Playing with Narratives:

The Neverending Story in Written and Visual Form

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Acknowledgments

I don't usually make New Year's resolutions. But this year, I knew I could not afford to pull off any last-minute jobs—not with this Thesis, at least. Amidst a blaze of fireworks and New Year's wishes, I swore to myself not to procrastinate in 2013. I'm pleased to say I pulled through.

This Thesis was quite a beast to conquer. Yes, it sometimes even felt like a never-ending story. This joke has followed me around for far too long now. Alas, I no longer have to hear it. Hallelujah!

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I. Introduction

There are few authors who have managed to capture the hearts of children like Michael Ende. Though less known in the USA, Ende was the most successful German author following the Second World War.[1] His books describe vast fantasy universes and address meaningful, and in parts even profound issues with a level of play and lightheartedness that few authors have been able to achieve. His breakthrough came with the book *Jim Button and Luke the Engine Driver* (1960) and its sequel, *Jim Button and the Wild 13* (1962). Following the success of *Momo* (1972), Ende published his perhaps most well-known work, *Die unendliche Geschichte* (1979) or *The Neverending Story*. Besides leading the German bestseller list for 113 consecutive weeks, *The Neverending Story* was translated into 35 different languages, attesting to its worldwide success.[2]

In spite of the book's success in Germany as well as internationally, American audiences tend to be more familiar with its film adaptation, *The NeverEnding Story*, released in 1984. Though produced in Germany by a German crew, it was an English-language movie, since it was mainly targeted at the American market. In the early stages of production, Ende himself collaborated with the producers to help compose a script. He was very optimistic about the project. And yet, he was greatly disappointed with the final result—so much so, in fact, that he ultimately refused to have any connection to the movie whatsoever. This begs the question, what did he find so disagreeable about the movie?

There are a number of possible reasons. In general, it seems that Ende regarded the movie as a deliberate departure from his book. Naturally, it is always easier to define something by what it is not than by what it is. So what kind of book *is The Neverending Story*? As far as genre goes, Ende's book is truly a strange creature. One may describe it as a children's book, fairy tale, or even a work of Romantic fiction, among other things. It combines various kinds of narrative, and yet, it doesn't seem quite at home in any of these. Besides being extremely versatile, the book also offers great depth through its many layers. For instance, the book contains a story within a story. And even with this story-within-a-story, stories are being told. Through these many layers, *The Neverending Story* itself presents a commentary on stories. In Section II, I will address some of these questions, drawing on narrative theory.

Based on these narrative aspects of the book, one may consider Ende to be a writer, exclusively. This could explain why he might have been so dismissive about movie. However, quite to the contrary, Ende regarded words and images as complementary forms of art. Though a writer himself, Ende's father, Edgar Ende, was a surrealist painter, who had a profound impact on Ende and his later life as a writer. Edgar's paintings resembled dreamlike landscapes. Often, Edgar would darken his studio to induce a certain dream-like state (*Wachschlaf*).[3] He would then sketch out whatever images came to mind, using a pen that had a little lamp attached to it.[4] Though rendered in a naturalistic manner, his images seem oddly detached from reality.[5] Edgar intended for his images to have this kind of estranging effect on his viewers to evoke a response. In this sense, he hoped that his images could

facilitate a dialogue with his viewers.[6] Ende felt very similar about his writing. Using words, he hoped to create images (*Sprachbilder*) for his readers.[7] Like this father, Ende regarded his work as fundamentally interactive: "Both my father and I aimed for the picture or story to be completed with the viewer or reader" ("*Es ist sowohl bei meinem Vater als auch bei mir ein Ziel gewesen, dass das Bild bzw, die Geschichte erst fertig wird im Betrachter respektive im Leser...*").[8] For Ende, *The Neverending Story* should provide this kind of dialogue for the reader, thus acting as a kind of playing field for the reader's imagination. How does the text invite the reader into a game of play and what is the goal of this game? In Section III, I will address this question among others, drawing on Iser's notion of the text as a site of "play" as well as reader-response theory.

These many rhetorical elements of the text proved to be extremely difficult to convey on screen. It took years for the producers to come up with a script they found satisfactory. Though the movie was successful at the box office, many critics like Ende considered the movie to fall short of its source material. What changed with the movie? And, at a more fundamental level, how do these two media relate to each other? Given the rhetorical capacity common to both media, Ende advocated an artistic expression across media. He found that he could transform his father's abstract paintings into words, and conversely, that his readers could produce images based on his words. Still, is it truly so easy for stories to traverse various media? Can a story be distilled to a certain essence? Drawing on adaptation theory, I will address some of these questions in Section IV.

Still the question remains, why did the adaptation process prove so difficult with Ende's book? The argument I hope to put forth here is that the project of

adapting the novel was ultimately doomed to fail because any adaptation of his book would likely have been unsatisfactory to the author. For one, the author's expectations for the movie were far too high. He hoped that the movie would resemble a unique work of art, reflecting the message of his book in a new and pertinent way. The producers, on the other hand, had different intentions for the movie. Though the movie largely stayed true to the story of the book, the book itself is so self-conscious of its being a book that a movie adaptation would inevitably represent a decidedly different interpretation of the book. Furthermore, the text engages the reader in a game of play that is specific to the text. On screen, the story cannot engage in a dialogue similar to the book. And yet, is it possible that at least the story could have been retained? What does it mean to "stay true" to a novel? Is it at all possible to do so?

The question of "fidelity" has been discussed at great lengths in adaptation theory. Though some recent scholarship tries to look beyond this term, it seems some scholars are still caught up on the notion of an author's basic intention. Today more than ever, there is a cross-proliferation of media. In establishing evaluative comparisons between media, recent scholarship has been lacking a proper consideration of ideology. An adaptation naturally introduces changes. As such, it represents only one interpretation or reading of its source. With the movie adaptation of *The Neverending Story*, the question is to what end was the book adapted, and why did the author so strongly reject the adaptation? In answering these questions, I hope to provide a better understanding of the book, the movie, and adaptation theory, in general.

Notes

[1] Thomas Kraft, "Die Faszination des Anderen: Eine Werkbetrachtung," in *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt: Die Suche nach dem Zauberwort* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1997), 7.
[2] "Die Geschichte des Thienemann Verlags," Thienemann Verlag, modified February 2013, http://cms.thienemann.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=66&Itemid=94.
[3] Roman Hocke and Uwe Neumahr, *Michael Ende: Magische Welten* (Henschel-Verlag, München 2007), 13.
[4] Hocke and Neumahr, *Magische Welten*, 13.
[5] Edgar Ende's paintings related to the notion of the subconscious. In his theoretical writing, Ende also draws on Freud and Jung, which one may relate to the current topic of interest. However, it would warrant too much further elaboration to bear any further mentioning.
[6] Hocke and Neumahr, *Magische Welten*, 17.
[7] Ibid., 82.
[8] Michael Ende, as quoted in Hocke and Neumahr, *Magische Welten*, 17.

II. *The Neverending Story* and Narrative Theory

A. Introduction

The book draws on various forms of narrative. In doing so, the author integrates and in some cases subverts familiar structures, typical storytelling logic and tropes. Throughout the book and many of his other works, Ende raises questions relating to narratives and storytelling in general. He asks us, what constitutes stories? How do we interact with them? And what is their value? In the following section, I will analyze *The Neverending Story* in relation to other narratives, as well as in the context of narrative theory.

B. Summary of the Book

The Neverending Story is about a boy named Bastian who reads a book, and gradually finds himself becoming part of its story. In the story, the land of Phantasien is in danger, because the Nothingness is threatening to destroy it. The Childlike Empress, the ruler of Phantasien, summons a boy named Atreju to find their savior, who turns out to none other than Bastian himself. Atreju's mission is to bring Bastian to Phantasien, since only a human child (*Menschenkind*) can save Phantasien by giving the Childlike Empress a new name.

At the mid-point of the book, Bastian enters Phantasien, thereby becoming part of the story of the book he is reading. At this point, the focus shifts from Atreju

to Bastian. Though the Nothingness still exists, Bastian's search for his true desire ("*Wahre Willen*") becomes the central issue of the story. To find his true desire, Bastian must follow the path of wishes ("*Weg der Wünsche*"). However, for every wish he makes in Phantasien, he forgets something about his own world. Eventually, Bastian has made so many wishes that he can no longer remember his home and wishes to stay in Phantasien forever. He attempts to overthrow the Childlike Empress, to become the emperor of Phantasien himself. In the end, Atreju and Fuchur prevent him from doing so and help him get back to his world.

C. General Themes and Issues

The book addresses many abstract, even existentialist issues. The most central issue of the book, the Nothingness, only makes sense in the larger context of the book. While Phantasien serves as a metaphor for the human imagination, the Nothingness represents the opposite thereof; it is the destructive force threatening to destroy Phantasien. The book tells us, it is caused by the fact that humans no longer believe in Phantasien. In other words, they have forgotten how to use their imagination, or perhaps no longer care to do so, which is causing Phantasien to slowly disintegrate. Similarly, Bastian is fighting a certain nothingness within himself. As Ende puts it, *The Neverending Story* is a story about a boy who has lost his inner life (*die Geschichte eines Jungen, der seine Innenwelt…verliert*).[1] His mother's death has left a void in his life, which has caused him to lose all sense of meaning in his world. He finds himself in a state of crisis (*Lebenskrise*). In an attempt to find some

sense of meaning, Bastian enters Phantasien. In the end, he is able to overcome the Nothingness and return home a changed person. To read and tell stories is to conquer the Nothingness. In this sense, the book itself marks an appeal to read books. In being so self-aware, the book itself acts as a commentary on storytelling in general. Still, the question remains, what kind of story is *The Neverending Story*? Where does it fall in terms of genre?

D. *The Neverending Story* as Children's Literature

To most people, *The Neverending Story* represents, first and foremost, a children's book. Most library catalogues would likely have the book listed under "Children's Literature." Assuming that children's literature constitutes an actual genre, what distinguishes it? Perry Nodelman delineates some of the basic characteristics of children's literature. Most obviously, perhaps, he notes that the main character in children's literature is often a child.[2] This serves as a measure of identification for young readers. Often, the child will also experience some kind of psychological development. In general terms, Rudd describes, "Any book that has a protagonist who is initially weaker—an underdog or a victim—has more potential to be attractive to a younger audience."[3] Both of these characteristics hold true for Bastian. He is a child of about twelve, and he is bullied by his peers at school. Furthermore, Bastian's mother recently passed away, and his father is virtually absent in his life. In this sense, Bastian is essentially an orphan. Nodelman considers this to be another common characteristic of children's literature.[4] This is also true for

Bastian, who is described as "the Son of the No One" (*der Sohn Niemands*) (44). Through his experiences in Phantasien, Bastian returns home more confident than at the start.[5] These are only a few general characteristics that can be related to *The Neverending Story*. Of course, there are many more. Still, there are some ways, in which the book does not match the general notion of children's literature.

While the story of the book may appeal to a young audience, several aspects of it mark a considerable departure from the general format ascribed to children's literature. For instance, Nodelman defines the children's book as primarily motivated by plot. However, with *The Neverending Story*, it seems the plot only serves as an excuse to explore the fictional world of Phantasien. Indeed, the story often strays from its direct plotline to describe something or raise questions by means of the narrator or through a dialogue between characters. To Zipes, the term "children's literature" is entirely abstract. He argues that children's literature does not exist, since children's literature is based on the assumption that childhood can be neatly delineated. As Rudd points out, the definition of childhood has been constructed differently at different times and for different groups within any particular period.[6] Moreover, the term "children's literature" suggests that it belongs to children, when, in fact, quite the opposite is the case. As Zipes points out, children's literature is produced primarily by adults and for adults.[7] The genre itself, if we may consider it such at all, is defined by what adults deem "suitable" for children. Ende also objected to the classification "children's literature." He found that children's literature is often regarded with a condescending attitude, as though it were of lesser merit, simply because it appealed to children.[8] Jooß contends that Kinder may arguably represent a

more demanding audience than adults: "*Das Urteil [der Kinder] ist oft unbestechlicher und bei aller Spontanität genauer als jenes der Erwachsenen. Für Kinder schreiben heißt deshalb: so gut schreiben wie für Erwachsene, möglichst jedoch besser*"[9] If the book's classification as „children's literature"is inappropriate, how else might we describe it, in terms of genre?

E. *The Neverending Story* as Classic Epic

Children's literature is often related to oral storytelling traditions. Indeed, Ende often liked to describe himself as a storyteller, rather than as a writer (*Literat*).[10] On one occasion, Ende travelled to Palermo, where he recalls seeing many storytellers or *Cantastorie*, as they are called, at one of the central market places. Some of them, he mentions, were reciting Homeric verses. However, he was most intrigued by one, who was reciting a novel by Alexandre Dumas. Ende writes that if a hundred years after his death, there would also be people telling his stories on the streets, he would consider it the greatest possible achievement.[11] It seems, if given the choice, Ende would rather have his stories be retold, rather than to have them occupy a place on a bookshelf. He notes, though it may be possible to recite a novel by Alexandre Dumas, the same is not true of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. This distinction seems to imply that the author would rather have us think of *The Neverending Story* as a story, rather than as a book. In this sense, *The Neverending Story* may be compared to traditional forms of storytelling, like the classic epic.

Given enough time and practice, *The Neverending Story* could likely be recited from memory, as is the case with the epic form. For the purposes of easy memorization, most epics have been patterned to consist of many distinct, independent episodes. In *The Neverending Story*, there are 26 chapters, each of which delineates a specific occurrence, usually involving one character, a group of people, or the name of a place that Bastian encounters. For instance, in chapter fifteen titled "Graograman, the Many Colored Death," Bastian meets a lion named Graograman, with whom he travels across the colorful desert. In the following chapter titled "The Silver City of Amarganth," Bastian travels to the city of Amarganth and meets its inhabitants. The scheme is pretty straightforward. Similarly, *The Odyssey* is organized into 24 books, where different sites of actions are separated into different books. In the epic, one of these episodes often involves a hero's descent into the Underworld or Hell. For Bastian, his passage into Phantasien may be compared to the epic hero's journey into the underworld. Similarly, Phantasien is a dangerous place, from which one may never return. At the end of the book, Bastian manages to leave Phantasien and return home, just as Odysseus returns home to Ithaca at the end of *The Odyssey*.

Still many elements characteristic of the epic do not apply to *The Neverending Story*. Most obviously, Ende's story is not the product of an ongoing oral storytelling tradition. Though the book contains many structural elements, it is written in free form, rather than verse form. And yet, the typical hero's arc remains is true for both the classic epic and *The Neverending Story*. The author himself makes several references that link the story with the medieval hero saga or *Heldensage.* At the same

time, however, the story seems to deliberately veer from some of the conventions of this genre. In what ways does story qualify as a *Heldensage* in the typical sense?

F. *The Neverending Story* as a *Heldensage*

The book at the same time affirms and subverts the typical hero's journey. At the beginning, Bastian represents what we may consider an antihero. In Phantasien, Bastian finds his antithesis with Hero Hynreck, who represents the prototypical European hero figure. Indeed, the name "Hynreck" is undoubtedly an allusion to "Heinrich," a character tracing many medieval German sagas. Moreover, Hynreck's title "Hero" (*Held*) already alludes to his status as a hero. While most heroes would not describe themselves as heroes, Hynreck actually refers to himself as a hero ("*ich bin nun mal ein Held*") (264). He even considers being a hero (*Heldsein*) his profession. Ironically, though, he is quite the opposite of a hero. Hynreck suffers from the fact that he hasn't been able to "prove" himself. He wants to win over Princess Oglamar's heart by demonstrating his strength and prowess. However, Hynreck is unable to impress Oglamar. In a cynical manner, Oglamar notes, one cannot trust the reports of heroes, since they all have a tendency to exaggerate ("*Den Berichten von Helden […] kann man bekanntlich nicht trauen. Sie haben alle einen Hang zum Ausschmuecken.*") (264). In general, Hynreck is also portrayed as an overly pompous, over-the-top character.

In a tongue-in-cheek manner, Ende integrates many tropes associated with heroes like Hynreck, effectively subverting these conventions. When Bastian first

meets Hynreck, the self-professed hero is on his way to a battle competition, which he hopes to win for the sake of Princess Oglamar. As one may almost expect, Bastian wins instead, and Hynreck is completely downhearted. To help Hynreck prove his courage to Princess Oglamar, Bastian spawns a dragon. Ende clearly recognizes this as a trope of most heroic tales. In the text, one of the characters concedes, "you can't be a hero without monsters (*Ungeheuer*)" (265). The dragon is called Smaerg, which bears a striking resemblance to "Smaug," the name of dragon in *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien. Smaerg resembles what one may consider the typical European dragon, while Fuchur resembles a dragon of the Asian tradition. In typical fashion, Smaerg has kidnapped the Princess Oglamar and is keeping her locked away in a castle. As is expected of any hero, Hynreck must first overcome certain trials before he can save the princess. Besides a pool of scorpions, Hyreck must defeat the dragon, who has three heads. Naturally, the dragon has also a fatal flaw. To kill the dragon, Bastian instructs Hynreck, he must cut off the dragon's two smaller heads using a special sword (*Beil*), which the dragon watches over (267). In the end, Hynreck succeeds in killing the dragon, and Oglamar consents to marry Hynreck. However, Ende denies us the typical happy-ever-after ending. After Hyreck's life-long mission had been to win over Oglamar, he now doesn't want to marry Oglamar anymore (269). Ende also denies us the pleasure of knowing what happened instead.

In the story, Ende uses Hynreck as a foil to Bastian. Still, while Bastian represents an anti-hero at the onset, he goes through many of the same motions that a typical hero does. By the end of the novel, Bastian becomes a true hero himself, albeit a different kind of hero than Hynreck. The key difference between Bastian and

Hynreck lies in the fact that Hynreck enters on his quest with a clear purpose in mind, while Bastian does not know exactly what he is looking for. Bastian sets out for an open-ended adventure, which is a common characteristic of most Romantic Literature.

G. *The Neverending Story* as Romantic Literature

Unlike the *Heldensage,* most Romantic literature does not have a clearly defined agenda, as it were. After Bastian finds himself in Phantasien, he doesn't quite know himself what he is looking for. The Childlike Empress gives him a medallion carrying the inscription: DO WHAT THOU WILT[12] ("*TU WAS DU WILLST"*) (199). What this means, a character in the book later explains, is that Bastian must seek his true desire *(Wahre Willen*) (228). This concept can be traced back to Aleister Crowley's Thelema, an occultist religion he founded himself. In fact, the phrase "do what thou wilt," also appears in Crowley's writing. Similarly, Romantic literature is permeated by a desire to understand nature and the self. Kraft describes Bastian's journey as a typical Romantic journey, where the traveler would carry a blue flower in his breast pocket.[13] The blue flower represented the symbol of the Romantic writers. By the end of the book, Bastian has "learned to love," which is itself another romantic ideal (416). Ende admired the Romantic writer Novalis, whose fantasy world "Atlantis" is very similar to Phantasien. Like Novalis, Ende hoped to charge the world with poetry (*die Welt mit Poesie aufladen*).[14] As the Romantic poet E.T.A Hoffmann describes, a story should free the reader from the burden of the daily

routine (*dem niederbeugenden Druck des Alltagslebens*).[15] In this sense, the story should provide some kind of inspiration to the reader, allowing the reader to learn from the story. This notion pertains, specifically, to the Romantic form of the *Bildungsroman*.

H. *The Neverending Story* as a *Bildungsroman*

In many ways, *The Neverending Story* represents a coming-of-age story or *Bildungsroman* in the traditional sense. Bastian's journey is, more than anything else, characterized by a spiritual development (*eine geistige Entwicklung),* as is the case in the *Bildungsroman*, more generally.[16] In general, the central issue of a *Bildungsroman* always concerns a protagonist's learning experience (*Bildsamkeit des Individuums*).[17] For Bastian, his adventures in Phantasien represent a quest for wisdom and meaning. As Ende describes, Bastian's journey concerns an inner process of development (*innere Entwicklung*).[18] As much as the *Bildungsroman* represents a kind of education (*Bildung*) for the main character, it is also serves as education for the reader. In other words, the reader is implied in the protagonist's development.

Bastian goes through exactly this kind of development. At the onset, he is fat, pigeon-toed, and cowardly. As mentioned earlier, he is an antihero, essentially. He is bullied by his peers at school. Bastian's insecurity is further complicated by the fact that his mother recently passed away. Bastian also struggles with the fact that his father doesn't really care about him. In Phantasien, the figures he encounters act as reflections of himself. This reflection of the protagonist's self in the external world is also a common element of the *Bildungsroman*.[19] By the end of the book, Bastian has

overcome his security and gained a degree of confidence in himself. Thus in the end, as is the case with the *Bildungsroman*, Bastian experiences a change, as a result of his spiritual journey. Through reading *The Neverending Story*, he acquires the courage to face actual problems in his own world.

I. *The Neverending Story* as Fantastic Literature

In another sense, *The Neverending Story* may be considered literature relating to the fantastic or fantastic literature. This term is highly varied in its usage. Critic Tzvetan Todorov defined the term "fantastic" as literature in which the characters and readers hesitate when presented with questions about reality. This stands in contrast to other literature, where the supernatural is marked out as distinctly separate from reality, i.e. as miracles. According to Todorov, as soon as a text relieves this hesitation by providing a definite answer, it ceases to belong to the realm of the fantastic. Thus, with the fantastic, there is a certain ambiguity regarding what is real and what is fictitious. Of course, *The Neverending Story* poses exactly these issues for the reader's consideration.

As Bastian gets increasingly drawn into the book, the line between his world and Phantasien gets increasingly blurred. He keeps asking himself whether what he is experiencing is actually happening. For instance, towards the beginning of the book, Bastian reads about Atreju fighting a spider named Ygramul and gives a little shriek of panic (*Schreckensschrei*) (70). The book subsequently describes how Bastian's shriek could be heard in Phantasien. The spider even looks around to see where the sound

could have come from. Bastian tells himself, that could not have happened ("*Aber das ist doch überhaupt nicht möglich*") (70). As he keeps reading, Bastian remains slightly hesitant, though he becomes increasingly convinced that what he is reading is actually real. Later in the book, just before entering Phantasien, he is convinced that the Childlike Empress actually looked at him. The book describes that Bastian saw her not in his thoughts, but with his eyes (161). Bastian is confident he did not make it up (*es war keine Einbildung, dessen war Bastian ganz sicher*) (161). However, as readers, we have no way of knowing for sure.

Many readers used to ask Ende, whether Bastian's adventures through Phantasien may have only been a dream. Ende maintains, however, that this is not the case. Throughout the book, Ende has us guessing what is real and what is not. At the very end of the book, Bastian returns to the bookshop to confess to the owner that he had stolen his book. However, the owner maintains that he had never owned such a book (425). As readers, we are just as surprise to learn this as Bastian. Assuming the bookshop owner is not lying, we must ask ourselves what Bastian was reading to begin with. Was he reading at all? We never find out for sure. Thus through the end of the book, the reader is forced to remain hesitant, as Todorov describes. Considering the book's many magical events, it may also be likened to a fairy tale.

J. *The Neverending Story* as a Fairy Tale

While the first half of the book is characterized by a novelistic style of writing, the second half resembles a typical fairy tale. In basic terms, we may basically describe the story as follows: Bastian enters Phantasien, doesn't know how to get home, encounters a witch, overcomes this witch, and returns home. Based on these events or functions,[20] the story bears a striking resemblance to the story of *Hansel and Gretel*. Accompanied by Atreju, Bastian finds himself lost somewhere in Phantasien, much like Hansel and Gretel. In trying to find his way back home, Bastian and Atreju encounter a witch named Xayide. Like the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*, Xayide poses as a good person, but has bad intentions. Though Xayide is not trying to eat Bastian, she still poses a threat to his existence by trying to convince him to stay in Phantasien. Ultimately, she succeeds in enticing him.[21] However, Atreju is able to save Bastian and help him get back home.[22]

The second half of the book is defined by Bastian's search for meaning or true desire (*Wahre Willen*). Lüthi holds that all fairy tales are permeated by this kind of driving force or "framing tension" (*Rahmen-Spannung*).[23] In fairy tales, Lüthi explains, this framing tension may come in various forms. Fairy tale scholar Alan Dundes defines the most basic form as Lack/Lack liquidated (abbreviated as L-LL).[24] In *The Neverending Story*, Bastian is lacking his true desire. Through his various adventures in Phantasien, he learns that his true desire is to be loved. Lüthi holds that the action poses the primary focus of a fairy tale. For this reason, he continues, the characters are subject to a basic "one dimensionality." Their actions are given

little explanation. Instead, they simply carry out certain actions, in the service of the narrative. As Lüthi elaborates, "They are bound neither to their surroundings nor to their past, and no depth of character or psychological peculiarity is indicated."[25] In this sense, fairy tales also tend to isolate characters (*Isolationstendenz*) in the context of the narrative. Here, *The Neverending Story* deviates from the general from of a fairy tale.

Unlike the characters of most fairy tales, Bastian is multidimensional and complex. Even secondary characters in the book have a certain depth of character or *Innenleben,* such as Held Hynreck.[26] Ende himself was a proponent of fairy tales. However, he criticized the "modernist tendency" to „distill fairy into some basic elements or structure."[27] In defense of Ende's point, one could argue that some of the attributes Lüthi ascribes to fairy tales could also be related to many other kinds of narratives. For instance, his notion of framing tension can be applied to just about any story, since few stories lack what one may consider a central issue. Similarly, many „functions" ascribed to fairy tales also apply to many other narrative forms, since these simply pose some of the most basic functions of narrative. Obviously, the fact that a story has a villain or some villainous force does not automatically make it a fairy tale. Fairy tales are distinctly oral tales, or oral tales put into writing. However, we can trace *The Neverending Story* back to a specific author, namely Michael Ende. For this reason, we would more properly have to consider Ende's book as a literary fairy tale or *Kunstmärchen*.

K. *The Neverending Story* as a Literary Fairy Tale

Unlike the traditional fairy tale, the literary fairy tale or *Kunstmärchen* gives more authority to the author. With a *Kunstmärchen*, the may take introduce deliberate amendments to a fairy tale, thus clearly making it his own creation. As one of the first to attempt a definition, Mima Idi Jehle described the *Kunstmärchen* as a kind of fairy tale that reveals the hand of the author (*die Eigenart seines Verfassers*).[28] She contrasts this notion to traditional fairy tales, which tend to have a very straightforward style of writing. Kuchartz defines a *Kunstmärchen* as a modern fairy tale accompanied by a wink by the author.[29] In reference to *The Neverending Story*, Kuchartz considers Bastian's name to constitute exactly this kind of playful gesture by the author. [30] He points to the alliteration underlying "Bastian Balthasar Bux" as well as the name bookshop owner, "Karl Konrad Koreander." To Kuchartz, "Bastian Balthasar" represents an overly complicated Baroque double name, while "Bux" is merely a trivial last name (*Trivialnachname*). Deliberate gestures like this are absent in most fairy tales.

In general, *Kunstmärchen* are more complex than conventional fairy tales. As alluded to earlier, Bastian deviates from the typical one-dimensionality characteristic of most fairy tale characters. In this sense, *The Neverending Story* resembles a *Kunstmärchen* more than a fairy tale. *Kunstmärchen* often describe the inner struggles and dilemmas that characters may experience. As such, the *Kunstmärchen* has the capacity to transmit more complex issues than regular fairy tales. Often, the *Kunstmärchen* may utilize the fantasy setting of the story, to impart a socio-critical message. According to Knud Willenberg, the *Kunstmärchen* seeks to bring the hero in

accord with the fantastic, especially in an industrial age, where poetics are not so highly regarded (*Das Kunstmärchen sucht gestaltend die Einheit des Helden mit dem Wunderbaren wieder aufzubauen, und dies im poesiefeindlichen Zeitalter der Industrialisierung*).[31] This concept certainly applies to *The Neverending Story*. However, considering the length of the story, it would more properly have to be described as a particular kind of *Kunstmärchen*—namely, as a fairy tale novel or *Märchenroman*. Though the *Kunstmärchen* may come closest to describing *The Neverending Story*, there are many other elements of the story that do not relate to fairy tales. While the second half of the story may qualify as a *Kunstmärchen*, the first half of the book is of a distinctly different character. To this end, the term *Kunstmärchen* cannot be applied to the book as a whole.

L. *The Neverending Story* as Something Else?

While *The Neverending Story* contains aspects of a number of general literary forms, it doesn't seem quite at home in any. Perhaps, then, *The Neverending Story* would best be described as a kind of hybrid form. Schnöbel, for instance, describes *The Neverending Story* as a fairy tale, a work of fantastic literature, and a romantic *Bildungsroman*—all at the same time.[32] Maria Tatar remarks that some of the best authors, like Ende, draw on various kinds of narratives. As an example, Tartar names J.K. Rowling, whom she describes as a "master of bricolage." The *Harry Potter* books, Tatar holds, string together countless sources, including "…much Dickens and Dahl, with heavy doses of fairy tales and Arthurian legend, British

boarding-school books, and murder mysteries."[33] To Tatar, Rowling only does what so many other authors do too, "recycling bits and pieces of stories and stitching them together in vibrant new ways."[34] Similar to *Harry Potter*, we may consider *The Neverending Story* as a patchwork of various narrative forms.

Alternatively, some have argued that *The Neverending Story* does not really match any genre, therefore representing an independent kind of narrative or genre in itself. Jooß notes that *The Neverending Story* "remains complex and interesting, even in parts where it seems that we are dealing with naïve, 'child-friendly' terms." (*Es bleibt vielschichtig und interessant selbst dort, wo scheinbar naiv, ganz "kindergemäß" erzählt wird*").[35] Ende's book presents many layers of stories, acting as a commentary on stories itself. Still, the question remains, what kind of commentary does *The Neverending Story* offer? What manner of storytelling does Ende advocate?

M. *The Neverending Story* as A Critique of Causal Logic

The Neverending Story deliberately attempts to subvert conventional story logic. Ende criticizes what he calls a certain cause and effect logic (*Kausallogik*), permeating most of modern civilization.[36] Since the book describes an imaginative universe, Ende asks, why can't this world also be subject to a different laws of logic? At a fundamental level, Kroeber holds, stories always seek to disorient a reader.[37] Stories play on an audience's expectations. They challenge our expectations and ask us to reconsider the way we think about commonplace matters. In this regard, *The Neverending Story* may be compared to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Indeed,

Ende admired Carol greatly. He even wrote a theater piece called "Die Jagd nach dem Schlarg" based on Caroll's nonsense poem "The Hunting of the Snark." Here, as well as in the vast majority of his other works, Ende embraced Carroll's sense of a topsy-turvy world.

The first description of Phantasien already concerns one of these illogical occurrences. Here, a Will O'Wisp (*Irrlicht*) that usually disorients travelers is itself lost (19). The Will O'Wisp is said to be one of the fastest creatures in Phantasien. At the beginning of the book, there is a gathering of four creatures in Phantasien. As representatives of their respective communities, they have all been sent to attend an emergency meeting hosted by the Childlike Empress. Besides the Will O'Wisp, there is a Rock Biter (*Steinbeißer*), a Nighthob (*Nachtalb*), and a Teeny Weeny (*Winzling*), a small creature that rides a snail. The Teeny Weeny proposes that the Will O'Wisp lead the way for the rest of them. The Will O'Wisp responds that he cannot possibly wait for someone riding a snail ("*Unmöglich! […] ich kann nicht auf jemanden warten, der auf einer Schneck reitet, tut mir leid!*"). So they decide to travel separately and meet at the ivory tower (*Elfenbeinturm*) where the Childlike Empress resides. In the end, the Teeny Weeny arrives at the ivory tower before any of the other travelers, despite the fact that he leaves last (25). The Nighthob is completely flabbergasted. "How did you do it?" he asks. The Teeny Weeny replies, "I told you, it's a race snail" (29). Clearly, the Nighthob did not expect The Teeny Weeny to be so fast. While this allegory is comedic, it also subtly alludes to the Nighthob's initial prejudice. Of course, this issue is conveyed without ever actually being stated. This is only one possible interpretation of the story.

To Ende, stories should not be didactic. They should not have to "get at" anything in particular. Bastian echoes this sentiment: "He hated it when he realized that someone was trying to get him to do something." ("*Außerdem hasste er es, wenn er merkte, dass man ihn zu was kriegen wollte.*") (26). Rather than meaning to inform his reader, Ende merely hopes to incite some sense of wonder and appeal to the reader's imagination. His stories are not meant to be based in reality, but inhabit a wholly independent imaginative universe.

N. Stories and Reality: Phantasien as an Independent Fantasy World

To Ende, stories can conceive of their own reality. This marks a break from most traditional forms of storytelling. For most of literary history, according to Auerbach, stories were expected to offer a faithful representation of reality.[38] This is what the Ancient Greeks referred to as *mimesis.* The objective was to render the natural world perceptible to human perception. In this context, Auerbach famously analyses *The Odyssey* for its mimetic treatment of reality.[39] As examples, he cites the many elaborate descriptions of a festive banquet or a family genealogy, conveyed in painstaking detail. These faithful descriptions serve to recreate reality through the use of language. Ende, on the other hand, that stories ought to conceive of a new reality. Stories, according to Ende, should not dwell on everyday matters, but should invent new stories situations and perhaps even fanciful laws. Again, Bastian reflects Ende's sentiments here, as this description of Bastian illustrates: "He didn't like books in which dull, cranky writers describe humdrum events in the very humdrum lives of

humdrum people. Reality gave him enough of that kind of thing, why should he read about it?" (26). In Ende's opinion, stories should neither lecture (*lehren*) nor should they merely describe (*beschreiben*), but they should realize (*realisieren*)."[40] In *The Neverending Story*, Phantasien represents, quite literally, a deliberate departure from reality.

As unique as Phantasien may appear, the concept of an independent, imaginative universe is no novelty. Many of the most celebrated works of children's fiction feature worlds just like Phantasien. Consider, for instance, J.M. Barrie's Neverland, Caroll's Wonderland, or the "wizarding world," as opposed to the Muggle world, in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. They all represent parallel fantasy worlds. Similar to Ende, Barrie considers Neverland to represent a very real world to his readers. Once the Darling children enter Neverland, it seizes to be imaginary. In the book, their transition to Neverland is described as follows: "Once upon a time, Neverland was 'make-believe,' but now it is very real, and there were no night-lights, and it was getting darker every moment."[41] Oddly enough, when Bastian enters Phantasien, Ende describes a scene that bears a striking similarity to the scene that Barrie describes: "It blew from the pages of the book…and the pages began to flutter wildly…The candle flames in the seven-armed candelabrum danced, wavered, and lay flat. Then another, still more violent wind blew into the book, and the candles went out." (190).

Before the new imaginative universe is revealed to the reader, both scenes end in darkness. It is as though the new world is being built up from scratch in the reader's mind. Unlike the typical mimetic treatment of reality, Barrie poses a wholly

new way of storytelling. In the context of children's literature, Tartar suggests that Barrie's Neverland represents an unprecedented attempt "to revel in the lawless world of the child's imagination."[42] Peter Pan introduces the Darling children to this new world. He "liberates their minds to roam freely in the world of imagination."[43] Like Peter Pan, Bastian acts as a figure that effectively leads the reader into a new imaginative universe. Just as Ende is able to create new universes in the book, Bastian is able to create whatever he wants by telling stories in Phantasien. In the book, Ende suggests that storytelling has the potential to create virtually anything. However, on the turn side, Ende alludes to the dangerous potential of stories.

O. *The Neverending Story* and The Ethics of Storytelling

Like Ende, Bastian is a storyteller. He is the only person in Phantasien with this ability. All of the stories he tells become true, almost immediately. In the context of the book, Ende raises questions regarding the impact of Bastian's stories. According to Ende, "Stories much like any other art form are dealing with potentially dangerous material (*höchst gefährlichen Stoffe*)—namely, fiction or illusion. In this sense, they are related to lies. The difference is that stories make positive use of this potential."[44] In one part of the book, the people of Amarganth ask Bastian to make up a story about their city's creation (258-260). Consequently, Bastian makes up an elaborate story involving a folk called the *Acharai*. After one of the inhabitants of Amarganth commits an unintended murder, the people of Amarganth are condemned to make their city into the most beautiful one in Phantasien, in order to

further exist. To do so, they require the help of the Acharai, who Bastian describes as "the ugliest being in Phantasien" (259). They are so ugly, that they wept uninterruptedly. However, their tears were made of a silver material that produced the most wonderful filigree. Using the Acharai's tears, the people of Amarganth are able to create the most beautiful city in Phantasien. In exchange, the people of Amarganth promise to devote their lives to storytelling, to effectively produce something beautiful of the Acharai's misery.

Later on in the book, Bastian encounters the Acharai himself. They plead him, "Turn us into something else," (*Gib uns eine andere Gestalt*) (281). Since he had created them himself, Bastian feels responsible for their suffering (280), so that he feels compelled to grant them with their wish. Consequently, Bastian turns them from being the most miserable into the most happy creatures in Phantasien—the Shlamoofs (*Schlamuffen*) (281). They are described as the always "the always laughing ones" (*die Immer-Lachenden*) (281). Though this initially seems like a good things, it later turns out that this is not the case. Just when Bastian is about to get home, they hold him up to express their renewed discontent. "You've turned us into preposterous clowns...we want you to give us an aim in life" (*Wir wollen, dass unser Dasein zu irgend etwas da ist!*) (408). However, at this point in the story, Bastian does not have the power to make any more wishes. Consequently, the Shlamoofs get very angry at Bastian and try to take him with them. In the end, Fuchur and Atreju arrive just in time to save Bastian. Here, Ende uses the *Acharai* to call for a responsible approach to storytelling, which means to be aware of the potentially harmful consequences stories may have.

In a similar manner, Bastian also spawns a monster (*Ungeheuer*) to pose a challenge to Hynreck, as alluded to earlier. Just he has done so, Bastian seems to reconsider his decision: "I just hope I didn't make it too hard for him" ("*ich hoffe bloß, ich hab es ihm nicht zu schwer gemacht*.") (267). Again, Bastian has created something, without properly considering the consequences. Does Hynreck really have to fight a dragon? Couldn't he have proved his worth differently? Moreover, Ende raises the question, does Bastian have the right to risk putting others in danger? (*"…hatte Bastian dewegen das Recht, sie derartig ins Unglück zu bringen?"*) (274-275).

With both of these examples, Ende prompts us to consider the potential impact of stories. They prompt a reaction in the world or in the reader, specifically. They can conjure an emotion. This is what makes them potentially dangerous. For this reason, Ende holds, the Philistines and the Barbarians as well as many people today had a secret fear of art…they wanted a "true" form of art—a safe one.[45] Indeed, the great philosopher Plato had the same fear. In Plato's vision of an ideal republic, music, along with poetry and drama and the other arts, would be censored to present only the good. Plato holds, "A young thing can't judge what is hidden sense and what is not; but what he takes into his opinions at that age has a tendency to become hard to eradicate and unchangeable."[46] Here, Plato criticizes the great poets, Hesiod and Homer, for creating tales that portray conflict and violence. According to Plato, Gods should never be shown as unjust, since children could think it is acceptable and honorable to do injustice. Ideally, Plato proposes, children must actively be told that citizens have never quarreled with each other.[47] Stories raise ethical questions. However, since Plato's "ideal republic" has resolved all

ethical questions, this leaves no place for narrative art. In insisting on narrative closure, Plato precludes the possibility for any further deliberation. Ende, on the other hand, denies narrative closure, provoking his readers to make up their own stories.

P. *The Neverending Story*: Where does the Story End?

In *The Neverending Story*, Ende rarely provides his reader the comfort of narrative closure. Often when a character exits the primarily plane of action, Ende only offers a brief explanation about how the story may have concluded. For instance, towards the end of the book, when Bastian has come under the influence of the evil witch, Xayide, he sends his donkey Jisha away. He tells her a story of how she will marry a white, winged steed, as she had wished. As with the Acharai, the story becomes true. The narrator continues the story a little further, saying that Jisha later had a child named Pataplan, "who made quite a name for himself in Phantasien" (325). However, the narrator does not mention why. Instead, the passage concludes with the phrase "…but that is a story for another time" ("*doch das ist eine andere Geschichte und soll ein andermal erzählt werden*") (325). This phrase serves as a recurring element throughout the book. By leaving the ending open, he seeks to arouse his reader's curiosity, inviting him to imagine how exactly the story may have played out or how it may have continued.

In general, stories represent an infinite mode of discourse—a never-ending story, if you will. For this reason, Bakhtin calls it an "unfinalizing" mode of

discourse.[48] Ende concurs that every story has the potential to open up new stories („*Jeder erzählte Vorgang enthält, deutlich oder versteckt, den Anstoß zu einem neuen Vorgang*“).[49] On this topic, Ende relates the process of reading to knitting, where the text represents a fabric or quilt composed of vertical and horizontal threads („*Längsfäden und Querfäden*“).[50] The vertical threads that are left open—deliberately or not—should invite the reader to continue with the story (*weiterträumen*).[51] Then, Ende continues, the reader's story will leave some loose threads, where another person might pick up, until hundreds of thousands of people will be contributing to produce one big story, like in old days.[52] Still, how does the reader pick up these loose ends and create his own meaning? How does a reader approach a text and make meaning of a story? Drawing on reader-response theory, I will address some these questions in the following section.

Notes

[1] Michael Ende, as quoted in Roman Hocke and Uwe Neumahr, *Michael Ende: Magische Welten* (Henschel-Verlag, München 2007), 105. This quote originates from a typescript from Ende bequeathed to the public.
[2] Perry Nodelman, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature*, 2nd ed (White Plains, N.Y.: Longman, 1996), 149.
[3] David Rudd, as quoted in David Rudd, *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2010).
[4] Nodelman, 154.
[5] His development matches what Nodelman defines as a home/away/home pattern, which he lists as another common feature of children's literature.
[6] David Rudd, "The Development of Children's Literature" in David Rudd, ed., *The Routledge companion to children's literature* (Abingdon, Oxon.: Routledge, 2010), 12.
[7] Jack Zipes, *Sticks and Stones: The Troublesome Success of Children's Lliterature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 40.
[8] Michael Ende, *Aber das ist eine andere Geschichte: das große Michael Ende Lesebuch*, Andrea Hocke and Roman Hocke, eds. (Munchen: Piper, 2004), 164-165.
[9] Erich Jooß, "Einleitung" in Michael Ende, *Worte wie Träume* (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 8. Translation: "If anything, children pose a more demanding audience than adults, since they have a more acute sense of judgment, as a result of their increased spontaneity. Thus writing for children means to write just as well as for adults—if not better."
[10] Michael Ende and Jörg Krichbaum, *Die Archäologie der Dunkelheit: Gespräche über Kunst und das Werk des Malers Edgar Ende* (Stuttgart: Edition Weitbrecht, 1985), 132-134.
[11] Ibid., 134.
[12] The English translation translates this phrase as „Do what you wish" The movie also used this translation. Compare to: Michael Ende, *The Neverending Story*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 170. However, Ende insisted this misconstrued the meaning of the phrase. In the story, Bastian also misunderstands this prompt to mean that he should do what he wants to do. However, Ende explained that this prompt asks the wisher to seek his innermost wishes. Essentially, the distinction is made between what you want to do and your deeper desire.
[13] Roman Hocke and Thomas Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt: die Suche nach dem Zauberwort* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1997), 14.
[14] Hocke and Kraft, 8.
[15] E. T. A. Hoffmann, as quoted in Aniela Jaffé, *Bilder und Symbole zu E.T.A. Hoffmanns Märchen "Der Goldne Topf,"* (Zürich: Daimon Verlag, 1986), 411.
[16] Gerhard Mayer, as quoted in Marcus Schnöbel, "Erzählung und Märchen. Eine Untersuchung zu Michael Endes 'Die unendliche Geschichte'," (Institut für Neuere Deutsche Literatur, Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, 1995), 66.
[17] Mayer, as quoted in Schnöbel, "Erzählung und Märchen," 117.
[18] Erhard Eppler and Michael Ende, *Phantasie / Kultur / Politik: Protokoll eines Gesprächs* (Stuttgart: Edition Weitbrecht, 1982), 38-39.
[19] Gerhard Mayer, as quoted in Schnöbel, "Erzählung und Märchen," 102-103.
[20] For more details on the "functions" of fairy tales, see Vladimir Propp's seminal work, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).
[21] The fact that the hero is, in fact, corrupted makes it an anti-fairy tale. Lüthi argues that the fairy tale and the anti-fairy tale complement each other: "Just as the fairy tale incorporates features of the anti-fairytale, the anti-fairytale reciprocates by incorporating features of the fairytale." Compare to Max Lüthi, *The fairytale as art form and portrait of man* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 54.
[22] There are a number of ways one could further discuss the relationship between Atreju and Bastian. One of these is to say that Atreju represents Bastian's alter-ego. In Jungian terms, Atreju and Bastian may be described as complementary opposites ("*komplementär-kompensatorische Charakter des Unbewussten*"). For further details on this model of analysis, see Jeffrey C. Miller, and C. G. Jung, *The*

transcendent function Jung's model of psychological growth through dialogue with the unconscious (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).
[23] Lüthi, 56.
[24] Alan Dundes, as quoted in Lüthi, *The fairytale as art form and portrait of man*, 54.
[25] Lüthi, 42-43.
[26] Schnöbel, "Erzählung und Märchen," 86-87.
[27] Michael Ende, "Wovon Märchen Erzählen," in *Michael Endes Zettelkasten: Skizzen & Notizen* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1994), 160-161.
[28] Mimi Ida Jehle, *Das deutsche Kunstmärchen von der Romantik zum Naturalismus* (Urbana: The University of Illinois, 1935), 188.
[29] Wilfried Kuckartz, *Michael Ende "Die unendliche Geschichte". Ein Bildungsmärchen*, (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1984), 22.
[30] Kuckartz considered *The Neverending Story* to follow the pattern of a special kind of fairy tale, the *Dümmlingsmärchen*. Here, the *Dümmling* (dummy) is distinguished by a certain, rather impractical talent that later becomes useful. The *Dümmling* is also often characterized by a sensibility for nature and a certain loving quality. For an example of a *Dümmlingsmärchen*, see Grimm's *Die Bienenkönigin* (ATU 554).
[31] Knud Willenberg, "Die Kollision verschiedener Realitätseben als Gattungsproblem in E. T. A. Hoffmanns Erzählung 'Der goldne Topf'," in *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie 95* (1976), 93-113.
[32] Schnöbel, 129.
[33] Maria Tatar, *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 198.
[34] Tatar, 198.
[35] Jooß, 7.
[36] Ende, "Wovon Märchen Erzählen," 160-161.
[37] Karl Kroeber, *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 85.
[38] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 33-39.
[39] Auerbach offers a very detailed analysis of selected scenes from *The Odyssey*. For anyone interested in the notion of realism versus fantasy this chapter of the book ought to be of interest.
[40] Ende and Krichbaum, 111.
[41] J. M. Barrie, as quoted in Maria Tatar, *Enchanted Hunters*, 177
[42] Tatar, 178.
[43] Tatar, 175.
[44] Michael Ende, "Michael Ende über die Verfilmung der 'Unendlichen Geschichte'," *Info3 - Anthroposophie im Dialog*, March 1983, 18.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Plato, *Republic*, (378d), accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%253Atext%253A1999.01.0168%253Abook%253D2%253Asection%253D378d&enable=edit.
[47] Ibid, 378c.
[48] M. M. Bakhtin, as quoted in Karl Kroeber, *Retelling/Rereading*, 9.
[49] Michael Ende and Roman Hocke, *Der Niemandsgarten* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1998), 303.
[50] Michael Ende and Franz Kreuzer, *Zeit-Zauber: Unser Jahrhundert denkt über das Geheimnis der Uhren nach* (Wien: Deuticke, 1984), 12.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

III. *The Neverending Story* and Reader-Response Theory

A. Phantasien—The Playing Field of the Text

In Section II, I addressed some of the narrative qualities *The Neverending Story* presents. This should provide a background on where the text is coming from, as it were. However, the text in its own right certainly warrants some attention, too. While in the last section I addressed the question, *what* kind of narrative forms permeate *The Neverending Story* and *what* kind of commentary it offers in regard to narrative, I will here address the question, *how The Neverending Story* works as a text. That is to say, by what means does it engage the reader? While Bastian is a storyteller, he is also a reader. As such, the book also presents a commentary on the act of reading. Indeed, at various points in the book, Ende raises a number of questions regarding the relationship between a reader and a text. He asks, what happens when we read? What exactly do we experience in the process? And most importantly perhaps, why do we read? Reader-response theory addresses some of these questions by first breaking down the act of reading into three distinct variables: the text, the author, and the reader. Theorist Wolfgang Iser, one of the main proponents of reader-response theory, often described a text as a playing field or "playground"[1] for the reader. Through various means, Ende integrates many games of play in his book, calling for the reader's response.

If a text may be considered a playing field for the reader, then Phantasien represents exactly this type of playing field in *The Neverending Story*. Through

reading, Bastian is able to construct his own imaginative universe. Ende describes Bastian's adventures through Phantasien as an inward journey and thus a means for Bastian to reawaken his inner world (*die Innenwelt*).[2] In reading *The Neverending Story*, Bastian embarks on an imaginative journey that ultimately becomes an exploration of himself as a person. In Phantasien, Bastian is able to test his courage and ultimately conquer his inhibitions. The text facilitates, so to speak, the reader's imaginative experience. Through certain rules and structures, the text opens up a play with the reader. In the following section, I will explore some of the ways in which *The Neverending Story* invites the reader into a game of play.

B. Creating Worlds through Play

In general, Ende intends to maintain an unobtrusive style of writing. As established in Section 2, Ende describes himself more as a storyteller than a writer (*Literat*), per se. To Ende, books—and stories in general—should act in service of the reader. They should describe without being self-conscious about style, and they should explain without being didactic. Ende tries to facilitate a seamless reading experience for the reader by utilizing what he calls a pictorial language (*Bildersprache).*[3] Ende believes that a story should not warrant any further explanations, since the images speak for themselves: "*Die Bilder selbst sind schon die Mitteilung.*"[4] To Ende, this *Bildersprache* is precisely what makes fairy tales so compelling. Their magic charm lies in the images' openness (*Vieldeutigkeit*). Iser concurs that an author will ideally produce "a sequence of readerly images" for his

reader.[5] Though the individual images may vary from reader to reader, a story takes shape through the totality of these images. Consequently, the reader's engagement with these images constitutes a level of play that is integral to the text.

As a whole, these images constitute the reader's imaginative universe. Iser defines play as a means of "worldmaking"[6] In theory, a text has the potential to conceive of new laws of physics and reason. For this reason, the author considers the game (*das Spiel*) to represent the ultimate locus of human freedom ("*Das Spiel ist der eigentliche Ort, in dem sich die Freiheit des Menschen offenbart*").[7] It is here that the reader is able to explore imagined scenarios and possiblities: *"…er [der Leser] taucht in phantastische Zusammanhänge ein, die er selbst erfunde hat oder denen er sich fügt."*[8] In this sense, an author provides a creative or intellectual stimulus, provoking a reaction in his reader. As Ende puts it,*"Beim Spielen gelingt es, Reaktionen zu provozieren und so den Mitspielenden im kreativen Miteinander zu animieren."*[9] Thus the text defines a fictional universe or playing field created through the play between author and reader.

C. Ende's *Pagat* and Play as Performance

Much like a text, the theater presents a playing field for its audience. Ende considers the theater to resemble the ultimate "magical space."[10] In the theatrical realm, the notion of play is perhaps best embodied by the figure of the court jester or *Pagat*.[11] To Ende, the jester internalizes both a certain "childlike playfulness" (*das Spielerisch-Kindliche*) as well as a "creative power" (*das Schöpferische*), both of which Ende considers to be the most desirable attributes of any writer or artist, in general.[12]

Indeed, the *Pagat* depicts what may arguably be his most popular figure, tracing many of his works.[13] If not directly appearing in his works, some of his characters exhibit characteristics relating to the *Pagat*.

To Ende, Shakespeare exhibits many aspects of a *Pagat*. Ende wrote about Shakespeare on a number of occasions and admired him very much for the playful nature of his plays. In fact, Ende mentions a character named "Schexpir" in *The Neverending Story* (273). It is mentioned that Schexpir has been to Phantasien before as well, alluding to Shakespeare's capacity to engage in imagined games of play. Indeed, Ende admired Shakespeare for his talent to stage a play—in both senses of the word. Of course, Shakespeare produced theatrical plays, but, according to Ende, Shakespeare also played games with his audience. Ende attributes the success of Shakespeare's plays to his ability to "disappear behind his characters,"[14] allowing the game to fill his absence („*er geht auf im Spiel*…"). To Ende, this game marks Shakespeare's primary interest ("…*er lässt die Figuren sprechen, weil das, was ihn interessiert, das Spiel ist.*")[15] Like a text, Shakespeare's plays, much like any good play, engage an audience in a game of play.

Iser himself liked to describe a text as a kind of performance. With a text, the reader can be both an actor and a director, simultaneously. The author merely provides the script, so to speak. Iser describes the text as "a staged play enacted for the reader, who is given a role enabling him or her to act out the scenario presented."[16] In this sense, the reader takes on the role of the actor. At the same time, the text presents various scenes of actions to the reader, "causing his or her direct involvement in the proceedings and indeed in the staging."[17] The text calls for the

reader to make deliberate choices in visualizing the script. In this sense, the reader acts as the director of a text. In short, by taking on the roles of characters and visualizing scenes, the reader may be described as both actor and director of a text. Through the playing field offered by the text, reader and author actualize a text, creating something new in the process. They make it "happen," so to speak. Yet, how exactly does the author engage the reader in a game of play? In the following subsection, I will consider some of the specific ways that *The Neverending Story* provides reader-inviting structures in the text.

D. The Implied Reader

To Ende, reading represents a collaboration between author and reader. They are "in it" together, so to speak. At one point in the book, he even uses the word "we" (27), referring to the reader and presumably himself as the author. In effect, Ende intends to take the reader along for a journey, albeit discreetly. This path Ende is marked out by the protagonists, Bastian and Atreju. As discussed in Section 2, Bastian and Atreju act as figures of identification (*Identifikationsfiguren*) for the reader. They represent the narratees, acting as the focalizers of the text. The narratee provides an example of what should happen to actual reader.[18] As Bastian is himself a reader, he acts as the embodiment of the implied reader. Like Bastian, who creates Phantasien, we are creating a world of our own as we read the *The Neverending Story*. Much like Bastian, the reader becomes a participant (*Handelnde*) of the text's game.[19] Still, the question remains, how are we made to identify with Bastian?

The story begins with Bastian stealing the actual book from a bookshop. The fact that he commits this crime may strike some readers as somewhat offputting. Ende, however, defends Bastian's decision. He premises the scene by saying, "*Wer niemals offen oder im geheimen bitterliche Tränen vergossen hat…der wird wahrscheinlich nicht begreifen können, was Bastian jetzt tat.*" (11). Books represent Bastian's greatest passion, the author tells us (11). Of course, this still doesn't justify his stealing the book. Ende simply concedes that the human passions represent a curious thing (*eine rätselhalfe Sache*) (10). In this context, the author asks us to understand, sympathize and perhaps even react in much the same way as Bastian. Ende assumes that the reader will share Bastian's passion for books. Moreover, he expects the reader to engage in the story, to be passionate, but also to be compassionate.

Ende's appeal to the reader's compassion is demonstrated most clearly in one scene, where Bastian begins to cry in reaction to what he reads. In this scene, the narrator describes how Atreju's horse, Artax, gets sucked into the Swamps of Sadness (57). Here, Ende makes a deliberate choice to interrupt his narration of the scene in Phantasien to describe Bastian's emotional upwelling. This passage may typify what one may consider an ideal reader's response. With this scene, Ende provides a model for how the reader should engage with the text.

E. Engaging the Reader: Devices of Identification

Another device whereby Ende seeks to engage the reader is marked by the different colors of the text. Everything happening in Bastian's world is written in red,

while everything that happens in Phantasien is written in green. The different colors represent another play of the text. Ende himself refers to these different colors as a kind of rule of the game (*Spielregel*).[20] In other words, they act as directional signs, helping the reader navigate between Phantasien and Bastian's world.

Throughout the first half of the book, Ende pretty regularly alternates between these two planes of action. As with the previous scene, Ende keeps coming back to Bastian, to describe his response to the preceding passage. As he reads, Bastian is increasingly drawn into the story of the book. Just before Bastian enters Phantasien, the lines between the two worlds converge, revealing the agency of the reader. In the part of the book, Bastian reads about how the Childlike Empress visits a man referred to as Old Man of Wandering Mountain, in search of help. The Old Man is said to faithfully record all that happens in Phantasien, reflecting Ende's ideal of a storyteller in the traditional sense—perhaps even Ende himself, one might argue. In hopes of finding Phantasien's savior, The Childlike Empress insists that Old Man tell her the whole story of Phantasien. The Old Man's story begins at the beginning, as we know it. It is the *The Neverending Story*, just as Ende wrote it. The story continues, describing all that happens to Bastian, until it eventually ends up where it started, with the Childlike Empress asking the Old Man to tell her the story. This cycle could presumably continue *ad infinitum*. It is like a broken record. The music has come to a halt. Ultimately, this prompts Bastian to enter the Phantasien. Starting at this point, the text becomes an uninterrupted stream of green writing. According to Ende, this marks the point when the story of the book *actually* begins.[21]

This allegory relates to Ende's argument that a story relies on a reader's input. A story in and of itself carries no meaning, since it relies on an interaction between reader, author, and text.

F. The *The Neverending Story* as a Self-Reflexive Text

This is one among many instances in the book illustrating its self-reflexivity as a work of fiction. Before Bastian enters Phantasien, the narrative alternates between Bastian's world and Atreju's world, between our reality and the fantastic realm. In doing so, Ende denies the reader the possibility to get lost in the story—or, as Ende would have it, to become engulfed by the illusion of this fantasy world. Critics have often charged Ende with essentially writing escapist fiction. Ende, however, argues that, quite to the contrary, his books encourage the reader to reflect on what he is reading. Iser describes reading as an active dialectic process between reader and text. In *The Neverending Story*, this dialectic process is encouraged through its self-reflexivity. By being aware of its being a text, the book manages to keep the dynamic between reality and work active.[22]

Another instance of the text's self-reflexivity is showcased by the inhabitants of Phantasien. They realize themselves that they are merely characters in a book: "*Wir sind nur Figuren in einem Buch*" (109). This reminder encourages us as readers to take on a metacritical stance. We become more conscious of our relationships to certain characters in the book.[23] We must ask ourselves, how do I identify with this character? How do I stand in relation to this character? In effect, Ende's novel

becomes less concerned with the story than the reading experience it generates. Ende's self-reflexive commentary serves as a kind of lens, through which we may come to think about the story.

As such, the self-reflexive elements permeating the *The Neverending Story* do not necessarily act as an impediment to the story. As readers, Iser argues, we understand that the text does not necessarily reflect reality. Instead, the text constitutes a game of pretend.[24] In his theoretical texts, Ende echoes Iser's point, arguing that an awareness of reality does not preclude the possibility for play. To illustrate his point, Ende refers to children playing in a sandbox. He says, though they may be "making a cake" using the sand, they realize that that this "cake" is only make-believe.[25] If someone prompted this child to eat this "cake," Ende maintains the child would know better than to do so. In this sense, the child is able to maintain a sense of self relative to the imaginative world, never losing itself in this game of play. In Iser's words, "the textual world is to be viewed, not as reality, but *as if* it were reality [emphasis added]."[26] Therefore, drawing attention to the story's being a story does not necessarily shatter the fictive universe it conjures. As Iser describes, play is unique in that it produces something while still allowing the process of production to be observed.[27] Harking back to Ende's notion of *Bildersprache*, Iser praises the author that is able to „evoke and revoke images,"[28] playing on a reader's expectations throughout. By being self-aware, the *The Neverending Story* essentially admits to the fact that it only represents one version of a given story, allowing for the possibility of alternate interpretations. Why does something happen? Why does

something else not happen? This play is exactly what Iser advocates, too. This relates to Iser's notion of staging and negation.

G. Filling in the blanks: *Leerstellen*, Negation and Staging

As much as the act of reading relies on words, it is also defined by the lack thereof, namely gaps. Iser defines these empty segments as *Leerstellen*, often also referred to as indeterminacies. Though these indeterminacies sometimes originate by chance, they may also be very deliberate. Indeed, *Leerstellen* may also be described as being deliberately placed between two determinate points.[29] These blanks offer readers the possibility to fill in the empty space or to read "between the lines," as it were. The act of constructing new meaning represents what Iser calls a "crossing of boundaries."[30] When talking about play, Iser uses the terms negation and staging to describe two instances of crossing boundaries.[31]

Iser notes that the process of filling in the blanks is by no means as harmonious as it sounds. Instead, it is often a discordant exercise. In *The Neverending Story*, the force destroying Phantasien, referred to as the Nothing, represents a good example of negation. Considering that the Nothing represents one of the central issues of the story, the author provides surprisingly little information about it. In general, it is defined more by what it is *not* than what *is*. No one is able to provide a proper description of what it looks like. One character says, "When looking at the Nothing, you almost feel blind" (page). He maintains, there is no way to adequately put it into words: "…*es gibt kein Wort dafür*!" Since language is apparently insufficient

to describe the Nothing, the reader must fill this gap using his imagination. Only through play can this concept be given some form. As Iser points out, "difference can only be manifested through play, because only play can make conceivable the absent otherness which lies on the reverse side of all positions."[32] Thus negation opens up a playing field for the reader.

Like negation, staging represents a means of crossing boundaries. In Section IIP, I discussed how Ende denies his readers narrative closure. In doing so, Ende provides a deliberate indeterminacy or *Leerstelle*, allowing the reader to stage his imagination and consider how the story may have played out. In general terms, *The Neverending Story* provides a framework for the reader's imagination. Using these gaps, the reader is able to move beyond the pregiven order of the text and turn the text into something more. This transformation, as Iser puts it, comes to full fruition through the recipient's imaginative participation in the games played…" In this sense, the act of reading is largely a subjective experience. Does that mean that any interpretation of a text may be considered valid? The fact that as readers we sometimes have a similar reading experience as someone else would suggest that this is not the case. How do we construct "meaning?"

H. Meaning and Interpretation of *The Neverending Story*

Of course, reading involves more than just a construction of mental images. It is only natural for a reader to also generate an evaluative response to a text. Iser considers imagining and interpreting as two successive motions defining the act of

reading. According to hermeneutic thought, this back-and-forth motion of interpretation also defines a reader's experience of a text on a larger scale.[33] The reader is said to move back and forth between the text and his own tentative evaluation, in an effort to understand the text as a coherent piece of writing. Thus the act of reading becomes a quest for meaning. It is a forward-moving game, where the endpoint is indeterminate.

The same is true for Bastian and Atreju. Both are on a quest of their own. Atreju is on a quest (*Große Suche)* to find the hero who will save Phantasien, who later turns out to be Bastian. Similarly, Ende describes Bastian as being on a *Große Suche* (44). After losing his mother, Bastian's world has become devoid of meaning (*bedeutungslos*). In Phantasien, however, everything is said to have meaning. Similarly, the playing field of a text is inherently abundant with meaning. Thus Bastian's adventures in Phantasien become a quest for meaning. He is searching for his true desire (*Wahre Willen*). In many ways, the same may also be said of the act of reading. The fact that Bastian is himself a reader only serves to reinforce this parallel.

Making meaning of a text may be described as a "dynamic, emergent process."[34] Iser does not consider the text to fix meaning. Instead, he considers the meaning of a text to represent a transient concept. Iser prefers to think of meaning as fundamentally reliant on the reader. Many aspects of the text will vary in what impression they make on the reader (*Wirkungspotential*).[35] The play of a text will often points towards some meaning, though it can never affirm this meaning completely. For this reason, Iser describes meaning as a "supplement" to the text, emphasizing the fact that it is not self-evident in the text. He defines the supplement as being

"*additional to the text without ever being authenticated by it.*"[36] Thus an interpretation can only be considered a "partial meaning" of a text.[37]

On several occasions, readers have asked Michael Ende to clarify certain aspects of the text. For instance, readers often asked Ende what the Childlike Empress represents. On principle, he declined providing any definitive answers. To Ende, there can be no „true" meaning of any of his texts.[38] In regard to *The Neverending Story*, he said any interpretation that is „good"—that is to say, reasonable or fair—is also valid, even if fit does not coincide with what he had in mind when he was writing the novel. To Ende, there can be no ultimate "key" to unlocking his book.[39]

Iser describes the text's "meaning" as a fundamentally abstract, modernist notion.[40] Like Ende, Iser holds that there is no inherent meaning to a text. It simply does not exist. Iser describes a reader's search for meaning as a fundamentally fruitless endeavor. Iser likens the act of reading to the endless tortures of Sisyphus.[41] Reading, to Iser, typifies a "cyclic repetition of failed meanings."[42] In other words, the reader's journey is defined by a constant failure to grasp meaning. The reader will often try to relate a text to his own reality or basis of references. However, he will never quite be able to reconcile the two, since a text can never directly coincide with a reader's reality. The paradox of the text is that it "realizes itself by continually invalidating any kind of reality."[43] The concept of negation discussed earlier also alludes to this fact. By filling in gaps or *Leerstellen*, the reader is constructing his own imaginative world.

Ende holds that reading should ideally resemble a form of meditation. In this sense, the text should be experienced in the moment. According to Iser, a reader will always arrive at tentative conclusions, though these must always be open to future revisions.[44] The act of reading is defined by a reader's expectations and how a text meets or defies these expectations. This constitutes the play of a text. However, it is a game that you can never win. For to win would mean to master the game and thus establish meaning. Drawing on philosopher James P. Carse,[45] Ende differentiated between finite and infinite games. According to Carse, the goal of a finite game is to win, while the goal of an infinite game is to keep playing.[46] The play of a text does not necessarily end with the last page. Where does the play lead you? The text cannot offer a definitive endpoint, since even at the end of a book there is a gap waiting to be filled. As the concepts of staging and negation make clear, the play of the text is neither about winning nor losing; rather, it is a process of transforming positions.[47]

Thus the inherent paradox of the text is that it leads us somewhere, where there is no definitive end. The play is "only a means to an end, and not an end in itself."[48] Iser holds that with play, you do not mean to "get at" anything in particular." This is certainly the case with the *The Neverending Story* and perhaps one may say the same of any text. As readers, we may try to attribute meaning to a text, but who can say for sure that this meaning coincides with the author's intention? If the game is driven at meaning and there is no true meaning, where does it end? Paradoxically, as Iser points out, "the game itself runs counter to its being brought to an end."[49] So what is the function of the text? Where does the story end?

I. Reading as a Means of Self-Reflection

Bastian enters Phantasien with no clear purpose. Upon entering Phantasien, Bastian receives a medallion from the Childlike Empress that bears the words "*Tu was du willst*." Ende explains that these words are based on an old Benedictian saying „Do what thou wilt." Bastian slowly learns the true extent of his own abilities and builds his confidence. Bastian is told that he must find his true desire, which he can only find by treading the way of wishes (*Weg der Wünsche*). This means that Bastian can only move from wish to wish. If he does not have a wish in mind, he cannot move forwards. At one point, Bastian has become complacent living in Phantasien and no longer wishes to go anywhere. As a result, he keeps finding himself in the same place he started at the beginning of the day. Bastian's *Große Suche* comes to a halt because he has lost interest in his quest for meaning. Similarly, the act of reading relies on a reader's personal engagement. Without it, the reader is simply sounding out words. A text only makes sense, if there is someone trying to make sense of it.

Since the process of reading reveals matters of personal significance, it may almost be considered a dialogue with the self. In this sense, we may consider *The Neverending Story* not only to be a story *about* Bastian, but truly to be *his* story, as is, in fact, mentioned in the text ("*es ist seine eigene Geschichte*") (186). The story becomes a reflection of the reader, acting as a mirror. By applying expectations and assumptions to a text, the reader may try to understand a text, but more importantly he may understand how he stands in relation to this text. This is arguably the only way we

can understand a text at all. Thus the act of reading, I would argue, is less about understanding the text itself than about using the text to understand something more meaningful about ourselves and how we view the world.

In Bastian's case, he ultimately learns to love—a cliché, of course. Nonetheless, the fact that we may scoff at this relatively conventional conclusion already indicates an evaluative response. These conversations between author and reader transpire through play. If the text is said to initiate a game of play and thus open up a playing field in the mind of the reader, how much value may we accord to the text itself? At the end of the book, Ende raises exactly this question. When Bastian returns to Herr Koreander to return the book, the shop owner says that he never owned such a book. He adds, though, that he has also travelled to Phantasien before, long ago. Though he experienced many of the same things, it seems his experience of Phantasien was entirely different. Every reader experiences Phantasien differently. Ende asks, "When two people read the same thing, are they really reading the same thing?" ("*Wenn mehrere Menschen das gleiche Buch lesen, lesen sie dann wirklich dasselbe?"*).[50] Every reader will see something else in the same text. Indeed, even if someone reads the same text twice, it will likely be different each time, since the reader will approach the text with different experiences and thus genereate different associations.[51] For this reason, Ende maintains that you can never meet the Childlike Empress twice. Each time, Bastian learns, you must give the Childlike Empress a new name. The playing field is different each time. Herein lies one of the fundamental pleasures of reading. Why else read a book twice? That moment you

finish the last sentence of a book, you somehow feel different. And in a strange way, the world also looks slightly different, too. Why?

J. Phantasien and Reality

We read because it takes us somewhere new. Through reading, Iser believes, the reader is lifted out of his practical concerns and physical surroundings, and thus "jerked out of passive contemplation." [52] This causes what Iser describes as an experience of momentary "irrealization."[53] The text constantly presents new situations and viewpoints, forcing the reader to adopt what Iser calls a "wandering viewpoint."[54] Through reading, we take on a new persona—sometimes even personas, depending on the number of characters in question. And yet, throughout the process of reading, the self remains in the background. Iser describes there being essentially two selves at work in the act of reading: the real me and the alien me. In reading, the reader will try to bring these two in accord. In some of the most evocative novels, reading may affect an actual change in the "real me." Indeed, Iser thinks of reading as a process inducing a "personal transformation."[55] Still, the question remains, how exactly does this transformation occur?

At the end of his journey, Bastian returns home more confident than in the beginning. Besides this experience, he cannot not take anything back from Phantasien. In the book, Ende explains that you can only take back the experiences you make in Phantasien. There is one exception, though. Before returning home, Bastian bathes in the Water of Life. According to Ende, Bastian transports some of

this water back, which he shares with his father. Consequently, his father's disposition also changes. Like Bastian, his father had entered a state of despair after his wife passed away. According to the story, the Water of Life melts away the "layer of ice" that used to surround Bastian's father. In this sense, the reading experience not only affects a change in Bastian but in his father as well.

How long was Bastian in Phantasien? It seems it all could have happened in one night. Was it perhaps a dream, then? Ende maintains that is not a dream, since a dream is often claimed to be completely fictional and thus "unreal." To Ende, fiction and reality are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, he raises the question how real (or unreal) a dream really is. To Ende, reality and fiction exist side by side and, in fact, complement each other. To Ende, what we call "factual" can have no claim to be true or real in itself. He considers a fact nothing but a "fabricated truth."[56] Where does fantasy begin and where does reality stop? To Ende, the boundary between Phantasien and reality is transient: „*Wir kennen von der Realität nur die Vorstellung, die wir uns von ihr machen. Ich weiß nicht genau, wo die Realität aufhört und die Phantasie beginnt*."[57]

K. The role of literature in shaping a new reality

To Ende, reading is essentially about experiencing a different world and then returning to our world in a new state of consciousness.[58] Thus Ende holds that the human fantasy—Phantasien, if you will—has the capacity to inform and even heal our world. Phantasien can inspire new ideas and new world views: "*Aus ihr [der*

Phantasie] allein erwachsen künftige Welten."[59] Iser defines the text's transformative capacity as "*magma*." Much like Ende, Iser holds that the images generated through reading have the potential to alter ourselves and consequently our social worlds.[60] Take, for instance, the abstract notion of "democracy." Through reading, Iser holds, the defintion of a like "democracy" can be subtly altered (*umgesetzt*) over time.[61] At a deeper level, the act of reading has the potential generate new systems of value: "*Durch die Phantasie werden individuelle Lösungen präsentiert, die über Lernprozesse persönliche Klarheit schaffen und so möglicherweise neue Werte definieren*."[62]

A text marks a distinct iteration of meaning. As Iser puts it, "The text itself is the outcome of an intentional act whereby an author refers to and intervenes in an existing world"[63] And though the act is intentional, it aims at something that is not yet accessible to the consciousness. Ideally, Iser holds, the text should confront the reader with two divergent worlds.[64] Caught between these two worlds, the reader is forced to create his own system of logic and values. In this sense, the text provides an outlet for the most fundamental values of our society. As Iser puts it, while social structures use negation to stabilize our view of reality, literary systems use them to expand it.[65] Thus reading serves as "a means whereby we may extend ourselves."[66] Through the play of the text, we may test both our inner-most values and our outer-most limits of comfort.

L. Critique of Iser and Relevance to Other Media

Iser scholar De Bruyn points out that Iser's focus is somewhat constrained. He mentions that Iser's analysis is both to general and specific at the same time. For one, it is too specific because his theoretical framework does not apply to all types of literature.[67] Mainly, it is tailored to novels that are ambiguous, socio-critical, and narrative.[68] At the same time, his theoretical framework is not specific enough either. Indeed, many of his points may also be applied to paintings with a narrative element, if the word "text" is replaced by "work."[69] When we look at figures in a painting, we are also using our imagination to conceive some meaning or narrative. Similarly, though Iser himself is skeptical of film, his theoretical framework works just as well with many works of cinema. In this case, one must only replace the word "*Leerstellen"* with "cuts." It seems therefore that these separate media have more in common than one might be willing to admit. Particularly nowadays, there is a constant dialogue between media. Indeed, can't certain modern books be described as being written in almost cinematic fashion? Doesn't cinema inform literature just as much as literature informs film?[70] As alluded to in Section I, Ende himself advocated an exchange across media. To him, writing and art could complement each other. Indeed, he was curious to see *The Neverending Story* turned into a movie. And yet, he was later greatly disappointed with the result. What kind of changes did the movie medium call for? And why was Ende so disappointed by the movie? In the next section, I will address some of these questions, drawing on adaptation theory.

Notes

[1] Wolfgang Iser, "The Play of the Text," *In Languages of the Unsayable: the Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987), 327.
[2] Michael Ende, as quoted in Roman Hocke and Uwe Neumahr, eds., *Michael Ende: Magische Welten*, (Henschel-Verlag, München 2007), 105. This quote originates from a typescript from Ende, belonging to a bequest.
[3] Andrea Hocke and Roman Hocke, "Vorwort des Herausgebers" in Michael Ende, *Aber das ist eine andere Geschichte: Das große Michael Ende Lesebuch*, ed. Andrea Hocke and Roman Hocke (München: Piper, 2004), 12.
[4] Michael Ende and Jörg Krichbaum, *Die Archäologie der Dunkelheit: Gespräche über Kunst und das Werk des Malers Edgar Ende* (Stuttgart: Edition Weitbrecht, 1985), 101-102.
[5] Wolfgang Iser, as quoted in Ben de Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser: A Companion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 181.
[6] Iser, "The Play of the Text," 326.
[7] Michael Ende, as quoted in Michael Ende and Franz Kreuzer, *Zeit-Zauber: Unser Jahrhundert denkt über das Geheimnis der Uhren nach* (Wien: Deuticke, 1984), 7.
[8] Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten*, 97.
[9] Ibid, 97.
[10] Ibid, 9.
[11] Roman Hocke and Thomas Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt: Die Suche nach dem Zauberwort* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1997), 14.
[12] Ibid, 97.
[13] See for instance Ende's *Gauklermärchen*.
[14] Ende and Krichbaum, *Die Archäologie der Dunkelheit*, 73.
[15] Ibid, 73.
[16] Iser, "The Play of the Text," 336.
[17] Ibid, 336.
[18] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 129.
[19] Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten*, 35.
[20] Ende and Kreuzer, *Zeit-Zauber*, 7.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 174.
[23] It would be interesting to survey how younger audiences understand these metaphysical structures. Personally, I never read the book as a child. I would assume that the metaphysical dimension of the book is not as pronounced with young audiences. The description "character" is perhaps, then, only a somewhat arbitrary term that does not fully link to a line of literary logic and classifications.
[24] Iser, "The Play of the Text," 327.
[25] Ende, as quoted in Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten*, 36.
[26] Iser, "The Play of the Text," 327.
[27] Ibid., 338.
[28] Ibid., 182.
[29] Ibid., 132.
[30] Ibid., 338.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 335.
[33] For more information on the topic, see Gadamer's discussion of the Hermeneutic Circle, "Hermeneutics and Social Science," *Philosophy Social Criticism / Cultural Hermeneutics 2*, 307-316, (D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, Holland, 1975).
[34] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 162.
[35] Iser, "The Play of the Text," 335.
[36] Ibid., 336.
[37] Iser, as quoted in Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 192.
[38] Hocke and Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 111-112.

[39] Ibid, 112.
[40] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 122.
[41] Iser, as quoted in Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser*, 122.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 190. Compare to hermeneutic circle
[45] Compare to James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1987) Ende liked to give this book away to friends as a present.
[46] James P. Carse, as quoted in Hocke and Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt,* 12.
[47] Iser, "The Play of the Text," 335.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Michael Ende, *Aber das ist eine andere Geschichte: das große Michael Ende Lesebuch*, ed. Andrea Hocke and Roman Hocke (Munchen: Piper, 2004), 15.
[51] For more information pertaining to the variance in a reader's expectations and previous knowledge, see Gadamer's theory on the cultural backpack and the horizon of expectation. For my intents and purposes, this was a too specific topic. Still, it is highly interesting, and may in fact inform my studies here. I welcome any further insights on the topic.
[52] Ibid, 140.
[53] Iser, as quoted in Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 127.
[54] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 188.
[55] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser*, 129.
[56] Ende, *Das große Michael Ende Lesebuch* (Munchen: Piper, 2004), 11.
[57] Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten*, 8.
[58] Erhard Eppler and Michael Ende, *Phantasie / Kultur / Politik: Protokoll eines Gesprächs* (Stuttgart: Edition Weitbrecht, 1982), 38.
[59] Michael Ende, *Das Gauklermärchen: ein Spiel in sieben Bildern sowie einem Vor- und Nachspiel* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1988), 93.
[60] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 179.
[61] Ibid, 177.
[62] Hocke and Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 35.
[63] Iser, "The Play of the Text," 327.
[64] Ibid, 180.
[65] Ibid, 133.
[66] Iser, "The Play of the Text," 327.
[67] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 142.
[68] Ibid., 141.
[69] Bruyn offers a pretty extensive discussion on this topic. For more information, see Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 144-146.
[70] Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser,* 143.

IV. *The Neverending Story* and Adaptation Theory

A. Introduction

The movie turned out to be a great commercial success. With a budget estimated at over $25 million, the movie was a relatively costly endeavor, even for today's standards. At the time, it was the most expensive German movie ever made.[1] Though it underperformed at the American box office, a total international gross of $100 million made up for the slight deficit.[2] While the movie met many enthusiastic viewers, it also caused many bitter conflicts in the process. Particularly Michael Ende, who had been an enthusiastic collaborator in the early stages of production, was ultimately disenchanted. Ultimately, the movie became his greatest source of frustration and perhaps what he may have also considered his greatest regret. Where did it all go wrong? In the end, the adaptation of *The Neverending Story* illustrates the paradigm of how an author will often find issues with an adaptation of his own work.

B. Geissler Secures the Rights to Make the Film

After the book became a bestseller, there were many companies interested in securing the rights to the movie. Among these were a number of international companies, including the Walt Disney Production Company.[3] In 1981, Dieter Geissler, head of Geissler Filmproduktion GmbH, and two of his assistants met up

with Michael Ende at his house in Italy. Ende and Geissler agreed that the movie should become a distinctly European fantasy film rather than a kind of Star Wars spectacle.[4] Before working on the film, Ende later explained, he viewed film as completely foreign territory.[5] Though he had worked as a film critic before, he never considered himself to be an expert on film.[6] By attempting an adaptation of his book, it seems he wanted to test the potential of the film medium. He was hoping that the movie could present his book in a new and meaningful way.

After news circulated that there would be a movie adaptation of the book, Ende received many letters of protest from his readers. They strongly objected to the idea of a movie adaptation. Some readers even went so far as to call him a "dirty pig" for selling the rights to his book.[7] Several accused him of having betrayed himself, suggesting that he was only in it for the money.[8] Interestingly, readers were not only critical of an adaptation of *The Neverending Story* but of film adaptations in general.[9] Was their outcry perhaps justified? Ende saw himself compelled to address the general question of whether an author can draw on the filmic medium for artistic purposes. In 1983, one year before the movie's release, Ende published an op-ed in the magazine Info3, responding to some of his readers' concerns.

C. Hopes – Michael Ende defends the film medium

Though film represents a medium for the masses, Ende argued that it should not be dismissed simply for this reason. In his article, Ende draws a comparison between film medium and the print medium, pointing out that the print medium was

also initially met with skepticism. Ende reasoned that the film medium also has the potential to be an artistic medium, since there were several movies he considered works of art. Here he quotes Saint Augustine: "Art is that, which is made by great artists." ("*Kunst ist das, was die großen Künstler machen.*") As examples of great filmmakers, he names Strohheim, Chaplin, and Eisenstein. Ende concedes that there are many more bad movies than there are good movies. However, he notes, there are also many more bad books than good books.[10] Since Ende presumably considered *The Neverending Story* to belong to the latter category of books, it seems as though Ende thought the movie could also become a work of unique artistic merit ("…*dass aufgrund des Buches vielleicht ein guter Film entsteht, der seinen eigenen Wert hat*).[11] Nonetheless, Ende was well aware that a movie adaptation would represent an entirely different artistic medium.[12] In his op-ed, Ende he alludes to some of the fundamental differences (*Anderseitigkeit*) between the two media. Indeed, Ende offers some very compelling views on the subject. Nonetheless, it seems that Ende's optimism was founded more on theory than actual practical experience.

One of the concerns brought forth by his readers was that a film denies a viewer his imaginative agency. In this sense, one might argue, it fulfills the exact opposite function of a book. Ende points out that the fear of the image is as old as European culture itself, referring to iconoclast movement that prohibited the portrayal of deities. He says this fear is unjustified, since he himself knows hundreds even thousands of images of Christ, yet his own image remains intact. Similarly, he mentions having seen numerous film adaptations of the *Brothers Karamasov* by Dostoyevsky. Some of them, he says, enriched his image of the main character,

Aljosha, yet none of them completely replaced the image he had in mind. Ende felt that the human imagination "*Vorstellungskraft*" has the capacity to resist filmic images and maintain its independence.[13] Rather than being considered an ultimate version, a movie adaptation should merely be considered one of many possible "visual paraphrases" of a book.[14] For this reason, Ende argued, the movie would not compete with the images offered by his book. In general, Ende was very optimistic about film medium. Still, there were a few potential dangers he anticipated.

D. Concerns – Retaining the "Kernel"

Mainly, Ende was concerned that the movie adaptation would misrepresent the kernel of his story (*Kern der Story*).[15] He defines this kernel as the part of the book that "goes straight to the heart" of his audience ("*der Teil [des Buchs]…der meinen Lesern an's Herz geht*").[16] It seems therefore that this kernel defies any proper definition. Whether this kernel may be retained, Ende holds, depends entirely on the director and the quality of the movie.[17] To put the movie on the right path, Ende was himself actively involved in the early stages of production, acting as both a screenwriter and creative consultant. Making a movie of his book prompted the challenge of adapting the story to the screen. In all, it took around three years to compose the script, while it only took half a year to shoot the movie.[18] In this sense, the script arguably posed one of the most challenging aspects of making the movie. There were many people who voiced their concerns whether the basic gist of the

story (*Schlüsselidee*) could be depicted on the screen. How could you convey both Bastian's universe and the parallel universe? How could you keep them distinct?

E. Geissler Production and The First Attempts at Conceiving a Script

The first director that Geissler hired was Hans Geissendörfer. He was also the first to compose a script. In this first version, Bastian is not in an attic reading a book, but in an old, run-down cinema watching movies. Koreander, who in the book is the old bookshop owner, is here a movie projector, who uses old celluloid strips to lure Bastian into the film world. The fantasy figures in the book became references to other movies like vampires, monsters, and werewolves.[19] Thus the movie became a kind of meta-movie, much as the *The Neverending Story* may be described as a kind of meta-fiction. And yet, Ende considered the script to be so far off from what he had intended that he refused to speak another word to Geissendörfer. The collaboration did not last long after this, and Geissendörfer abandoned the project soon after.

The next person Geissler put to work was his assistant, Dr. Christian Schneider. As Ende later recalls, Schneider was the one originally responsible for convincing him to sell the rights to Geissler. According to Ende, Schneider "understood" the story of the book.[20] With Schneider as the director, the prospects seemed promising. However, this also proved to be a brief stint. Schneider worked on conceiving a script for a total of three months, before ultimately giving up. He returned to Geissler, saying the book could not possibly be turned into a movie ("*das*

Ding ist nicht verfilmbar").[21] It became obvious that to convincingly convey the book's fictional universe, a lot of convincing special effects and money would be needed.

F. Neue Constantin and More Attempts

Things took a turn when the Neue Constantin Film AG bought the film rights from Geissler without Ende's knowing. When he heard about it, he was at his home in Italy. Immediately, he flew to Stuttgart to meet his friend Hanjörg Weitbrecht and the lawyer of the Thienemann publisher.[22] The same day, he travelled to Munich to confront the representatives of Neue Constantin. This marked the beginning of a series of legal disputes.

From the start, Ende had tried to prevent selling the rights to a large production company. He didn't want the movie to become a big-budget production. However, it seems that Neue Constantin had always intended for the movie to be an extremely ambitious and costly endeavor. The German box offices would not yield enough for this undertaking. Therefore, it was clear from the start that the movie would have to be made in English since the American box offices presented a huge potential market. After Konstantin bought the rights, Ende already suspected the worst: "*Wenn die Neue Constantin den Film macht…dann wird das ein Science-Fiction-Reißer im üblichen amerikanischen Klischee.*"[23] Ende foresaw that a large budget production could easily become susceptible to a certain technical materialism (*technische Materialismus).*[24] He feared that his book would become a special effects

blockbuster like Star Wars („*dass man versuchen wuerde, die ganze Magie des Buches in einem unheimlichen Aufwand in ein Star Wars Muster zu pressen*").[25]

Still, the main person in charge at Konstantin, Bernd Eichinger, assured Ende that they shared the same vision for the movie. Like Geissler, Eichinger promised that it would be a distinctly European film.[26] As part of the initial contract, Ende reserved the right to have the last word on the choice of director, the main actors, and creative designers.[27] The production company even insisted to hire Ende as a creative consultant, to ensure that the movie remained true to his original intention.[28] In short, the initial set-up promised an ideal exchange and collaboration between producers and author. Ende himself described his relationship with Neue Constantin as exceedingly positive (*ungeheuer positiv*), and thus the work began.[29]

G. New Director, New Draft

The first director that Constantin signed was Helmut Dietl. Ende actively collaborated with Dietl. Still, both admitted to being anxious about making the movie.[30] Two directors had already tried to tackle the script, and both had failed. This time, the set-up seemed very promising. Ende even invited Dietl to his home in Italy, to work on the script together. However, even at this early point in the collaboration, there were already many disagreements with the production company, which constantly requested changes be made to the script. A number of times, scenes had to be rewritten, and the preparations for the movie constantly demanded new decisions to be made.[31]

Together, Dietl and Ende completed a script in June of 1982.[32] Still, the production company had many issues with the script. To them, it was still too complicated and especially far too lengthy.[33] To Ende, however, the script reflected many of his views. In fact, he established in writing that every following script should use Dietl's script as a basis. Still, the production company seemed to have a different vision for the script. Without telling Ende, they hired the scriptwriter Hermann Weigel, who had become popular after having written the script for *Christiane F. – Wir Kinder vom Bahnhof Zoo*. One day, Ende found Weigel's script in the mail. Ende was flabbergasted. Promptly, he sent the production team a Telex,[34] accusing of them as having gone mad: "*Ihr seid wohl wahnsinning geworden. Dieser Scheiß kommt überhaupt nicht in Frage*." In the meantime, director Dietl had also abandoned the project, making him the third person to attempt conceiving a script and eventually giving up. The speed of production had grown too fast for him. Like Geissendörfer, he had grown increasing convinced that it was impossible to turn the book into a movie. In his last meeting with the production company, he maintained that the book could not be made into a movie: "*In 90 Minuten ist das nicht zu machen*."[35]

H. New Director, New draft (Again)

The Neue Constantin had to find a new director quickly. In a stroke of good fortune, they were able to convince Wolfgang Petersen, director of the internationally renowned movie *Das Boot*, to headline the project. The production

company was convinced that Petersen could also turn *The Neverending Story* into an epic work of cinema like *Das Boot*. However, Ende was still not convinced the project was going in the right direction. At this junction point, Ende and his legal advisors met with representatives of the Neue Constantin, including Eichinger and Petersen, to discuss points of conflict regarding the story.[36] It seems there was no shortage of discussion, since the meeting went on for a total of thirteen hours, later prompting the name "marathon meeting" ("*Marathon-Sitzung*").[37] It looked as though they wouldn't be able to come to a consensus. However, during a coffee break, the art director Ul de Rico was able to convince Ende that Petersen had a lot of understanding (*Verständnis*) for the story of his book.[38]

Eichinger was able to convince Ende to collaborate with Petersen to compose a new script. By this point, Ende had also come to learn that a script inevitably had to take some departures from the original.[39] Together, Petersen and Ende completed a script. However, Eichinger was far from pleased ("*Dieses Buch ist Scheiße*"). To him, it was too dark and heavy. Ende and Petersen tried to rework the script into something the production company might like more. One day, Petersen called Ende at his hotel, to report that he was going to quit. This was the fourth director that had become discouraged with the project. However, at this point, the production of the movie was well underway, and the production company could not afford looking for a new director. In the end, Eichinger managed to convince Petersen to stay on board. In just a few days, the production company used Petersen's script to produce a new script, the compromise version ("*Kompromißfassung*").[40] Ende, however, claims that he was never involved in creating this script.

I. The Script Doctor and The „*Kompromißfassung*“

Still, the production company was not completely satisfied with the script. In a covert operation, they contracted a so-called script doctor named John Hill. Together, Hill, Weigel, Petersen, and Eichinger, spent one month working on the script.[41] By the end of it, they had the script they wanted. The Neue Constantin was finally satisfied and the production began soon after. The story goes that Ende heard about this new version only by chance. Apparently, Ul di Rico called him to ask how he liked the new script. Since Ende had never received this script, he was shocked to hear about this new version. He contacted the Neue Constantin immediately, and they delivered him the script. He was greatly disappointed with what he saw. He later reflects, the main „substance” of the story had been completely destroyed, and all of the changes ran contrary to the story of the book.[42] Ende was not willing to tolerate this affront.

M. End of the Story

After seeing the final script, Ende was ready to sue Neue Constantin. However, at this point, the production company could not possibly abort the project. In the end, the production company forced Ende to back off. They said they would make Ende pay millions in reparation damages if he tried to get in the way of

production. Ende had fought long and hard, but in the end he had no choice but to admit defeat. The odds were not in his favor. As Ende reflects later:

"*Die Wahrheit war natürlich, dass auf der einen Seite ein Betriebskapital von über 60 Millionen Dollar auf dem Spiel stand, auf der anderen die Meinung eines einzelnen, größenwahnsinnig gewordenen Autors.*"[43]

It was obvious who would win. The project left him feeling betrayed and pretty cynical towards film adaptations in general. In a later interview, he remarked that he ought to have been thankful to see his book turned into a movie. After all, seeing your book being made into a movie is the greatest thing an author could ever dream of ("*... nach allgemeiner Meinung ist ja das Höchste, was ein Schriftsteller sich erträumen kann, eine Verfilmung seines Buches und er sollte sich entsprechend dankbar erweisen.*").[44] In the end, the production company forced Ende to sign a contract that said Ende and his publisher would distance themselves from the script and interfere neither with the production nor the distribution of the movie.[45] Still, Ende reserved the right to revoke his name in connection to the movie, upon seeing the final version of the movie (*Nullkopie*).[46]

J. The Movie – Minor Changes

So what remained of the book? It was clear fairly early on that the movie would only cover the first half of the book. As far as the story is concerned, the

movie is arguably not too dissimilar from the book. By and large, the changes introduced by the movie were fairly innocent. Most of them were little gags for entertainment value. For instance, some of the characters have little quirks in the movie. For instance, the old turtle, Morla (The Ancient One), is "allergic to youth" in the movie, which is supposed to make for a comical scene when Atreju meets her, and she can't stop sneezing. In some sense, this detail is in line with the original story, since Morla is described as being very cynical and disparaging of Atreju's youthful vigor. In a similar vein, Fuchur has a constant itch behind his ear, and he winks at Atreju far more often than he should. Though these details may somewhat distract from the story itself, they do nothing to really hamper with the story.

The few plot changes in movie hardly pose serious infringements to Ende's story. For instance, when the Childlike Empress is searching for her hero, the movie leaves out an intermittent step, in which a representative of the empress seeks the kingdom to find Atreju. In the book, this scene primarily serves to illustrate Phantasien more than representing an actual plot point. Another difference is that in the book Bastian's scream is heard in Phantasien when the spider Ygramul enters, rather than when Morla enters. There are many more minor changes similar to these. However, they are surely not important enough to warrant further enumeration here. Most likely, Ende would have agreed on these changes. In fact, he may have proposed some of these himself to fit the format of the movie. The changes that likely frustrated Ende most were those that conflicted with the ideology of his book.

K. Conflicting Ideologies between Book and Movie

The laws of Phantasien, especially those in relation to Bastian's world, were of particular importance to Ende. Though these laws may not directly pertain to the plot, they relate to some of the more general themes of the book. On a few occasions, the movie departs from the laws set up in the book. For instance, at the end of the movie, Bastian returns home riding Fuchur. Together, they are able to scare away the bullies, effectively giving the bullies what they deserve and providing the movie with a happy ending. In the book, Bastian cannot take anything back from Phantasien besides his experiences (417).[47] To Ende, this was very important, since it underlined the fact that Phantasien represents the human fantasy rather than some magical, parallel universe. This constituted a key metaphysical aspect of the book that the movie disregarded—deliberately or not.

Similarly, when Bastian finally enters the fantasy world of Phantasien, he remarks "Falchur is much more beautiful than I thought." However, this neither makes sense in the context of the book nor in the context of the movie. If Phantasien represents Bastian's imagination, then he shouldn't be surprised at how Fuchur looks. Instead, Fuchur should be 100% congruent with the image Bastian had in mind when reading the book. In other words, the novel's descriptions would act as a basis for the reader's—in this case Bastian's—mental image. In the context of the movie, this scene does not make sense because it raises the question, whose version of Phantasien we have been seeing. Based on the way the movie is edited, it seems as though we are entering Bastian's imagination each time we see Phantasien. Clearly,

though, this is not the case, since Bastian is surprised by what he sees. Instead, it seems that the movie is trying to offer us an "objective" portrayal of Phantasien. This idea, of course, runs completely contrary to Ende's notion of Phantasien, which each reader perceives differently.

L. Reactions to the Movie: Michael Ende

On March 29, 1984, the production company invited Ende to a private screening of the movie (*Nullkopie*).[48] This screening was to decide whether Ende would revoke his connection to the movie or not. He had already seen the script, and he had visited the set several times in the initial stages of production. However, this was the first time he saw the movie in full. The script had already been difficult for Ende to tolerate. However, seeing a visual rendering of what he had read was probably more than he could bear. He would later describe the movie as "a gigantic melodrama made of kitsch, commerce, plush, and plastic" ("*ein gigantisches Melodram aus Kitsch, ‚Kommerz, Plüsch und Plastik*")[49] The visual aspect of the movie seemed to truly disturb him. He described Fuchur as an oversized "long-haired dachshund" ("*überdimensionaler Langhaardackel*").[50]

Ende believed that the movie missed the "main point" (*Sinn*) of his book, turning it into a "comic strip" (*Comic-Streifen)*, instead.[51] He considered the movie to represent a "joint trip," rather than a spiritual journey.[52] He demanded that at least those sequences that contradict the "inner logic" of the story be removed.[53] Disregarding the impracticality of Ende's request at this late point in the production,

we are again confronted with the question of what exactly constitutes this “inner logic” or “kernel” of the story. Ende clearly felt that the movie had not stayed true to the basis of his story. While there were many moviegoers and critics that greatly enjoyed the movie, there were also some that echoed Ende’s views.

M. Reactions to the Movie: Press

In general, the movie received mixed reviews from the press. New York Times film critic Vincent Canby shared many of the same points of criticism as Ende. In his review of the movie, Canby jeered the film as a "graceless, humorless fantasy for children.”[54] He criticized the notable cast of special effects artists for creating "tacky" special effects. He described Fuchur as "an impractical bathmat." Surprisingly, despite having invested in cutting-edge technology, the movie’s special effects seemed to have disturbed some contemporary viewers just as much as modern audiences find the effects amusing. A more positive review stated the movie provided a convincing illusion of "an entirely new world."[55]

Naturally, many critics also compared the movie to the book. One critic wrote, “A decent fantasy, but anyone who's read the book will be sorely disappointed […].”[56]Another critic writes that the movie was not able to live up to the “sophistication of the source material.”[57] This view was echoed by a number of other contemporary critics. Still today, people who have read the book maintain that the movie does not do justice to the book. Naturally, there can be no “right” or “wrong” answer here. Still, before addressing the question of fidelity, I feel it is necessary to

establish some fundamental differences between the two media in question that are often overlooked.

N. Differences in Media: Reality of the trade

Though this may seem obvious, a book and film are subject to two fundamentally different modes of production.[58] Unless it is published, a book involves little to no expenses, while movies usually require a long list of personnel, i.e. a director, actors, equipment, etc. To fund these various aspects of production, a large budget is required. When Ende was talking about creating an "artistic movie," it seems that he underestimated how much the movie would depend on satisfying a commercial market. While still working with Geissler, Ende assumed that the movie would cost no more than a few million *Deutsche Mark* to make. To Geissler, it was clear from the beginning that the project would cost more like ten to twenty million *Deutsche Mark*.[59] To cover these costs, the Neue Constantin had always intended for the movie to be produced for an international market. They were expecting for the movie to become huge international success. Still, the production company tried to keep the budget at a minimum, which naturally informed decisions in the making of the movie. Ende likely envisioned for the movie to be just as multifaceted and thought-provoking as his book. However, at the risk of being unclear, the producers had to keep the movie simple, especially since this movie was intended primarily for a young audience. In addition, as the production moved along, the budget kept increasing, as unexpected costs came up. Many of these financial concerns inevitably

had a bearing on the production of the movie. Thus Ende's initial idealism had to give in to several sobering realizations. He envisioned for the movie adaptation to become a work of rare artistic quality. However, he soon realized that any movie would eventually have to submit to the demands of the industry:

"*Alle sprachen von einer neuen Filmsprache, die entwickelt werden sollte [...] aber wenn es erst mal um große Summen geht, kommen völlig andere Gesichtspunkte zum Tragen, die mit künstlicherischen Fragen oft nichts mehr zu tun haben.*"[60]

Though this may have come as a surprise to Ende, the truth is that movie adaptations are almost always motivated by commercial interests. A book is often adapted to the screen precisely because it presents such a popular medium. The theorist Bazin alludes to this fact in one of his early essays, published in 1948. He writes, "To be sure, one must first know to what end the adaptation is designed: for the cinema or for its audience. One must also realize that most adapters care far more about the latter than about the former."[61] Looking back on the project, Ende concludes that "art and commerce do not get along" ("*Kunst und Kommerz vertragen sich nicht*").[62] Bazin contends that this is not true. According to Bazin, even a "bad" adaptation may have an indirect value for a book, since the sale of a book always increases after it has been adapted to the screen.[63] As far as numbers go, the movie was a clear success. Presumably, the sales of Ende's book also increased after the release of the movie if only marginally. Still, though these figures may represent an objective truth, the movie's "artistic merits" did not present such a clear case.

O. Differences in Media – Showing vs. Telling

Books and movies represent two fundamentally different modes of storytelling. While novels represent a primarily verbal medium, movies represent a primarily visual medium. Though they may both be utilized to narrative ends, both media are diametrically opposed: Novels show by ways of telling, while movies tell by ways of showing.[64] In other words, the descriptions of a novel may conjure a visual elaboration in the reader's mind, while the images of a movie tell us something. As alluded to in Section II, evaluative descriptions in verbal narratives invoke a "visual elaboration" in the reader's mind.[65] Essentially, they are "constructions imaged by the reader out of words.[66] Unlike books, movies cannot describe.[67] Instead, they communicate through concrete images. With movies, images must be arranged to tell a story. Filmic discourse "picks up and selects precisely those meanings necessary for the story to be told."[68] Thus, for a series of images to tell a story, the process becomes about "creating a hierarchy of narratively important elements within a mass of contingent details."[69] Movies tell stories through images, turning the descriptions of a novel into concrete images.

In this sense, one may consider a movie to offer a more specific rendering of a novel. For this reason, Anthony Burgess, the author of *A Clockwork Orange*, holds that novels almost demand movie adaptations. He says, "Every best-selling novel *has* to be turned into a film, the assumption being that the book itself whets an appetite for the true fulfillment—the verbal shadow turned into light the word made flesh."[70] The

suggestion here is that a novel is incomplete when compared to a movie. Of course, Burgess, being an author himself, is only being facetious here. Nonetheless, his remark serves to illustrate a key distinction between novels and films; where novels describe, movies may provide concrete images, bringing the reader one step closer to this fictive universe. Images have a more immediate impact on a viewer. While these images may make for a compelling experience, they may, in other cases, be perceived as offsetting. Directors depend on the audience's agreement on visual cues. Particularly with movie adaptations of novels, the images on the screen may run contrary to the reader's construction of descriptions based on the novel.

P. Differences in Media: Time

Another fundamental difference between the two media concerns the aspect of time. All movies have a predetermined runtime. In movies, time is ongoing. Chatman refers to this as the "ongoing march of events."[71] He adds, even "dead moments," moments when nothing moves, "are felt to be part of the temporal whole."[72] Granted, movies can also be put on pause, but this is only a relatively new development afforded by home video devices. With a book, the rate at which the story progresses depends entirely on the reader. It is indeterminate. Still, given the relatively short runtime of a movie, the assumption is that it will be consumed in one sitting. A movie is supposed to provide an experience, given the time allotted. To interrupt a movie's arc would mean to experience the movie differently than the director had intended. A movie is not supposed to be consumed in days, weeks, or

even months, as a book might. Here, again, the movie and the book are at odds with one another: "The novel renders the illusion of space by going from point to point in time; the film renders time by going from point to point in space."[73]

While time in a novel is ever-expanding, the movie can only convey time in a very deliberate manner. As Bluestone puts it, a novel has three tenses, while a film has only one.[74] In a movie, everything is happening at that very moment. Only through film grammar can you allude to changes in the temporal plane, i.e. flashbacks, dreams, suggestion of the future, etc. Still, these distinctions are not easily conveyed and are arguably not natural to the medium. More abstract notions of time or deliberately vague notions of time cannot be presented. As alluded to in Section II, Ende was deliberately ambiguous about notions of time. He was particularly insistent that Bastian's adventures in Phantasien did not occur in one night, as in a dream. Similarly, he raises the question how long everything in Phantasien has already existed. After Bastian creates Perelin, the Colorful Forest, he later asks Gramaogran how long it has already been there. Gramaogran responds that it has existed "for one hundred years and forever—both" ("*100 Jahre und doch war es schon immer so gewesen*"). Ende alludes to the fact that stories are never new. According to Ende, since history is constantly recreated, every story represents a recreation of the past. Of course, this concept would be virtually impossible to convey in a movie. In the context of the book, this point relates to Ende's more general commentary on stories and storytelling. Though this temporal oxymoron may not directly relate to the story of the book, is it possible to leave it out and still remain "faithful" to the book? Is it part of what one may consider the "essence" of the book? The question of

a book's "kernel" has come up a number of times now. What constitutes a book's "kernel?" On this topic, it seems that scholars and critics cannot come to an agreement. Before I address the question of fidelity, I should therefore like to convey the arguments on both sides.

Q. Divorcing Form and Content: Those Against

Michael Ende is among those that argue that a story cannot be divorced from its form. He says: *„In der Kunst und in der Poesie geht es um Schönheit. Um nichts anderes! Da gibt es keine Form, die vom Inhalt getrennt werden könnte und umgekehrt*."[75] In other words, the content of a novel relies on its stylistic mode of expression. The two complement each other.[76] What he says is reminiscent of Wagner's notion of a complete work of art (*Gesamtkunstwerk*). Nonetheless, Ende encourages creating art across all media. It turns out that *The Neverending Story* was not the first adaptation of his work that he found unsatisfactory. Just before the *The NeverEnding Story* went into production, a German opera director, Mark Lothar, approached Ende about turning his book *Momo* into an opera, and Ende agreed. As with the movie adaptation, Ende was an enthusiastic collaborator in the initial stages of production, but he eventually came to the conclusion that his novel was unsuitable for an adaptation: "*Er glaubte, dass der Momo-Stoff nicht in das Gewand einer Oper im üblichen Sinne passe...*".[77] Mainly, he was disliked the fact that the main character, Momo, should have to talk or sing, simply because the opera calls for arias. In the novel, Momo is described as only ever listening, rarely ever speaking herself.[78] As with *The Neverending Story,* the opera

called for certain compromises, which Ende was unwilling to make.[79] To work as an opera, Ende's story had to undergo several larger changes. And yet, if these changes weren't so dramatic or they could have been agreed upon, perhaps there is a possibly that the story could have successfully traversed media.

R. Divorcing Form and Content: Those In Favor

On the opposing front, there are many who believe that form and content can indeed be separated. According to Gunning, stories can traverse various media due to what he calls the "double nature of storytelling,"[80] consisting of "story" and "discourse," or content and form. [81] Similarly, Andrew concurs that stories can be broken down into a set of "narrative units,"[82] such plot, characters, setting, etc. Ende did not deem this possible, since he considered his book to represent a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Responding to some of these concerns, Bazin makes a very acute observation:

"It is interesting to note that the novelists who so fiercely defend the stylistic or formal integrity of their texts are also the ones who sooner or later overwhelm us with confessions about the tyrannical demands of their characters… but then writers must recognize that the true aesthetic reality of a psychological or social novel lies in the characters or their environment rather than in what they call its style."[83]

Indeed, before Ende published *The Neverending Story,* his publisher wrote him a letter, inquiring about his progress. Ende responded that he couldn't get Bastian out of Phantasien, since Bastian refused to leave, effectively forcing him to join Bastian on his long journey.[84] Here, Ende expresses Bastian's "tyrannical demands," just as Bazin points out. If it is true what Bazin says, then it should be possible to break *The Neverending Story* down into certain basic narrative elements. Hypothetically speaking, how far could you abstract the story before it becomes unrecognizable? What if you changed the names of all characters? Or if Bastian was a girl, instead? If one were to continue along this line of logic, one would ultimately arrive at what some would consider the "kernel" of a story. This issue has preoccupied scholars since the inception of adaptation theory as an academic field of study and certainly well before as well. Most scholarship on adaptation theory suggests that staying true to this kernel marks a successful adaptation, while a failure to retain this kernel marks an unsuccessful adaptation. As more recent scholarship has argued, this question of fidelity is insufficient to properly evaluate an adaptation.

S. The Question of Fidelity

To address the question of fidelity, recent scholarship has introduced new terms to describe an adaptation in relation to its source material. For instance, Geoffrey Wagner outlines three approaches to adapting a story:[85] The first, which he defines as "transposition," involves minimal changes; the second, "commentary," takes some aspects of the source material and purposely or inadvertently alters them;

the third, which he calls "analogy," describes a fairly considerable departure from the original for the sake of making another work. Wagner's distinctions essentially typify three degrees of fidelity—most faithful, faithful, and not faithful. The scholars Michael Klein and Gillian Parker, establish a similar rubric. They, too, are interested in establishing ways to describe an adaptation relative to "the main thrust of the narrative." McFarlane describes these descriptions as "some heartening challenges to the primacy of fidelity as a critical criterion."[86] He holds that "unless the kind of adaptation is identified, critical evaluation may well be wide of the mark."[87] I would argue that, quite to the contrary, these attempts do little to expand the field of adaptation theory. While these scholars may no longer consider fidelity to represent a "yes" or "no" question, it seems it has instead become a question of "yes," "no," or "kind of." This system is flawed because the notion of fidelity, even if established in gradients, goes unchecked.

It seems some contemporary scholars are almost deluding themselves into believing that there could be an objective system of classification. To use Wagner's terms, the movie producers of *The Neverending Story* would likely consider the movie to represent a "transposition" of the book—that is to say, an adaptation introducing minimal changes. Ende, however, would likely consider it a "commentary," at best—that is, an adaptation that retains some aspects of the orginal. Most likely, however, he would consider the movie to resemble an "analogy," though perhaps that would still be giving the movie more credit than it deserves. What does it mean to stay true to the script? What distinguishes a partial adaptation? Some scholars

have rightfully raised the question, fidelity to what? No matter way you look at it, the notion of a story's "kernel" is always inextricably linked to ideology.

T. Ideology at the Core

Films and books transmit ideology. What, otherwise, is the point of a story? Contained within the narrative of a story lie the fundamental values of a society, its ideology. Stories cannot exist without ideology. They work in familiar systems, follow common arcs, play on an audience's expectations, integrate popular tropes, and draw on popular culture. As Ray points out, "At its most extreme the Hollywood system sought to codify even its leading actors."[88] There was the handsome young man, the beautiful lady, and so on. You could replace characters from different movies for one another, and the movie would essentially remain the same. And yet, obviously an interest remained in the movies, otherwise more would not have been made. But how do you define ideology? How do you describe the "kernel" of a story? It is truly an elusive concept. A movie may represent so many different iterations of ideology that it is impossible to ascribe any one ideology to a movie. As Ray points out, some authors may sometimes not even be aware of their own intentions.[89] The difficulties of conceiving a script for an adaptation prove that the kernel of a story poses an inherently subjective matter. Still, it seems, authors are often very quick to point out the "shortcomings" of certain adaptations. What constitutes a "bad" adaptation?

U. Beyond Fidelity: Towards a Better Understanding of Adaptation Theory

The notion of fidelity is essentially about judgments of personal aesthetics or values. As Stam points out, most previous literature on adaptation theory is marked by a "profoundly moralistic" language of criticism.[90] Words such as "infidelity" and "betrayal" translate our feeling, when we have loved a book, and an adaptation has not been worthy of this love.[91] It seems obvious that Ende would be connected to his work. Nonetheless, why should the movie be regarded as inferior to the novel?

In the past, literature has often been given primacy. However, this is not be regarded as inherently bad. In fact, it is only natural, since new media always arise from old media. Often, these media vie for legitimacy, as is still the case with literature and cinema today. Postmodern critic Jameson describes this battle of forms as ongoing. He says, new forms are always in battle with old forms.[92] Ironically, though, the content of a new medium always essentially represents an old medium.[93] The same is true for literature and cinema. Indeed, Dickens' novels of Victorian England informed a whole epoch of cinema. Similarly, written narratives appropriate oral tales, just as television borrows from cinema.[94] Cohen describes this cross-proliferation using the phrase "dynamics of exchange."[95] Increasingly, the boundaries fencing off the written medium are disintegrating. Adaptations across various media are more prevalent than ever. The term "intertextuality," proposed by some scholars, recognizes these frequent intermedial exchanges. With the primacy of literature slowly fading, the question of fidelity ought to be reconsidered. As Orr states, "Within this critical context [intertextuality], the issue is not whether the

adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the film's ideology.[96] Thus adaptations should be regarded as interpretations of an ongoing cultural discourse.

V. Intertextuality and New Media

While narratives used to be conceived for a single medium, the lines today are being increasingly blurred. As Naremore points out, "The study of adaptation needs to be joined with the study of recycling, remaking, and every other form of retelling in the age of mechanical reproduction and electronic communication."[97] Watching a movie is not the same that it once was. Unlike in the early days of cinema, movies can now be watched at home. Furthermore, DVDs allow viewers to pause a movie, as well as to watch it over and over again. In addition, it has become normal for a whole host of supplementary material to accompany a movie, such as dedicated webpages and DVDs featuring cut scenes act. This material acts as almost an extension of a movie. This expansion across media means that the characters can grow beyond the confines of a movie. In some cases, it seems that movies are being conceived with the notion of marketability and adaptability across media already in mind. Furthermore, video games based on movies now allow viewers to play out, so to speak, some of these movies on their own.

Now more than ever, various media inform each other. As alluded to earlier, literature also shaped the film medium. Today, a video game may just as likely serve as a basis for a book. For instance, the record-selling video game "Halo: Combat

Evolved" (2001) has inspired several books, including "Halo: The Fall of Reach," a prequel to the video game, which was published the same year. In the following years, a number of other novels have been published based on the games. One of them is said to take place after the first and before the second video game, acting as a bridge between the two. Similarly, video games may also inform movies. After buying the rights to video game "Prince of Persia: Sands of Time," Disney produced a movie adaptation (2010) based on the game. But isn't the video game "Prince of Persia" already based on common Western notions of the "Orient?"

Dudley maintains that no forms of discourse immediately respond to reality. Instead, everything is already an adaptation.[98] This process which Bakthin describes as the dialogic process of discourse essentially describes the hermeneutic circle at a cultural level.[99] As we try to make meaning of the stories, we keep returning to the popular discourse presented by mainstream media. These different media may be thought of as the various languages forming the intertextual whole of our society. The exchange between these languages can generate new ideas and perhaps even new languages of discourse altogether. Referring to work in translation, Benjamin points out that the result of a confrontation of languages around the case of a treasured text can reveal something new about the original while always expanding the two languages involved.[100] Of course, the same is true of cultural discourse at large. These exchanges ultimately perpetuate the ideologies of society, driving on what Bakhtin calls the "powerful deep currents of culture."[101]

W. Stories / Storytelling: Adaptations as an Iterations of Meaning

The question of fidelity overlooks the most important aspect of stories—namely, the fact that stories change over time. If two people are asked to tell the same story, it would invariably be slightly different with each person, even if both people were to use same medium of expression. For instance, there are many movie adaptations of many classic works of fiction, like *Romeo and Juliet*. And yet, no two are exactly the same. In general, the issue with most adaptation theory to date is that they are overly critical of adaptations. As Dudley puts it, most scholars treat adaptations as though they would represent "a rendering of […] a legal precedent."[102] At the end of the day, the adaptation is no less original than its source.

The notion of a self-sufficient work of art is relatively new. For most of human history, stories, such as those from the Bible, were recycled countless times over. More important than the work of art itself was the content and the effectiveness of its message. Rather than consider an adaptation "original" in its own right, an adaptation ought to be considered as simply one "reading" of a certain source.[103] With a movie adaptation, one would hope that it presents the novel or some aspect of the novel in a new way. Indeed, as Orson Welles points out, "If one has nothing new to say about a novel, why adapt it at all?"[104]

Stories are situated in an ongoing cultural dialogue. Stam takes Bakhtin's notion of a "translinguistic" author to mean that the author essentially takes on the role of an "orchestrator of pre-existing discourses."[105] Here, what some may consider his original material is essentially a product of what Bakhtin calls a "translinguistic"

engagement. *The Neverending Story* is itself by no means an original work of art, though Ende may perhaps have considered as such. As described at length in Section II, Ende's book combines various forms of narrative, thus presenting an amalgamation of literary forms. And yet, even these recognized literary forms can not be considered original, either. The pursuit of an original story or type of story is likely to be of little avail, since all texts present what Bakhtin calls "tissues of anonymous formulae."[106] Moreover, to consider *The Neverending Story* an original work in itself would mean to disregard the very ideology it wishes to convey. Ende's common phrase "*doch das ist eine andere Geschichte*" alludes to fact that the book only conveys one of many possible stories. When Ende criticizes the movie adaptation of his book so severely, perhaps he is himself forgetting this aspect of his book.[107]

X. Sequels and Beyond: *The Neverending Story* Continues

As the title already suggests, *The Neverending Story* did not stop with the first movie adaptation. Several years later, *The Neverending Story II: The Next Chapter* (1990) was released. This project was led by a completely different crew than the first movie. While the first movie covered the first half of the book, the second mainly covered the second part. While the second movie was hardly as successful as the first, there was evidently enough interest to produce a third movie, *Neverending Story III* (1994). Again, the crew as well as the cast was completely different. Curiously, though, the screenwriter of the second movie, Karin Howard, was also involved in writing the script for the third movie. While Ende may have watched the second

movie, he admitted in an interview to being completely indifferent to the third movie: "*Den dritten, bisher letzten Teil, der vor kurzem, wie ich hörte, in die Kinos gekommen ist, habe ich mir nicht einmal angesehen*." It is well worth noting that he adds the phrase "*bisher letzten*," alluding to the fact that this might not be the last adaptation.

Indeed, interest in Ende's book did not subside after the third movie. In August 1995, Michael Ende passed away as a result of a stomach cancer. Only several years later, in 2000, an American TV series called "Tales from the Neverending Story" entered production and was subsequently aired on HBO in 2002. Again, Karin Howard was involved in writing the script. The TV series was also relatively unsuccessful. And yet, even today there is still some talk about making a new adaptation of Ende's story. In 2009, reports circulated that Warner Brothers was going to team up with Kennedy/Marshall Co. and Leonardo DiCaprio's production company, Appian Way, to produce a new adaptation of *The Neverending Story*. In general, this interest seems to be fueled by a desire to produce a movie that would "live up" to the book. For instance, one journalist writes, "Since the film's original release there have been two sequels, which have their individual charms but do not come close to the first in terms of quality, and poor scripts hampered the success of both."[108] Similarly, one of the rumored producers, Kathleen Kennedy, remarks, "We've always thought there was an opportunity there because there are a lot of elements in the book that aren't in the movie…" According to one online source, this new adaptation hopes to "examine the more nuanced details of the book."[109]

The Internet Movie Database lists 2014 as a tentative release date for the new film. One source notes that the original producer Geissler may, in fact, be involved again. However, there is no clear indication whether any producers have been able to secure the rights to make a new movie. One source reports that the project is cancelled. One of the producers, Kathleen Kennedy, remarks, "It's too bad, because there's an opportunity with that book [*The Neverending Story*] because it's so beautifully written, but I guess it's not meant to be."[110] Who knows, maybe the movie will still happen…

Notes

[1] Roman Hocke and Uwe Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten* (Leipzig: Henschel, 2007), 117.
[2] IMDb, "The Neverending Story at IMDb (business)," Accessed May 1, 2013.
[3] Eyssen, 21.
[4] Ibid., 22.
[5] Michael Ende, as quoted in Roman Hocke and Thomas Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt: die Suche nach dem Zauberwort* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1997), 118.
[6] Ibid., 22.
[7] Michael Ende, "Michael Ende über die Verfilmung der 'Unendlichen Geschichte'," *Info3 - Anthroposophie im Dialog*, March 1983, 17.
[8] Ibid., 17.
[9] Ibid., 18.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ende, "Verfilmung der 'Unendlichen Geschichte'," 19.
[12] Ibid., 19.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ende, as quoted in Hocke and Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 117-118.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ende, "Verfilmung der 'Unendlichen Geschichte'," 18.
[18] Eyssen, 179.
[19] Ibid., 23.
[20] Ibid., 21-22.
[21] Eyssen, 24.
[22] Ibid., 26.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 22.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 26.
[27] Hocke and Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 118.
[28] Ibid, 118.
[29] Ende, as quoted in Hocke and Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 118.
[30] Eyssen, 28.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid., 37.
[33] Ibid., 37.
[34] For all those baby boomers—a Telex was the equivalent of a text message in the 80's.
[35] Eyssen, 38.
[36] Ibid., 39.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 40.
[39] Ibid., 41.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 42-43.
[42] Ibid., 44.
[43] Ende, as quoted in Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten*, 130-131. Translation: "On the one hand you had a production capital of over $60 million, and on the other you had the opinion of an author gone mad."
[44] Ibid., 131.
[45] Eyssen, 45.
[46] Hocke and Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 119.
[47] Ende discusses this issue in further detail in an interview. See Michael Ende and Franz Kreuzer, *Zeit-Zauber: Unser Jahrhundert denkt über das Geheimnis der Uhren nach* (Wien: Deuticke, 1984), 12-13.
[48] Eyssen, 163.

[49] Ende, as quoted in Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten*, 121.
[50] Ibid., 121.
[51] Hocke and Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 118.
[52] Ibid., 127.
[53] Ibid., 122.
[54] Vincent Canby, "'Neverending Story,' A Fantasy," *The New York Times*, July 20, 1984, http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C02E3D9143AF933A15754C0A962948260.
[55] Roger Ebert, as quoted in "Critic Reviews for The NeverEnding Story – Metacritic," *CBS Interactive Inc.*, accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-neverending-story/critic-reviews.
[56] Chuck Rudolph, as quoted in "The NeverEnding Story Critic Reviews - Page 2 - MovieWeb.com," *MovieWeb, Inc.*, accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.movieweb.com/movie/the-neverending-story/reviews/critic?pg=2.
[57] Dave Kehr, as quoted in "Critic Reviews for The NeverEnding Story – Metacritic," CBS Interactive Inc., accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.metacritic.com/movie/the-neverending-story/critic-reviews
[58] Robert Stam, "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 56.
[59] Eyssen, 22.
[60] Ibid, 22. Translation: "Everyone was speaking of a new film language [...] but as soon as large sums of money come into play, the artistic merit of a project no longer plays a role."
[61] André Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 21.
[62] Roman Hocke and Michael Ende, *Magische Welten* (Leipzig: Henschel, 2007), 116.
[62] Ben de Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser: a companion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 195.
[63] André Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," 22.
[64] Seymour Chatman, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)," Critical Inquiry, no. 1 (1980): 128, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343179.
[65] Ibid., 127.
[66] Ibid., 126.
[67] Ibid., 128.
[68] Tom Gunning, "Narrative Discourse and the Narrator System," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 21., eds., 5th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 395.
[69] Gunning, "Narrative Discourse and the Narrator System," 394.
[70] Anthony Burgess, as quoted in Brian MacFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 7.
[71] Chatman, 130.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Chatman, 130
[74] George Bluestone, as quoted in Griffith*, Adaptations as Imitations*, 22.
[75] Erhard Eppler and Michael Ende, *Phantasie / Kultur / Politik: Protokoll eines Gesprächs* (Stuttgart: Edition Weitbrecht, 1982), 102-103. Translation: "Art and poetry are about beauty—nothing else! There is no form that can be separated from content."
[76] In this context, some scholars will refer to form as style, since it marks the manifestation or fabric of form.
[77] Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Michael Ende: Magische Welten*, 116. Translation: "He didn't believe that his book could not take on the robe of the opera in the typical sense."
[78] Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten*, 139.
[79] Ibid., 139.
[80] Gunning, "Narrative Discourse and the Narrator System," 391.
[81] Compare to the notion of *szujet* and *fabula*, where *szujet* represents the "raw material of a story" and the *fabula* represents the "way it is organized." Though *fabula* is more related to the construction of narrative, it may also be related to the form as a whole. For further details, see for instance, Michail Bakhtin, Michael Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: 4 Essays* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1987).

[82] Dudley Andrew, "Adaptation," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 34.
[83] Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," 23.
[84] Hocke and Neumahr, eds., *Magische Welten*, 104.
[85] Geoffrey Wagner, as quoted in MacFarlane, *Novel to Film*, 10-11.
[86] Ibid., 10.
[87] Ibid., 11.
[88] Robert B. Ray, "The Field of 'Literature and Film'," in *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 40.
[89] Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 57.
[90] Ibid., 54.
[91] Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 54.
[92] Frederic Jameson, "Adaptation as a Philosophical Problem," in *True to the Spirit: Film Adaptation and the Question of Fidelity*, ed. Colin MacCabe, Rick Warner, Kathleen Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 232.
[93] Marshall McLuhan, as quoted in Ray, "The Field of 'Literature and Film'," 42.
[94] Ray, "The Field of 'Literature and Film'," 42.
[95] Keith Cohen, as quoted in Andrew, "Adaptation," 33. For more details, see Keith Cohen, *Film and Fiction: The Dynamics of Exchange* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).
[96] Christopher Orr, as quoted in MacFarlane, *Novel to Film*, 10.
[97] Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 66.
[98] Andrew, "Adaptation," 28-29.
[99] Ibid., 29.
[100] Walter Benjamin, as quoted in Colin MacCabe, "Bazinian Adaptation: The Butcher Boy as Example," in *True to the Spirit*, ed. MacCabe, Warner, Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38.
[101] Mikhail Bakhtin, as quoted in Karl Kroeber, *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 96.
[102] Andrew, "Adaptation," 31
[103] Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 63.
[104] Orson Welles, as quoted in Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 63.
[105] Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 58. See Bakhtin for more information on this subject.
[106] Stam, "Beyond Fidelity," 64.
[107] Perhaps Ende would not have been so bitter towards the whole project, if it hadn't been for the constant legal disputes. Later in the production, it seems it may have become a purely personal matter between Ende and Eichinger.
[108] Martin Higgins, "The NeverEnding Story Remake - With Leonardo DiCaprio?," *Purple Revolver*, March 2012, accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.purplerevolver.com/movies/reel-news/122203-the-neverending-story-remake---with-leonardo-dicaprio.html.
[109] Chris Tilly, "NeverEnding Story Never Ends," *IGN Entertainment, Inc.*, February 26, 2009, accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.ign.com/articles/2009/02/26/neverending-story-never-ends.
[110] Scott Collura, "About that NeverEnding Story Remake...," *IGN Entertainment, Inc.*, December 16, 2011, Last modified February 26, 2009. Accessed May 1, 2013, http://www.ign.com/articles/2011/12/17/about-that-neverending-story-remake.

V. Conclusion

The project was doomed to fail from the start. Ende's expectations for the movie were completely at odds with those of the producers. While Ende was hoping that the movie would be a deeply reflective work of cinematic art, the producers simply wanted to create a visually elaborate movie that would appeal to a young audience. As a result, the movie had to alter or leave out many aspects of the book, which Ende regarded as integral to the overall message of his story. The book may be interpreted as being simply about a boy who goes off on an adventure. However, as discussed in Section II, there are many more aspects to Ende's story, which may arguably be more important than the story itself. In presenting a commentary on stories and storytelling, Ende touches on very specific topics like the ethics of storytelling and the issues related to a causal logic in storytelling. As discussed in Section III, it was also very important to Ende that the story act as a dialogue with the reader, provoking him to go beyond the story at hand. As a playing field, the text should allow for the reader to create new connections and meanings. In Section IV, I discussed the issue of a book's "kernel" and its relation to ideology. Whether form may be divorced from content depends on what stylistic elements one may consider to belong to the form rather than the actual story. Much like a text, a movie may also be described as offering a playing field. However, this playing field is of course completely different from the filmic medium. In the case of *The Neverending Story*, did the rules of the film medium act as too great a confinement on the story?

Games require rules. Every medium has its rules and has to operate within these rules. Without rules, play cannot happen. As Ende points out himself, without rules, we would not be able to communicate, and without communication, we could not be able to share our feelings and experiences with each other.[1] To free them of their suffering, Bastian turns the *Acharai,* the "Always Crying Ones" (*die Immer-Weinenden*), into the *Schlamuffen*, the "Always Laughing Ones" (*die Immer-Lachenden*) (281). However, even after this transformation they are still unhappy. They complain that they are bored to death, because they can't even play "a proper game," since they have no rules (408). At a basic level, a text is, of course, made up of language, which itself is constructed based on countless rules. As a whole, a text also operates based on certain principles and conventions. Ende plays on the reader's expectations, defying these in many instances for subversive effect.

A movie, on the other hand, presents an entirely different game. Since it is a different medium altogether, the rules of the game are, of course, very different. Therefore, while a movie may also be described as having a playing field, a viewer plays with a movie much differently than a reader plays with a book. A text primarily plays on a reader's imagination. With a movie, the images are already there. A movie may offer gaps through cuts, but the immediate visual element is always there, constantly evoking an immediate response in the viewer. With a movie, the game has a different duration. When you watch a movie, you're not supposed to talk since you might miss something. It is like you're supposed to hold your breath until the moment the credits role in. A movie provides an experience. It

takes you on a ride. Only once it has come to a stop are you allowed to turn to your buddy and ask how he liked it.

So what does it mean to transfer a story? What needs to happen in order for this to occur? The play of any art form depends on the possibilities the respective form can provide. The way in which a medium is utilized for artistic purposes is generally described as "style." Can style be translated across various media? As Ende recognized himself, when a story is adapted to a different medium it must inevitably undergo changes, which may be described in one of two ways: either as compromises or as improvements. Some may consider these changes to represent compromises, implying that something is lost in the process. Other may consider these changes to represent improvements, where the adaptation enhances the original material. What is important to the story? What can parts can be left out? The process of conceiving a script for *The Neverending Story* illustrates exactly these difficulties. All of their disagreements and conflicts center around the question, "What is *The Neverending Story* about?" Through a number of questions and investigations we get to the bottom of the story, to its kernel—that is to say, its ideology.

Stories are inextricably wound up with ideology. They are deliberate, because they represent a clear articulation of cultural situations and thus values. Similarly, *The Neverending Story* presents a comprehensive commentary on stories and storytelling. Though there may not be one key message, it still represents a clear articulation of meaning. Ende speaks to this issue himself:

"*Die echten Märchen sind keine beliebigen Wundergeschichten, die sich in früheren Zeiten das*

"unwissende und abergläubige Volk" zusammengefabelt hat. Das Volk erfindet solche Dinge nicht, aber es überliefert sie wortgetreu von Generation zu Generation, weil es die Wahrheit spürt, die darin steckt."[2]

Ende alludes to the fact that a good story will be "true," which is to say that it reflects a common experience among people. In short, it must capture a shared ideology. Similarly, Ende wanted for his writing to effectively change the culture of his time. As Kraft says, he was not merely a dude that tells stories (*Märchenonkel*), but he wanted to build an independent cosmos with his audience.[3] In the case of *The Neverending Story,* this cosmos, one may say, takes the form of Phantasien. However, a similar cosmos also permeates many of his other work. In general, Ende sought to create a new imaginative universe with his readers, separate from reality. He wanted to create a universe with new values and possibilities, where his readers could explore new, compelling ideas. In Hocke's words, Ende was after a certain magic word (*Zauberwort*), a story that could express the cultural sentiments of his society (*die jeweilige kulturprägende Lebensgebärde einer Gesellschaft*).[4]

In general, it seems there is an inherent desire for humans to communicate and express themselves. Why? Iser describes humans themselves as *Leerstellen.*[5] Time and again, we are confronted with the question, Who are you? To identify themselves, people will often align themselves with shared notions of meaning, i.e. an idea, a person, a place, etc. As discussed in Section II, a book essentially represents a mirror for the reader. However, it may also apply to an author. By describing an imaginative universe, Ende's text itself acts as an instance of staging.

But beyond this, a text allows an author to describe situations that may convey personal experiences or more abstract feelings. How does it feel to be in love or to be loved? Or how do you express what it feels like to be jealous? As Iser puts it, life exceeds its depiction.[6] Thus words serve as means to describe experiences that others may relate to. On a larger scale, the text allows us to reflect on the human experience, to put into words what we feel.

A text asks us to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. It describes situations, questions our judgments our ethics.[7] By experiencing a story through the lens of a character, the text allows us to see the world with different eyes. As Tatar puts it, "When the pleasures of a text wash over us, we are reoriented in ways that affect us in our everyday lives, leading us to develop heightened curiosity about others and to attend to the details of their lives..."[8] J.K. Rowling, the author of the *Harry Potter* series, believes that the imagination can foster a sense of empathy.[9] Through reading, we can experience a whole range of emotions; we can get excited, sad, angry, etc. By experiencing some of these feelings, the text becomes real to us, as Ende might say. As Tatar points out:

"As readers, we traverse vast regions „without moving an inch," discovering the thrills of story worlds, recoiling from their villains and empathizing with their champions, all the while shaping our values as we build relationships with the book and discover its real magic…"[10]

Undoubtedly, Rowling's *Harry Potter* series has been able to utilize this "magic" quality of books. It has truly been able to express the *Zauberwort* of an entire generation. Though some trends indicate that children are reading less books than they used to, the *Harry Potter* series certainly stands as a case in point that books are far from gone. And yet, it is probable that the novel may at some point fade away. Of course, the novel was "novel" more than two hundred years ago. Today, new forms of writing are developing. For purposes of entertainment, people now read blogs, tweets, or online news articles, to name a few examples. As far as I can tell, people are reading just as much as they once were, if not more. The difference is that people today are generally taking in information in smaller sizes. Instead of watching a long movie, some people may be more drawn to TV series, broken down into twenty-minute segments. Nonetheless, writing and stories at large will continue to exist. Indeed, for better or for worse, some TV series seem to provide a never-ending stream of stories. However, in some cases, the same can be said of movies. Though *Toy Story* seemed complete enough, *Toy Story 2* followed some time after, thus extending the previous story even further. Backed by popular demand, a third installment made the trilogy complete. And yet, who can say for sure whether the adventures of Buzz Lightyear and Woody end at part three? Perhaps someone will make a feature length live-action adaptation, or someone will be inspired by Buzz Lightyear to make a movie about toys in outer space. The possibilities are endless. As long as we can agree on matters relating to copyright, there should be no problems. Nonetheless, don't make the mistake of calling your story original, because, at the end of the day, it's only an adaptation of many other adaptations.

Notes

[1] Michael Ende, as quoted in Roman Hocke and Thomas Kraft, *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt: die Suche nach dem Zauberwort* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1997), 106.
[2] Michael Ende, "Wovon Märchen Erzählen," in *Michael Endes Zettelkasten: Skizzen & Notizen* (Stuttgart: Weitbrecht, 1994), 160-161. Translation: „The real fairy tales are not some wondrous stories that some unknowing and superstitious folk made up long ago. People do not simply make up that kind of stuff, Ende insists. Instead, Ende holds, they faithfully pass on these stories from generation to generation, because they sense the truth that lies within them."
[3] Kraft, "Die Faszination des Anderen: Eine Werkbetrachtung," in *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 9.
[4] Hocke, "Vorbemerkung," in *Michael Ende und seine phantastische Welt*, 5.
[5] Ben de Bruyn, *Wolfgang Iser: A Companion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 180.
[6] Ibid, 198.
[7] Karl Kroeber, *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 62.
[8] Maria Tatar, *Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 197.
[9] J. K. Rowling, as quoted in Tatar, *Enchanted Hunters,* 197.
[10] Tatar, 197.

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