

# Saul Andreetti

---

## Memory and Life: Creation and Destruction in Michael Ende's "The Neverending Story"

---

Jednak Książki. Gdańskie Czasopismo Humanistyczne nr 4, 171-182

---

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

# JEDNAK KSIĄZKI



GDANSKIE CZASOPISMO HUMANISTYCZNE

2015 nr 4

o Młodej Polsce mniej znanej

ESSEJE

## MEMORY AND LIFE: CREATION AND DESTRUCTION IN MICHAEL ENDE'S *THE NEVERENDING STORY*

SAUL ANDREETTI

Independent Scholar

**T***he Neverending Story*<sup>1</sup> is a fantasy novel whose complexity has not been altogether ignored by critics, but has not received the critical attention it truly deserves. Unlike the famous film adaptation of 1984, the novel eschews a superficial treatment of fantastical imagery; rather, it offers an articulate discourse on the nature of memory, creation and the life of stories. The motif of memory loss is central to the text and can be analysed from what will be called here a 'cosmogonic' approach and an 'intimistic' approach, respectively. This paper explores the connections between the ontology of imagination and memory and the relationship between the two in the novel.

In the vast corpus of studies on memory and its rapport with creativity and imagination, not to mention death and oblivion, there are three sources in particular that seem to offer

---

<sup>1</sup> Ende, Michael. 1983. *The Neverending Story*. New York: Penguin.

a framework suitable for the present analysis. A book that should not be ignored by scholars who delve into the issue of memory is *The Anatomy of Memory* by James McConkey.<sup>2</sup> This book is a collection of essays touching on as different disciplines as psychoanalysis, historiography and literary studies. The insights of writer and memoirist Patricia Hampl will be particularly useful for her observations on the role of imagination in the memoir genre. There are two other texts that furnish an illuminating standpoint from which to understand the motif of memory in *The Neverending Story*. The first is *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit. Erinnern–Vergessen–Verzeihen*<sup>3</sup> by the renowned philosopher Paul Ricoeur. His short but captivating book on memory, forgetting and forgiveness offers an overview of the thoughts dedicated to memory by philosophers such as Aristotle, Heidegger and Hegel and helps placing this analysis on memory and Michael Ende in an adequate conceptual framework. The other is a monograph by Italian scholar and philosopher Paolo Rossi entitled *Il passato, la memoria, l'oblio*<sup>4</sup> (the past, memory, oblivion). This book is useful because it offers an extensive overview on memory in as different disciplines as philosophy, psychoanalysis and literature, and it lends the present analysis an effective metaphor drawn from literature: memory is portrayed as an “attic”.

*The Neverending Story* can be divided in two parts: the first recounts the adventures of Atreyu, the protagonist of the metadiegetic “The Neverending Story”, and his Quest to find out the reason behind the mysterious disease of the Childlike Empress and the slow but inexorable Nothing that is effacing the world of Fantastica out of existence. The second part, instead, narrates of how Bastian, the former reader of the metadiegetic<sup>5</sup> “The Neverending Story” and now a character of the book, goes into a cognitive journey into himself, the “Way of Wishes”, and of his efforts to find a way back to his own world. The two sections may seem very different from one another, as one portrays a world that is under the threat of total obliteration, and the other shows the journey of a lonely soul in a strange and mysterious land. And yet, there is a very strict bond that unites the two parts of the narrative: memory is identified in the text with life, identity and creation and its threat with oblivion and the destruction of reality and the soul.

But what is the relationship between Fantastica and memory? And how can the motif of memory be analysed in the light of a cosmogonic perspective? The reason why the bond between memory and Fantastica is so strict is because Fantastica itself functions as a huge container of mythological material, as it embraces the entirety of the myths of the world. From early on in the book, the description of the innumerable creatures that inhabit Fantastica points to a plurality of

<sup>2</sup> McConkey, James. 1996. *The Anatomy of Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Ricoeur, Paul. 1998. *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit. Erinnern – Vergessen – Verzeihen*. Göttingen: Wallstein.

<sup>4</sup> Rossi, Paolo. 1991. *Il passato, la memoria, l'oblio*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. “Concept of Metadiegesis“ (in: Genette, Gérard. 1969. *Figures II*. Paris: Editions du Seuil).

sources. In fact, Ende's scope embraces all myths of the world, and his references range from kobolds, to vampires, to djinns and creatures of his own invention<sup>6</sup>. Fantastica embraces and holds in its bosom all such myths, and therefore all the possible mythical narratives connected to them. If it guarantees the existence of their story, it goes without saying that it preserves their memory, upholding the very existence of all the myths of humankind. Thus Fantastica as a *world* carries out the function of living memory of mythical material. Moreover, the equation of Fantastica with memory is grounded in further evidence in the text. In Chapter XII of the novel, in the episode narrating of the encounter between the Childlike Empress and the Old Man of Wandering Mountain, one finds a clear reference to memory itself for the first time. The Childlike Empress sets out to find The Old Man of Wandering Mountain, who symbolises the neverending end; he is eternally old and the opposite of the Childlike Empress who is, in turn, eternally young. After the Childlike Empress has finally been successful in finding the Old Man, a being that can only be found, but cannot be looked for, she leaves her seven invisible powers behind and climbs the ladder made of letters that leads to the Old Man's abode, the Cosmic Egg, an epitome of life, renewal and cyclicity. The letters are the first reference to memory and remembrance:

WHAT YOU ACHIEVE AND WHAT YOU ARE / IS RECORDED BY ME, THE CHRONICLER /  
LETTERS UNCHANGEABLE AND DEAD / FREEZE WHAT THE LIVING DID OR SAID.<sup>7</sup>

This is a clear indication not only of the function of the Old Man, who is referred to as the Chronicler of the World of Fantastica, but also of literature as having the ability to freeze time in letters that can never be changed, like massive boulders epitomising the immutability of recorded memory. Furthermore, the Old Man is the very Memory of Fantastica ("you, who are the memory of Fantastica"<sup>8</sup>). This is not a mere reference to the motif of memory and the Old Man is not a simple compiler of historical information. Ende takes the meaning of memory to the extreme and the connection between the act of recording and the act of creating has deep ontological implications. Memory is one and the same thing with life because the Old Man does not merely write down everything that happens, but everything that he writes down happens. The mutual connection with existence, its recording and its creation, is absolute. The act of stealing the metadiegetic book "The Neverending Story" at the beginning of the novel takes an

---

<sup>6</sup> Ende, Michael. 1983. *The Neverending Story*. New York: Penguin, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 161.

unexpected turn, because within the cosmic egg we find another “Neverending Story” which is meta-metadiegetic, because it can be found within the metadiegetic “The Neverending Story”, but also contains all other levels of existence of the text. The addition of a meta-level is not, however, what interests us here. The salient point is that this book which comprises all of reality, and is one and the same thing with the world (“This book *is* all Fantastica--and you and I”<sup>9</sup>), can be conceived as an Absolute Book, whereas the Old Man is the Absolute Memory much in line with the tradition of the historiographical method of German historiography such as Leopold Ranke’s idea that history must be recorded as “it really happened” as it is suggested by Ende’s critic Andrea von Prondczynsky<sup>10</sup>. The coincidence of memory and life gives way to further reflections: does the Old Man create life itself when he recounts the story of the meta-metadiegetic “The Neverending Story”? Is the act of remembrance engendering new life or the frozen loop of repeated stories has, instead, deathlike and dismal implications? What is certain is that the Old Man’s re-creation of the world of Fantastica from memory points to the idea that Fantastica itself is made of memory.

Indeed, one finds further evidence of this truth later on in the text. When Bastian converses with Grograman in Chapter XV of the book, yet another paradox with ontological implications is presented to the reader. Bastian has created, or co-created with the power of the magic talisman AURYN, the multi-coloured desert of Goab. The latter is portrayed as being the result of Bastian’s creation and, at the same time, to have expected Bastian from time immemorial. Grograman’s solution for such a conundrum is that both explanations are possible because “Fantastica is the land of stories.[...] A story can be new and yet tell about olden times. The past comes to existence with the story.”<sup>11</sup> If Fantastica is the land of stories, and the recalled past comes to new life as an act of remembrance, Fantastica is inevitably the land of memory. When one recalls, does one create too? Is the act of remembering necessarily an act of precision? Patricia Hampl argues that although the reader might “expect a memoir to be as accurate as the writer’s memory can make it [...] The piece itself has a life of its own (“the real trouble: the piece hasn’t yet found its subject; it isn’t yet about what it wants to be about. Note: what it wants, not what I want”). The difference has to do with the relation of a memoirist--a writer, in fact--has to unconscious or half-known intentions and impulses in composition.”<sup>12</sup> The Old Man is no memoirist, he is a chronicler. And yet one sees the dialectics between the Old Man’s precise account, by usage of “the letters unchangeable and dead” which compose literature seen as

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 161.

<sup>10</sup> Prondczynsky, Andreas von. 1983. Die unendliche Sehnsucht nach sich selbst: auf den Spuren eines neuen Mythos Versuch über eine “unendliche Geschichte”. Frankfurt am Main: Dipa Verlag.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem, p. 198.

<sup>12</sup> McConkey, James. 1996. The Anatomy of Memory. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

a unique, monolithic block and the very nature of Fantastica which is founded on memory but is supple, as it is subject to the gift of imaginative power. It is an ever-changing world whose boundaries are not fixed, but they move according to the wishes of the travellers of myth. Fantastica has no borders because it is not made of "letters unchangeable and dead"; it is a transformative world that feeds on transformation. It changes those who venture in its meanders and is changed by them accordingly. Creation and memory have a mutual dialogue, and Ende's book shows this well by evoking images connected to hyperbolic frozen memory and to the lively nature of mythical stories imbued with imagination and creativity. The frozen loop is death when memory is conceived as a static effort to recall whereas the memory that plays with imagination is life, fuels Fantastica, the ability to wish, and the very intentions and impulses inherent in the writing process of which Hampl talks about in her essay. What can be noticed hitherto is that *The Neverending Story* presents a great deal of imagery related to pairs of opposites clashing with or completing each other and always mirroring one another. Examples of this are abundant, ranging from the couples 'Childlike Empress and Old Man of Wandering Mountain', 'Bastian and Atreyu', 'the world of reality and Fantastica', the dichotomy truth/lies and so on and so forth. There is one specific instance where such mirroring imagery relates to the all-pervading presence of memory in the text and sheds light on how the discourse on memory and its organisation is structured in the novel. Indeed, as anyone having even a simple idea of the frame story would know, Bastian takes refuge in the attic of his school to read "The Neverending Story." In Chapter XXI of the novel, long after Bastian has entered the world of imagination, the narrative tells of the encounter with the Three Deep Thinkers of the Star Cloister. These three sages, an owl, an eagle and a fox, address Bastian as the Great Knower with cosmogonic questions, as they want to know what the origins of the world of Fantastica are, and what Fantastica truly is. Bastian provides answers which inevitably lead to further questions ("Fantastica is the Neverending Story", the latter is to be found "in a book bound with copper-coloured silk" and this is "in the attic of a schoolhouse"<sup>13</sup> and upholds the magic stone Al Tshahir as though to prove his point. When Bastian pronounces Al Tshahir's name in reverse order:

175

At that moment there came a flash of lightning so bright that the star paled and the dark cosmic space behind them was illumined. And that space was the schoolhouse attic with its age-blackened beams. In a moment the vision passed and the light of a hundred years was gone.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Ende, Michael. 1983. *The Neverending Story*. New York: Penguin.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 296.

This unmistakably shows that Fantastica and the attic where Bastian was formerly reading the book are not only linked, but they could not exist without each other. Beyond the metafictional implications of this assertion, what matters here is that the attic is the place where everything started, where Bastian was reading and where he found the portal to the dimension of imagination, embodied in a book. The attic is the place that furnishes the cosmogonic explanations to the very existence of Fantastica. The *Ursprung* and the *Omphalos*, as it were. In his monograph on recollection, the past and oblivion, Paolo Rossi indicates that memory has been depicted by many with the images of the archive, the encyclopaedia and the closet. Places where things are stored and organised. More importantly, Rossi quotes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for a very interesting as portrayal of memory itself that deserves to be quoted at some length:

Man's brain originally is like an empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing all his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent<sup>15</sup>.

This passage is peculiarly interesting if the metaphor is applied to *The Neverending Story*. The attic as brains and memory as an extension of meaning is not merely the place where things are organised, catalogued or left in chaos. The attic is not only the very place where Bastian finds shelter from the outside world, seeking to push away guilt and fear, and his sense of not ever been understood by anyone, least of all his own father. The attic is also the place where he chooses to transgress the boundaries between his world and Fantastica, the place where he can start his cognitive journey into himself. But the attic is also a metaphor for Bastian's mind, where his fears take the shape of the three stuffed animals of the attic (an eagle, a fox and an owl) which are, in turn, mirrored in "The Neverending Story". Such representation of Bastian's mind, his memory and his feelings may urge readers to reflect on an overlapping between the cosmogonic and the intimistic approaches to the novel. The attic can, metaphorically, be one and the same with Bastian's mind conceived as the abode of his memory and the *Ursprung* of Fantastica. The question is whether Fantastica is a representation of Bastian's inner world, and therefore represents his memory and its destruction as a result of his refusal to face his fears and to accept

<sup>15</sup> Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. 2007. *A Study in Scarlet*. London: Penguin.

his mother's death<sup>16</sup>, or whether Bastian enters another world, but one which mirrors who he is and where he is from. The attic is an image of memory, what it recalls, what it leaves out, its organisation and its entropic disorder.

Furthermore, there is yet another pair of opposites that has a central role in the text: Fantastica as opposed to the Nothing. If Fantastica is equated with memory, the destructive agent that threatens its existence can plausibly be identified with Oblivion. The Nothing is about destruction: it effaces out of existence the entirety of Fantastica, its creatures and the dimension they live in. If destruction and oblivion are the same thing, what happens to memory? Does it vanish altogether or is it, instead, transformed? If one does not stop at the initial imagery of destruction and its visual impact with the Nothing destroying and engulfing everything, and instead one's focus is directed to the life of Fantastica and of the Childlike Empress, one will soon realise that the world of imagination as Ende presents it is cyclical. The book informs us that Fantastica is periodically threatened by the Nothing because the Childlike Empress needs a new name, since her previous name has been forgotten, as she is the only creature who lives in names and not in time. Subsequently, we learn that only a Son of Man can give her a new name, and if this happens, she will be well again and the Nothing will cease to devour existence. Most importantly, the text tells us that many humans have come to Fantastica in the past, as the following passage shows very clearly:

Every human that has been here has learned something that could be learned only here, and returned to his world a changed man. Because he had seen you creatures in your true form, he was able to see his own world and his fellow humans with new eyes. Where he had seen only dull, everyday reality, he now discovered wonders and mysteries. That is why humans were glad to come to Fantastica. And the more these visits enriched our world, the fewer lies there were in theirs, the better it became. Just as our two worlds can injure each other, they can also make each other whole again.<sup>17</sup>

This is crucial because it shows that, firstly, the two dimensions share a relationship of mutual dependence and, secondly, because it makes it clear that *many* humans, not just Bastian, have visited Fantastica and given the Childlike Empress a new name. As a result, it is undoubtedly clear that Fantastica is a cyclical world, which is periodically regenerated by the power of naming humans possess. The Nothing is what tidies up the attic, as it makes sense of entropy and deals with disorder because it fosters new life. Oblivion and destruction come to

---

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Bosmajian, Hamida. 1986. "Grief and Displacement through Fantasy in Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*". *Children's Literature Association Quarterly Proceedings* (1986): 120-123 for Bastian's refusal to face death.

<sup>17</sup> Ende, Michael. 1983. *The Neverending Story*. New York: Penguin, p. 148.



Fantastica so that new life can be created, a fresh start, activated by the power of naming. Bastian counters the mephitic effects of lies, harbingers of destruction to the world of fantasy, the moment he bestows a name on the Childlike Empress, who is the guarantor of creation, equilibrium and the cyclical life of Fantastica. But such destruction is somewhat necessary and her periodical re-birth under a new name enables her to be always new and always the same, thus preserving the existence of the time of fantasy and myth, which is circular and recursive.

Furthermore, one can take this discourse on cycles and the equation of the destructiveness of the Nothing with Oblivion, and of creation as both memory and life, one step further. Paul Ricoeur's *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit. Erinnern–Vergessen–Verzeihen* furnishes the proper tool to understand this by means of his illuminating account of Heidegger's concepts of *vergangenheit* as opposed to *gewesenheit*. Heidegger explains the difference between a past that is forgotten (*Vergessen*) and one that has passed, but with the awareness that it has not vanished altogether. Ricoeur explains how Heidegger plays with the past participle of the German verb *Sein* (*gewesen*, to have been). Heidegger argues that one can understand oblivion in terms of a resource, and not merely destruction. In other words, oblivion displays a positive role the moment where in its relationship with the past what prevails is its "having been", like a presence that lingers on in the continuity of being and does not fade in the recesses of the past. Oblivion as the Nothing is positive when it does not cancel out the *historical* past of Fantastica, but its destruction is the mere ordering up of the attic so that it can be re-furnished with the same creatures that existed in a previous Fantastican cycle. Indeed, and this is implied in the text; Fantasticans remember the previous cycle, their existence has not truly been obliterated, only their previous story has come to an end and the divine power of naming enables them to come into existence as Grogaman would say:

[B]eginning the moment you gave it its name [...], it has existed forever<sup>18</sup>

This happens because the recursive time of story is all-encompassing, containing itself just like AURYN, a symbol for the Ouroboros, hence of cycles and eternal repetition. The Nothing is ominous only when its destruction is complete, with the victory of lies and therefore of true *Vergessen*/Oblivion of the history of Fantastica. Nonetheless, it is positive when it functions as a necessary renewal of the world of imagination, provided that a hero comes to save the day by giving Fantastica a new start. Indeed, Ricoeur understands the function of oblivion in terms of

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 198.

the pattern of appearance, disappearance and re-appearance. Is this cyclical scheme dissimilar from a Fantastica that appears through the power of naming and human imagination, disappears as a result of the Nothing, and reappears through the same patterns, forever repeated equal and yet always different? Ende's literary creation is grounded in complexity and his understanding of memory in relation to the life of stories and their cyclical existence is suggestive and compelling, a rich gift for those who want to see the complexity of the attic, hence memory and the human mind, and do not take fantasy at face value as a mere story for children.

As to what pertains the motif of memory in a more intimistic view, the second part of *The Neverending Story* does not treat memory in an altogether different way. Rather, there is a change of perspective: it is Bastian's inner world that is in danger. The narrative informs us clearly that Bastian's usage of AURYN enables him to fulfil all his wishes to the detriment of his memory. Bastian loses a piece of himself at every wish that is granted to him. The chubby, clumsy and insecure boy the reader is introduced to at the beginning of the novel has become a strong, beautiful and fearless child. But the more he changes, the more he loses his memory of his earthly existence, and the more Fantastica grows richer and stronger.

Indeed, when Bastian enters Fantastica, he soon realises that through AURYN, he has embarked on a journey of self-discovery. AURYN's inscription "do what you wish" is not an invitation to do what he pleases, but to follow his True Will, as it is what gives true meaning to things and beings. It is the opposite of lying and forgery, the very reversal of the lies one tells oneself. In order to complete this journey, Bastian needs to follow the Way of Wishes, from the first to the last, following good but also evil wishes. And only a genuine wish can give him direction in the world of Fantastica, only his last and true wish can grant him access to the mystery that he conceals deep within himself. Bastian creates reality itself through his wishes and his imagination, enacting the role of co-creator of a new cycle of Fantastica out of the power the Childlike Empress has given him with AURYN. All his wishes come true to the letter and all the stories he conjures up become reality. But this happens at a terrible cost: at every single wish he is granted, Bastian loses a memory of his earthly existence. In other words, Bastian's amnesia will ultimately lead to the ultimate destruction of his identity, to the point that he will forget his own name. Memory loss endangers identity because the latter can plausibly be conceived as a totality of one's desires and fears along with one's past, memories and affections. If desires point toward future transformation, the recollection of one's past is an unmistakable look into the recesses of the mind. Destruction is therefore not only identified with the Nothing that devours and engulfs fantasy but also with memory loss. If the first part of the novel presents Fantastica as the life of memory and the Nothing as Oblivion, the second part introduces the demise of recollection out

of the inexorable amnesia Bastian has to suffer. This is the effect of a strange conundrum which functions as a law of the world of Fantastica: “without a past, you cannot have a future.”<sup>19</sup> One needs memory to wish, without memory one cannot even grow old and stays always the same, unchangeable and unchanged like the humans who end up in the City of Old Emperors in Chapter XXIII of the novel. Indeed, we are instructed that “[n]othing can change for them, because they themselves can’t change anymore.”<sup>20</sup> The more Bastian wishes himself forward in order to find his True Will and the way back to his world, the less he remembers who he truly is and thus loses sense and purpose. The paradox is that “[AURYN] gives [Bastian] the means but it takes away [his] purpose.”<sup>21</sup> Ironically and mysteriously, the healing process of the world of Fantastica entails the destruction of Bastian’s inner world. Creation replaces memory, as it were.

The slow and inexorable destruction of his memory can aptly be compared to the encroachment of Fantastica by the Nothing. Indeed, both his memory and Fantastica are eroded piece by piece and, it seems, fatally so. But in this case, the process is somewhat reversed: the more Bastian loses, the more Fantastica grows. One may wonder if AURYN is a curse. The point is that Bastian’s journey into the imaginative dimension is a descent into the underworld, a veritable cognitive journey. Here, the past informs the future because it furnishes the distinctive traits of one’s identity, embodied in one’s individual memories, passions, fears and desires, but it also points to the construction of the future as if the latter were a building whose foundations are made of memory. But one of the plausible centres of the borderless world of imagination is in truth AURYN itself. And it is within AURYN that the boy without a name, who was once called Bastian but has no memory of it, will regain his memory by drinking from the Waters of Life. A reversal of the Lethe and another powerful and paradoxical statement of *The Neverending Story*: AURYN is both the destroyer of memory and the place where memory can be regained. In Chapter XXV, Bastian sets forth to find an image that can take him back to his world. He is looking for a lost memory, something that can recall his lost identity and re-establish the bond between himself and the world of reality. It is a bond that has been severed by his memory loss. At this point all that is left to him is his own name, he does not even remember that he once had parents. How much time has elapsed since his journey to Fantastica? In the world of the imaginative, time and space have a different meaning. The picture mine where he works hard in dark corridors and tunnels is another powerful invention of Ende. This mine holds the forgotten dreams of humankind:

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, p. 323.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, p. 323.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. 291.

Nothing gets lost in the world. Have you ever dreamed something and when you woke up not known what it was? [...] They are the forgotten dreams of the human world [...] Once someone dreams a dream, it can't just drop out of existence. But if the dreamer can't remember it, what becomes of it? It lives on in Fantastica, deep under our earth. There the forgotten dreams are stored in many layers. The deeper one digs, the closer together they are. All Fantastica rests on a foundation of forgotten dreams.<sup>22</sup>

Can Fantastica be envisaged as the collective unconscious? It is a very plausible hypothesis and grounds for further research. What is certain is his status as the land of memory. Fantastica is the memory of humankind, it conceals in its very heart the forgotten dreams, the hidden desires, the fears and the hopes of every single person of our reality. And this is no exception for Bastian whose initiation journey is about to end in the place where he will find a piece of his former self, the picture of his father encased in ice and unable to break free, but looking at Bastian with love and tenderness. Beyond doubt, *The Neverending Story* is a father quest. But it is also a quest for the forgotten and the concealed, for the truth that hides behind the appearance, for what is submerged but only waits to come out again: the unconscious desires and the very ability to love others, which is Bastian's true goal. By leaving the ice cage of fear and the sense of inadequacy, Bastian learns that the true initiation is "the joy of being able to love."<sup>23</sup>

## SUMMARY

### **Memory and Life: Creation and Destruction in Michael Ende's "The Neverending Story"**

The paper explores the motif of memory loss and its relationship with creation and oblivion in Michael Ende's esoteric novel *The Neverending Story*. The paper also furnishes an analysis of the connections between the ontology of imagination and memory in terms of a 'cosmogonic' and an 'intimistic' approach to the world of myth and imagination, which can be identified with a veritable land of memory, an abode of remembrance and transformation.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 355.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 368.

## KEYWORDS

Memory, imagination, Bastian, Fantastica, attic, oblivion, cosmogony, creation

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Bosmajian, Hamida. 1986. "Grief and Displacement through Fantasy in Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story*". *Children's Literature Association Quarterly Proceedings* (1986): 120-123.
2. Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. 2007. *A Study in Scarlet*. London: Penguin.
3. Ende, Michael. 1983. *The Neverending Story*. New York: Penguin.
4. Genette, Gérard. 1969. *Figures II*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
5. McConkey, James. 1996. *The Anatomy of Memory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
6. Prondczynsky, Andreas von. 1983. *Die unendliche Sehnsucht nach sich selbst: auf den Spuren eines neuen Mythos Versuch über eine "unendliche Geschichte"*. Frankfurt am Main: Dipa Verlag.
7. Ricoeur, Paul. 1998. *Das Rätsel der Vergangenheit. Erinnern – Vergessen – Verzeihen*. Göttingen: Wallstein.
8. Rossi, Paolo. 1991. *Il passato, la memoria, l'oblio*. Bologna: Il Mulino.