlamoofs.

Alchemy

Alchemy is much more than the predecessor of modern chemistry. It is a comprehensive, thoroughly magical way of seeing the world. Michael Ende drew constantly on the wealth of images contained in such conceptions of the

world. Alchemy was made famous and literarily "respectable" by another prominent Fantastica traveller: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whose *Faust* Ende naturally knew well.

Allusions – cultural-historical

In *The Neverending Story* there are many allusions to different eras and cultures. After all, Fantastica is the boundless realm of the imagination, formed from the thoughts and dreams of all humankind. It's no wonder then that some of the inhabitants of this world should seem exceedingly familiar to us.

Antiquity: The legends of antiquity furnish Fantastica with several of its inhabitants. The Southern Oracle gives prophecies like the ancient Oracle of Delphi. This is indicated in part by the lane of stone columns, which are reminiscent of Greek architecture. The entrance is guarded by sphinxes, which also come from ancient Greek mythology: in the Oedipus legend a sphinx sits on the road to Thebes and poses an unsolvable riddle to every passing traveller. Only those who solve it may pass – those who fail are devoured. Oedipus solves the riddle and thus rids the city of the sphinx. Atreyu isn't posed any riddle, but the question as to why the sphinxes let some pass and not others is itself a riddle. Not for nothing is the gate the sphinxes guard called the "Great Riddle Gate."[19] True, the idea that the gaze of a sphinx turns a person to stone is not a traditional attribute of the sphinxes of antiquity; Greek myth does, however, speak of the deadly gaze of Medusa.

Cairon the centaur and the Sirens also come from the myths of antiquity, as does Pegasus, the winged horse.[20] The gnome couple Engywook and Urgl share

characteristics with Philemon and Baucis, the old hospitable couple from the Greek legend.

Ende liked to draw on *The Odyssey*. Just as Odysseus conceals his true name from the cyclops Polyphemos and calls himself "nobody," so does Atreyu refuse to tell Gmork who he is: "I am nobody"[21] is Atreyu's reply when Gmork asks who he is. The werewolf replies, "Then Nobody has heard me, and Nobody has come to me, and Nobody is speaking to me in my last hour." Ende himself called attention to these allusions to the great works of world literature.[22]

The archery contest in the Silver City of Amarganth also calls *The Odyssey* to mind: When Odysseus returns home after his long years of wandering and saves his wife from a horde of suitors, he must first defeat them in a contest involving his old bow.

Xayide bears a resemblance to the sorceress Circe from *The Odyssey,* and Bastian's visit to the Picture Mine recalls Odysseus's journey to the underworld, where he sees the shade of his mother (Bastian sees that of his father).[23]

And so, Fantastica is not shaped merely by the imagination of a single person. Every dream that is ever dreamed generates its own piece of Fantastica.

The Middle Ages and Chivalric Romance: The tournament in Amarganth might be the most obvious reference to the Middle Ages. Hero Hynreck is a stereotypical knight. His courtship of Princess Oglamar, which ends after he has freed her from the clutches of the dragon Smerg, recalls Schiller's ballad "The Glove." In the poem the lady gives her admirer the task of retrieving her glove from an enclosure full of wild beasts. When the hero returns and she receives him with tender glances, he throws the glove in her face and leaves her with the words "I don't desire your thanks, lady!"[24]

Atreyu is introduced in *The Neverending Story* as a hero in the medieval mode. He is chosen for qualities unique to him and sent off on a quest. This is how Cairon puts it when he sets out to find the Greenskins. Jung includes the hero who saves his people and defeats monsters, sometimes with the help of magical means, among his list of archetypes. Like many heroes, Bastian also lapses for a time into arrogance and must be punished before he can find his way back out of Fantastica[25]. The famous Fantastica traveller Tolkien, and many others besides, have also drawn from these archetypes.

Atreyu, the hero of the Great Quest, shares characteristics with the medieval Parzifal, and for the magic sword Sikanda we also find a medieval model: King Arthur's Excalibur might well be the most famous magic sword of all. But other heroic figures of the Middle Ages have special swords with names of their own, such as, for example, El Cid from the Spanish epic poem *El Cantar de Mio Cid* or Siegfried in the German epic poem the *Nibelungenlied*. The Hero Hynreck episode alludes to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. In Tolkien's *The Hobbit* as well, weapons, and swords especially, have names.

Romanticism: Michael Ende said the following on the subject of Romanticism:

I am of the opinion that Romanticism is the only original German cultural achievement to date. We have more or less assimilated everything else in Germany from abroad. Romanticism marked the first time we achieved something that also found interest in other countries. For that reason, I have tried to position myself in this tradition, because I consider myself a German author through and through, and because I am convinced that this voice, which indeed is

typically German, should not be drowned out in the concert of nations.[26]

Michael Ende saw in Romanticism the liberation of the individual from the purely causal-logical thinking that had become ever more widespread since the Enlightenment. He found his critique of his own times validated by the emphasis placed on the Inner World, on the fantastic, that one finds in Romantic literature. The present, he believed, had grown ill from an excess of thinking exclusively in terms of causal logic and quantification. According to such thinking, only what is useful is good. But what does "useful" mean against the violent backdrop of history? *The Odyssey, Faust,* Michelangelo's *David,* and the Pyramids aren't actually useful, but what would humanity be without them? Like the Romantics, he saw this crisis as having had its beginnings in the sixteenth century.[27]

The Magic Mirror Gate gestures toward Romanticism, in which the motif of the mirror was especially popular (see for example E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Princess Brambilla*). The giant bluebell that grows near the Ivory Tower, and in which the phoenix nests, is a nod to the famous blue flower in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.

The disembodied voice of Uyulala is, in turn, a nod to the Romantic notion of *Naturpoesie,* the poesy of nature; even prior to Romanticism's heyday, Goethe and Herder expressed the thought that poetry is given equally to all peoples, that it is one of the ancient gifts of humanity.[28]

Both in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Golden Pot* and in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* there is an imaginary land called Atlantis. In Novalis, Atlantis is a land where music and poetry reign: a Romantic Fantastica. Unlike in Hoffman and Ende's books, however, Novalis's hero Heinrich lives in a world in which the realm of imagination

is given recognition and esteem. Thus, he never meets with misunderstanding.

Hoffmann, on the other hand, anticipates the central message of *The Neverending Story:* To insist on a one-sided life in the bare Outer World is to follow the wrong path, but so also is to escape into the imagination.

The wise old man, found in Ende in the figure of the blind miner Yor, likewise appears in Romantic literature. According to the Jungian school he embodies the archetype of the wise sorcerer who represents deeper knowledge of himself and the contents of the unconscious[29]. Yor and the Minroud Mine, where the forgotten dreams of humanity that form the foundation of Fantastica are excavated, are a nod to fantastic art, which is also represented by Michael Ende's father Edgar Ende. The pictures that Bastian finds in the mine are based in part on real models: For example, Bastian finds one that depicts lots of melting clocks, like the famous painting by Salvador Dalí.

Philosophy and Religion of the East: The No-Key Gate is a motif from Eastern mythology. Unintentionality, or ridding oneself of all volition, is the goal of meditation. The idea of dragons as intermediaries between heaven and earth also has a basis in Chinese lore. This is most clearly embodied in the character of Falkor, the luckdragon. In Asia, dragons are considered symbols of luck and are therefore not slain by heroes, as is common in European legends.

But the most important Eastern motif in *The Neverending Story* is that of the mandala, which appears in the form of the labyrinth that surrounds the Ivory Tower, with the Childlike Empress sitting in the centre like an Eastern deity.

The idea that opposites are linked, symbolized by the two snakes biting each other's tails, is as old as Chinese philosophy itself. This idea was especially significant for

Lao Tse, the Taoist thinker. In its joining together of opposites, for example male and female (Yin and Yang) and even good and evil, Chinese thought differs from Christian thought. Considering *The Neverending Story* in light of Chinese thought, it becomes clear why the Childlike Empress draws no distinction between good and evil Fantasticans.

The cyclic nature of the Taoist worldview is also apparent in Perelin and Goab, the pair of opposites whose lives and deaths are linked. This concept is fundamental to Fantastica as a whole: After all, this isn't the first time the Childlike Empress has been sick. With her, Fantastica perishes and is reborn – there's a reason there must be a phoenix among its inhabitants. In Hinduism this cycle is called *samsara.*[30]

Alternating Landscape

One of the most fascinating phenomena in Fantastica is that of the alternating landscape, like Perelin, the Night Forest and Goab, the Desert of Colours.

At night a colourful and wild jungle blooms where during the day a desert of thousand-coloured sand stretches to the horizon. Once the sun that burns down on Goab sets, the Night Forest is reborn.

Perelin is Bastian's first wish and the first landscape in Fantastica to be given new birth after the boundless realm's triumph over the Nothing. Scholars of Fantastica posit that the first thing every traveller who arrives in Fantastica to create it anew must do is conceive an alternating landscape. Without passing through this phase there can be no new Fantastica. The wonderful play of lights in the Night Forest would not be possible without its interplay with the Desert of Colours.

In the imagination, opposites are not free-standing entities, strictly marked off from each other; rather they are connected. The whole emerges from their interplay: day and night, excess and scarcity. What's more, alternating landscapes embody the idea of the cyclic return of life and death, and thus of existence as an eternal cycle – like the seasons in the Outer World.

Al Tsahir

Al Tsahir is a polished stone carved from the horn of a unicorn. If called by its name, it radiates a blazing light and is capable of illuminating even the most gloomy and evil darkness. Bastian gets it from the Library of Amarganth. The following inscription is to be found there when the stone is still stuck to the library's locked door:

Removed from the unicorn's horn, I lost my light.
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.[31]

Bastian calls the stone by its name and thus opens the Library of Amarganth.

As the Arabic-sounding name suggests, Michael Ende was likely influenced here by the "open sesame" stories from the *One Thousand and One Nights.* Works of fantasy tend to outfit their heroes with magical tools as well. In *The Neverending Story,* however, there is a catch: Bastian