

'Till the World is Mended:  
Constructed Universes and the Subversion of Modernity

by

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*Certificate of Approval*

This is to certify that the accompanying thesis by Samuel Chapman has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with Honors in Environmental Humanities.

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## **Introduction—Always Lovelier**

*Why are all reflections lovelier than what we call the reality? — not so grand or so strong, it may be, but always lovelier?*

—George MacDonald

The quote above comes from George MacDonald's 1858 novel *Phantastes*, which describes one man's journey through a magic realm at once unknowable and familiar (MacDonald 66). Whether one seeks greener countries on the other side of fences, or brighter rooms on the other side of mirrors, a type of literature has sprung up in the last 150 years which deals directly with the quest for something *external* to the everyday. I wrote this thesis to determine if there is a reason this outer desire so often takes the form of a natural environment, and, if so, what that means for our realm on this side of the mirror.

If we modern western humans can define ourselves by any one characteristic, it is that we know what is real. Atoms, planets, and humans are real; elves, sea monsters, spirits, intelligent animals, and magic are not. When our literature came into its own as literature, it took the first step on a winding road that would lead it from romances filled with enchantment, through tales which relegate the mythic to allegory, and finally to realistic traditions—realism, modernism, postmodernism—that know exactly where their concerns lie: the sensible, everyday sufferings of the psyches that persist within a material world, with their surrounding environments unnecessary. To that end we have separated realism from what we now know as “fantasy,” a type of story dealing with events we say couldn't possibly happen, frequently set in worlds we say couldn't possibly exist. The narrative today states that it is as easy to separate the works of fantasy from the

canon of “serious” literature as it is to separate a creation myth from the Big Bang theory: the latter is the correct way to do things, the former is an aberration, perhaps enjoyed by some but without anything meaningful to contribute to our understanding of the world.

The many ways that fantasy reflects the anxieties of our real lives provide the first clue that this model is false. In our current literary age, it can seem the only purpose of artists to sit and dare each other to edge closer to the abyss, that hole wherein dwell our darkest fears: that our lives will be forgotten, that death is nothingness, that humans have no purpose and a gleeful overabundance of cruelty. Like children on a playground, they receive prestige based on how near to the abyss they come. It is conversely unfashionable to ask why the abyss is there or to suggest ways that it might be filled in. Such a question has the reek of faith and sincerity, distasteful in our times that straddle nihilism, logical positivism, and irony. Speculative fiction asks what the boundaries of modern emptiness are, and what might be done about it; it has frequently been exiled from intellectual discourse as a result.

In this thesis, I take as my topic that particular type of speculative fiction that takes place in what is known as a constructed world or a secondary world. This is a setting that is perceptibly not our own Earth and cosmology, but it does not always require elves and strange constellations. The litmus test for when you have arrived in one is to see whether the characters are aware of our world—hereafter called “the primary world”—as another existing parallel to our own (this will become

significant when discussing *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, which has multiple points of contact with our true history).

It is entirely in the power of the author or authors to create every aspect of the world, and those which they do not create, the reader has the freedom to determine on their own. So that the constructed world is able to breathe enough that the reader accomplishes this, the writer will almost always engage in an act of mythopoeia: the creation of a fictional body of myth. This begins and ends with the setting, for the layers of history and meaning added to a new world are all components of its environment. As such, my criticism in the following chapters will be focused on the idea of the constructed universe as a place with its own ecology that reacts to the presence of questing characters and readers within it. The worlds of the works I discuss are settings with agency that act as immense living symbols.

My choice of texts to analyze follows a continuum based on the idea that constructed worlds act as mirrors that symbolically reflect things missing in the primary world that creates them. I start by briefly tracing the history of fiction alluded to above, beginning in the time of Homer when myth was so intertwined with spatial reality that the idea of constructing a world would have been absurd. I trace the gradual separation of the mythic from the realistic through medieval allegory, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Romanticism, leading to the modern day. By exposing this fissure, I hope to discover the origin of the wound in our lives that seems to accompany modernity, to which so much fiction ultimately alludes.

The second chapter brings the idea of perception to the forefront with J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. These books conjure a secondary world with a

palpable numinous consciousness, or awareness of the divine, that sustains its heroes through times of darkness. Tolkien's subgenre enables him to make statements about the necessity of a return to our origins that, if he were to have expressed them politically, would have been decried as backward and anti-progress, and laughed out of the room. The chapter will also treat some of the complications raised by a misalignment of Tolkien's work with conservatism: though he seems to espouse the movement's values, he also implies the world would never have been saved had the hobbits not ventured into the unknown environment of Middle-Earth. As we will see, Tolkien's most important contribution was to reinvigorate a subgenre that rewards exploration of its setting's many spaces.

Whereas Tolkien's work argues that we are not looking at the world in the way we should, the Earthsea Cycle of Ursula Le Guin has a sharper point to make. I argue that in these works, aimlessness results from the fact that we have upheld the defeat of mortality to the detriment of all other faiths and systems of meaning. Antibiotics and longevity often appear as catch-all excuses for whatever modernity might throw at us. After Tolkien uses his fantasy world to define what is causing our modern incompleteness, Le Guin uses hers to break free from the constraints of possibility in imagining what that ecological wholeness could look like once the fear of death is removed from the paramount position. Our speculations and fantasies hold an important function in reflecting both our hopes and fears.

The third book on which I will focus, Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, would seem out of place with the others because it is ostensibly set on Earth. However, it is a familiar landscape with a twist—both its history and the Fae



realms which about its world locate the novel in a separate but accessible dimension. Instead of replicating Earth, Clarke rearranges it according to a perception Tolkien might find agreeable. She conjures a divided England where the wild moors of the north deal with a legacy of magic, while the decadent south is privileged to study its theory at a “respectable” distance, and suffers for it. Since spells are in part derived from a history of human pacts with faeries, it is not hard to see magic as a stand-in for an awareness of wildness, and the magicians of the north as practitioners of Le Guin’s utopianism and, by extension, the writers themselves.

Therefore, Le Guin, Tolkien, and Clarke form a triffecta of modern ecocritical mythopoeia, respectively defining the ideal, naming its enemies, and commenting in a self-aware fashion on the connection between diminishing the importance of mythic writings and diminishing the importance of wilderness. Ultimately, I hope for this paper to reinforce a conviction that the resurgence of fantasy literature is an expression of a natural human desire that can lead us to positive ecological ends—in other words, that these constructed worlds will construct a better one for us. With that in mind, let us begin with the history.

## Chapter 1—Through Athens’s Gates: A Short History of Mythopoeia

*Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,  
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,  
That, in a spleen, unfolds both heaven and earth,  
And ere a man hath power to say, —Behold!  
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:  
So quick bright things come to confusion.*

—William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Act I, Scene i

Undoubtedly, Homer did not tell the first story. Both the Epic of Gilgamesh and the tales it derives from are older—though admittedly, assuming Homer was a historical figure, they likely were not his inspirations. Further, these examples discount a potentially immense canon of works non-western or never written down. In North America alone, oral traditions still exist, tales which cannot be dated but which suggest that the earliest myths formed by humanity were indistinguishable from history, science, or any method of perception now considered more reasonable. Sophia Heller, in *The Absence of Myth*, recounts the story of Carl Jung’s visit to the Pueblo of New Mexico, where Jung found “no distinction between the literal phenomenon of the sun rising and the religious meaning of the phenomenon...This myth is not a story or a hypothesis about God” (Heller 14). Joseph Campbell extends the argument:

Wherever myths still are living symbols, the mythologies are teeming dream worlds of such images. But wherever systematizing theologians have appeared and gained the day, the figures have become petrified into propositions (Campbell 73).

Today’s conception of mythology has suffered from the difficulty of escaping the modern worldview that prioritizes the senses and the rational faculties. One may look, for example, at the presence of a dragon on a supposedly historical Breton

map, and conclude that it must be a metaphor, or a misconception, because nobody could truly *believe* that (Babcock 474). But the metaphors and misconceptions are all our own. Leslie Marmon Silko relates in "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo imagination," that "the squash blossom itself is *one thing*: itself...the squash flower is released from a limited meaning or restricted identity" (Silko 1005). Myth was the world at the dawn of storytelling; the sun was the sun god. Telling a tale literally spoke the land into being.

Homer's *Odyssey* brings this worldview, which lacks metaphors to literalize, into the western canon. By choosing to begin my brief history with it, I do not mean to suggest that nothing which came before it matters. Rather, I will be concerning myself foremost with literary works from the West because it was works from the West that began to move the world away from the type of storytelling described above. This canon begins with Homer, a categorical example of mythology, and ends up in the Enlightenment philosophy that made mythology invalid, before objecting abortively to this invalidation with Romanticism.

Since my argument concerns the revision, by literature, of modern rationalism in favor of a bygone mode of understanding, Homer provides an ideal point of departure. The *Odyssey* is a lengthy and well-preserved work of poetry that provides nothing less than the schematic for an entire civilization's perception of existence. The Pueblo would find much familiar in it, for their tales, the *Odyssey*, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, and the Breton dragons all have one thing in common: they do not refer to themselves as a "mythology." The stories were their philosophy, their science, and their entire understanding of their place in a vast world.

Geography is immediately significant in the *Odyssey's* rendering of a mythic imagination. Odysseus, on his journey home from the Trojan War, encounters goddesses, dragons, and angry whirlpools, but these are all located squarely between Troy and Ithaca: he faces his trials on Earth, the same world where he lives in peace with his family. His voyage is structured as a series of amplifications and distortions of things he thinks he knows well—acts of the gods, ever-present, repeatedly reminding him that his failure to have direct experience with the supernatural means he cannot yet consider himself human. Presiding over these sufferings is Poseidon, god of the sea which is the Greeks' most present form of wildness, who in a pure mythology is no different from the sea itself: "off on a wave-washed island rising at the center of the seas," Odysseus's physical and emotional pain comes from the immediacy of the divine (Homer I.60). He receives the status of person only after he has nearly broken himself competing with a world utterly removed from that created by his brethren of human warriors.

As we shall see for the rest of this paper, all the works I am concerned with share this reliance on geography as a defining trait. Forces arising from specific loci in the world are constantly woven through the material experiences of both the characters and the narrators. Because friction between consciousness and environment is the reason to construct meaning in the first place, a mythopoeia must have an environmental awareness if it is ever to come into its own as a mode of alternate perception.

Since all the modes of perception we so far understand come from human origins, a mythic view of the world will center on using this extrahuman outer

dimension to define a place for humanity—though that place may well not be at the center of the seas or anything else. The twin enemies of Scylla and Charybdis represent outer chaos in a way familiar to anybody who has read the *ekphrasis* in the *Iliad* on the shield of Achilles, which has formless Oceanus as its border (*Iliad* XVIII.606-607). Scylla and Charybdis are the ultimate in exaggerated nature, a great rock and a treacherous current transformed into a six-headed dragon and a sentient whirlpool who together force an insidious choice Odysseus cannot avoid (*Odyssey* XII.61-65). Falling back on what he knows of himself already, he gives a speech to his men reminding them of the Cyclops's cave: "even from there my courage,/ my presence of mind and tactics saved us all" (XII.229-230). However, in his orders to the crew, he leaves out any mention of Scylla, knowing it is a "nightmare" too far from their consciousnesses to comprehend (XII.242). Coming from Troy, these men are unused to problems they are not supposed to fight. However, learning what we must not make war on has been a cornerstone of secondary worlds since this time, and is still so today.

Since Odysseus's wit strives in vain to find a third option, he resolves to take up arms, despite Athena charging that he is "hell-bent yet again on battle and feats of arms" and hearkening back to the failure of his strength against Polyphemus (XII.126). Continuing the work of Circe, who turned the crew into pigs, Scylla and Charybdis test the tenets of Odysseus's personhood by stripping them away: one by one, his cunning, his battle prowess, and his leadership of men desert him, the latter when he cannot stop his stranded crew from slaughtering the Cattle of the Sun and being pulled back into Charybdis (XII.447-452). This victory of wilderness, however,

is a paradox in disguise: just when it seems Odysseus has proven insufficiently human to stand against “Brute Force...Scylla’s mother,” Athena gathers him to her care, as earlier described (XII.134). Speaking to him on the shores of Ithaca, she explains why: “not even here, on native soil, would you give up/those wily tales that warm the cockles of your heart!...I can’t forsake you in your troubles—/you are so winning, so worldly-wise, so self-possessed!” (XIII.333-334, 376-377) In Homer’s world, the favor of the gods passes not to those who overcome the wilderness, but to those who forge an identity within it and come to terms with it. The presence of exaggerated nature in the *Odyssey* testifies to the inexhaustible drive of man to carve a place for himself from the rough waves and uncultivated forests of the far seas: the more it batters Odysseus, the more it shapes him into something unlike itself. To an ancient people, with a civilization constructed around and hardened by its environment, this was the height of realism.

Because Odysseus is incomplete until he places himself within the wilderness, we can see that his experience of wildness was of direct importance to the existence of an identity called Odysseus. This parallels the relationship of all humanity to its wildernesses ancient and modern, from the dark forests to the black reaches of space to the shadows that lie beyond death. The works of the Western canon, in struggling over how we see, struggle also over how we live.

In order to truly understand the epic poem’s role in the development of the human identity, however, we cannot overlook the divinity of the obstacles Odysseus faces. Not only are the gods present throughout his challenges, they have established the entire gauntlet themselves, all fueled by the rage of Poseidon against

Odysseus (1.81-84) In his introduction to *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*, Chris Brawley elaborates on ideas of Rudolf Otto that explore this connection between the “numinous consciousness” and the “otherness which is at the core of fantasy’s departure from reality” (Brawley 16). Brawley writes that although the pervasive perception of the holy in sensory reality is “indescribable,” it “can be evoked through means of symbols which objectify the numinous state of mind” (16-17). These symbols are employed to reflect meaning that cannot be understood directly. The numinous in any landscape is such a meaning. One of the functions of the modern secondary world is to be a giant symbol for this sense of the divine, or sense of environmental purpose. In the days of Homer, when the gods lived in their original forms, the earth itself could be such a symbol; but we no longer see it that way. The present age has forced this sacrality to remove to new worlds. My definition of mythopoeic fantasy will depart from Brawley’s to reflect the way revision now requires a new space, not defined in human language, from which it can begin. To illustrate a place too strongly interferes with consciousness of it, as we assume there are better ways of knowing, and desire them so as not to be fooled. The constructed world releases the chains of anticipated understanding.

Yet in the history of storytelling, the works of the medieval West instead corral the numinous in service of that understanding—though this occurs before the construction of secondary worlds. About two thousand years later, we can revisit literature to find it significantly changed. Here, mythology reached a point of separation from its previous intrinsic state when it began to take the form of allegory: the audiences of tales, as Laurence Coupe writes, “wanted a religious

meaning beyond mere narrative...this kind of thinking was significant as part of a general process of demythologization” (Coupe 103). Though Homer’s poems, and contemporaneous works such as Hesiod’s *Theogony*, carry meaning with them, whether or not they take on allegorical character is entirely dependent on who is reading them. To Geoffrey Chaucer, these allegories began with the works themselves: his “dream vision” *The House of Fame* consciously locates the act of creation outside the act of existence by describing an extraterrestrial space full of “praised writers of antiquity, frozen as statues, fit for nothing but admiration” (Cannon 182). Chaucer’s bid for himself to enter the “aesthetic realm” renders the myth-makers, including Homer and Virgil, more significant than their myths (183). Room now exists for artistic works to become subservient to culture, as a judge of the greatness of literature has received its first incarnation. It is this instinct—the desire for the achievement of glory beyond the conveyance of beauty and meaning—that will contribute to the ghettoization of fantasy a thousand years later.

The Bible was a different creature entirely. Free by its total cultural dominance in the medieval West from the need to achieve glory, it could take up the mythological mantle and attempt to constitute the whole world. Following the trend Coupe points out, its perception of the world was a step removed than that found in ancient oral works. Paraphrasing the ninth-century iconoclast bishop Claudius of Turin, Beryl Smalley sums up this relationship: “The letter is a garment for the spirit, with a suggestion of cloak or concealment, which the commentator must penetrate...in order to devote himself to the spirit” (Smalley 2). No longer does the myth instantiated in literature speak for itself. Allegory, instead, “lay at the very core



of the Christian life as lived in the liturgy” (9). Once medieval thinkers revealed the spirit cloaked by the Bible, it frequently contained no more “wilderness” than the garment it wore. A God so removed from the world tended to bring the numinous out of the world with it.

The exemplar of medieval theology was Thomas Aquinas, whose approach to introducing the divine to the universe drew heavily from Aristotle and refused to admit God as self-evident: “It is not necessary that God be known to exist immediately upon knowing that the name God means that than which nothing greater can be thought, since many of the ancients held that this world is God” (Aquinas 246). Though Rene Descartes or Francis Bacon are often held up as the fathers of Enlightenment, the rampant logical positivism of the modern day owes less to them than it does to Aquinas’s inability to accept the numinous on its own terms. Though aware of the ancients’ views, he takes steps to remove the divine anyway. The act of faith became substantially altered when it became defined as something that had to occur amid a denial of reason.

The worldview of the “garment for the spirit” can best be expressed through the concept of hermeneutics, the idea that a prevailing mythology is worth nothing without interpretation. This idea bled into literature, even romances which were not expressly religious—witness *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. John Gardner, as its translator, writes that this poem codifies Catholicism and feudalism into a mode of behavior known as chivalry. “To the extent that this ideal code (chivalry) has anything at all to do with Nature as it is,” he said, “it urges that Nature either withdraw to its lair or adapt itself to the ideal” (Gardner 40). Odysseus’s rite of

passage climaxed with him being swallowed by a whirlpool and spat back out—his trial occurred in the context of a nature that existed on its own merit, that he needed and not the other way around. Aquinas and *Gawain* introduce us to a new perception: the world of God is for us. We exist to complete God's challenges, to defeat a lower form of heaven so that we can rise to the real thing. Magic has been yoked to the plow of allegory.

Several hundred years later, Shakespeare provides us with an example of magic in a literary work existing without subservience to a higher plan. As with Homer, Shakespeare does not have the only magic of his time, but his work is illustrative of a burgeoning schism. Plays such as *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest* all demonstrate to us the first stirrings of numinous revisionism: the reintroduction of a self-determined mythic world, through the portal of literature. Though each of the plays is very different from the others, every one contains a significant supernatural element, none of which are remarked upon from a rationalist perspective and all of which serve to repudiate the drive toward greatness and overreach. Instead of a target for human attainment, the right hand of Shakespeare's wildness was merely present, shaping reality to allow humans to better understand a cyclical existence on Earth.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we see an early expression of the new form of literary nature-worship—a new form derived out of a classical tradition only slightly newer than Homer. The play's supernatural characters, the fairies, describe a natural setting in wondrous terms, so far outstripping the capabilities of the human characters that it becomes clear they are exalting the forest for no reason

other than that they can: “Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,/By paved fountain or by rush brook,/Or in the beached margent of the sea,/To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind” (*MND* II.1.83-86). Similar language occurs in *The Tempest*, this time placed into the mouth of Caliban, a subhuman character we have previously been conditioned to fear: “the isle is full of noises,/Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not” (*TT* III.2.134-135). The trend that these plays set forth is the idea, antithetical to allegory and to an extent also to religion, that beauty is its own purpose—yet, by this time, it is a more complex celebration.

Geography has developed a rift since the *Odyssey: A Midsummer Night's Dream* concerns a forest, and *The Tempest* an island, removed from the normal realm. Though the human characters in the former pass freely back and forth “Through Athens’ gates,” the walls of the city remain a palpable boundary beyond which lie “new friends and stranger companies”—and while the fairies conclude the play by blessing the Duke’s house, they are never permitted to make themselves visible to the humans (*MND* I.1.13, 19). In *The Tempest*, the supernatural in fantasy is already couched in terms of disbelief: “If in Naples/I should report this now, would they believe me?” (*TT* III.3.29-30). Through the geography of these plays, Shakespeare highlights the need to build worlds away from the primary world, because the primary world cannot look at itself.

Harry Berger Jr. defines the phrase “second world” as “a time or place (the mind) clears in order to withdraw from the actual environment” (Berger 12). I will be employing Tolkien’s definition of this phrase instead of Berger’s, as the latter is too broad for my argument, but it is helpful for our attempt to roughly periodize

the growing alienation of the mythic and consequent invention of the “real.” In *The Tempest*, writes Berger, “The archaic world of folklore and superstition, the world of the mythy mind, is set beside the ultimate refinements of literary artifice and the marvels of theatrical thaumaturgy” (163). By basing his conflict on the difference between Naples and the island, Shakespeare takes his place among the first writers to consider that there *is* a division. Though a truly constructed world has yet to appear, we have in these two plays a verifiable instance of early mythopoeia. But myths have already changed: they must now be invented with an eye to their status as myths, as they have been separated from other epistemologies in the primary world. These new myths become the grandparents of those which the next three chapters concern, since the departure of myths is what Tolkien, Le Guin, Clarke, and others will later end up revising.

Responding to the times in which he wrote, Shakespeare kept the effects of his imagination from bleeding too heavily into the world he portrayed; his consciousness of a world with mythical possibility had already become speculative. A roughly contemporaneous work, Cervantes’s *Don Quixote*, starkly shows the limited capacity for belief of people at this point in history by featuring the supernatural as conspicuously absent. The title character inhabits romantic scenes of his own creation, due to his having read so many stories of chivalry that he took them to constitute his entire worldview. Though he defends himself eloquently, he is rarely called anything but mad, as the novel is always perfectly aware of the definition of reality: as Jorge Luis Borges writes, “for Cervantes the real and the poetic were antimonies” (Borges). Harold Bloom, who called *Don Quixote* “the first

modern novel," helps to locate the work in the evolution of Western literature: "the Quixotic can be accurately defined as the literary mode of an absolute reality, not as impossible dream but rather as a persuasive awakening into mortality" (Bloom). There is nothing cyclical or renewable here: the first modern novel is a lament for how we have failed to defeat death. However, this is far from the whole story, and the text holds more respect for the world constructed by its title character than might appear at first.

Cervantes here initiates a tradition common to the "literary" works of the modern day: that of awareness that something is wrong about a trajectory that trusts only sensory input and disdains the more creative use of it. Quixote has learned to construct a more meaningful narrative than the one by which he was previously living, and demonstrates the results of this construction: "Don Quixote was developing his arguments in such an orderly and lucid way that for the time being none of those listening to him could believe that he was a madman" (Cervantes 355). The designation "madman" is baseless and ludicrous here, a word choice that is firmly of our own world and says more about us than Quixote: most characters see but one reality, and all others are mad. But some characters, such as a barber whom Quixote embroils in his adventures, find themselves drawn into his poetic world, and saddened when they leave it due to the brief presence of a new type of consciousness: "one man had been plunged into the deepest depths of despair, and that was the barber, whose basin, there before his very eyes, had turned into Mambrino's helmet, and whose pack-saddle, he was sure, was about to turn into the splendid caparisons of some handsome steed" (420). The fact that a

novel considered the first modern work is aware of its division from a world with a stronger meaning demonstrates that a great deal of modernist angst can be traced to a rejection of present divinity.

Beyond this, though, the book posits that a solution to some of the cruelties suffered by Don Quixote could be mitigated by a reunion of his chivalry with something of the prosaic world he moves through. Arnold Hauser discusses the book in *The Social History of Art*:

His work was not intended, however, merely to take a rise out of the artificial and mechanical novels of fashion, nor to become merely a criticism of out-of-date chivalry, but also to be an indictment of the world of disenchanted, matter-of-fact reality...The novelty in Cervantes' work was, therefore, not the ironic treatment of the chivalrous attitude to life, but the relativizing of the two worlds of romantic idealism and realistic rationalism. What was new was the indissoluble dualism of his world-view (Hauser 399).

All of the works that I will discuss in later chapters will, in some way, return to this unity. Shakespeare separated his islands and forests from his cities because the world was fast evicting its fairies, while Cervantes's divide is psychological, between faith and rationality—both of the latter being ways of seeing the world through proxy. A strong component of constructed-world fantasy is revising so that both might be used to fill in each others' gaps, but Shakespeare and Cervantes demonstrate the world had not arrived there yet, leading to a hole in our artistic consciousness and the marginalization of the numinous worldview derived from it.

In *Forests: The Shadows of Civilization*, Robert Pogue Harrison provides us with a philosophical terminology to match the literary gulf charted above. His work strongly implicates rationalism as the culprit in the expulsion of myth from the

human world, and reveals how the presence of God in *Sir Gawain*, *Don Quixote*, and medieval thought does not align with the same divinity in Homer. When Rene Descartes, working in a rationalist theological mode inherited from Thomas Aquinas, writes *I think therefore I am*, “the certainty of the subjective existence becomes the ground for the certainty of God’s existence, not the other way around” (Harrison 109). Having placed himself at the center of the universe, the rationalist upholds a new God born literally out of logic, a God who is “not a God (he) can pray to, appeal to, kneel before, seek salvation from...(God) is already cold with rigor mortis—with metaphysics” (109). God has also lost the power to define humanity, as it is impossible to create a story out of a rationalist deity—mythology serves no empirical purpose for a person desperate to “discriminate effectively between truth and falsehood,” and the *Odyssey* gives us no useful information on navigation (110). After all, the more our sea charts improve, the clearer it becomes to our senses that none of that stuff in the Mediterranean is actually there. Throwing out the identity of an Odysseus, who with all his wit and strength relied on the help of the gods when he needed it most, the thinking center of a Cartesian universe “can rely strictly upon its own resources to escape the realm of randomness and error, thanks to its adherence to the linear path of mathematical analysis” (111). It is this recipe for modernity that has removed gods from the Earth, and, by extension, removed stories.

According to Harrison, the Enlightenment as defined by Immanuel Kant is an age of “pejorative detachment from the past” founded on irony, the critical abandonment of tradition (114). *Don Quixote* is merely the first work that spawned

a number of realist traditions to address the resulting malaise. The rise of Romanticism in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries can be described a cultivated recontextualization of the past in response to Enlightenment, realism, and what would later be called modernity. Among other things, the Romantic movement was concerned with a reintroduction of strong emotion to cultural discourse, and its reactions to nature could rise from the dizzying divinity of Thoreau to a dread more at home in Sylvia Plath.

As Lisa Feurzeig argues, artists from Germany, birthplace of the movement, were heavily influenced by a connection with forests derived from Roman times. A reverence that stretched back before the advent of the Romantic movement was characterized by a numinous awareness that, though it spoke with Christian concepts, bypassed scripture to something altogether closer to the land: “At the turn of the sixteenth century, the fear of the forest as a place harboring uncivilized wild men was modified by the idea that Christian saints and heroes might also inhabit the forest” (Feurzeig 171). Romantics sought to bring back the irrational, to make the forests again more than tree farms through the simple act of perceiving more in them than the senses let on.

Within this tradition, *Frankenstein* is perhaps our most significant link. Mary Shelley clearly has a foot in Romanticism, since passages such as this one testify to the value of being awed by nature: “The immense mountains and precipices that overhung me on every side—the sound of the river raging among the rocks, and the dashing of the waterfalls around, spoke of a power might as omnipotence” (Shelley 64). However, her use of technology is just as speculative as any of Prospero’s magic



spells in *The Tempest*. When Victor Frankenstein is first preparing to reanimate dead tissue, we receive little information regarding his actual method, explained as the character himself being reluctant to speak of it. Instead, we are shown a character retreating into a dream state, describing a scientific act as though he were bewitched by fairies: “a resistless, and almost frantic impulse, urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit” (33). The lack of explanation, and the assumption of a world in which “a magic scene” is a natural possibility, reveal to us where Shelley stands: she is using the supernatural to define the position of humanity in nature, just like Homer, though her examination of man’s place in the wilderness is pointed closely at the pursuers of science (51). At the critical point before the creature arises, Victor pauses his narration to exhort his listener that “a human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and peaceful mind...I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge is an exception to this rule” (34). Since the listener, Robert Walton, is engaged in an attempt to conquer the North Pole, we can generalize his story with Victor’s into a warning against all quests to subjugate the planet or to wring out nature’s secrets on the rack. The act of speculation allows Shelley to transcend the boundaries of the real to communicate her message. She is, in this sense, initiating a modern myth. The fact that *Frankenstein* is subtitled *The Modern Prometheus* makes this connection explicit, though it is important to remember that the idea of “modernizing” Prometheus might not have occurred to the initiators of the Prometheus myth.

*Frankenstein* could not charitably be called an optimistic text. It has faith in the ability of its wild landscapes to heal—“The sight of the awful and majestic in

nature had indeed always had the effect of solemnizing my mind and causing me to forget the passing cares of life”—but they offer only a temporary reprieve for a protagonist condemned by technology; the demon always lurks around the next bend (66). There is little way forward, just a warning to avoid sliding farther back. Yet Aquinas and Descartes give us no sense that their path could ever lead us wrong. Both of these fail to affect a complete revision because they offer incomplete perceptions. As initiated by Tolkien and carried on by others, the construction of worlds draws from both, completing a new perception—these worlds *must* be both explored and protected, or they by definition do not exist. This paper does not argue for the defeat of the Enlightenment by Romanticism, or vice versa, no matter which of them has the upper hand in the present day.

Concurrent with the advent of realism and then modernism, the trail of the supernatural in literature leads into the twentieth century, to what the modern era calls “fantasy.” If it is difficult to determine exactly where the subgenre begins, and where the acts of speculation split off into the other categories of science fiction and horror, it is because its origins lie along a continuum that spans the whole of human invention. Romantic creative works—notably the poetry of both Germany and England—strongly align the sublime with the numinous. Thomas Weiskel writes that, in this period,

The emotions traditionally religious were displaced from the Deity and became associated first with the immensity of space and second with the natural phenomena (oceans, mountains) which seemed to approach that immensity (Weiskel 14).

Invoking the numinous though true perception of the vastness of a world beyond language is a form of worship older than any practiced in a church. The intentional creation of modern fairy tales in Germany is another conscious attempt to bridge the gap between primary world and divine: “despite the best efforts of Enlightenment, the supernatural still maintained the upper hand” (Tully ix). Whether or not this populist sentiment is true regarding which philosophy had more power to steer history (and I suspect it is not), it is a clear picture of what people caught in history’s flow sought out in order to make themselves purposeful and whole.

The path to Tolkien goes through the work of William Morris, a seminal author in both science fiction (with his time travel utopia *News From Nowhere*) and fantasy, where he is notable as the first writer to construct a world from nothing (Oberg 114). As would later recur in the work of everyone from Dunsany and Tolkien to Ursula Le Guin and Mervyn Peake, Morris’s works like *The Well at the World’s End* featured no character from Earth crossing over to explore the world with the reader at their side. The significance of this cannot be underestimated: islands and forests removed from Athens are no longer enough. Empirical science had mapped every corner of the world we know. The modernist tradition demonstrated discontent with this: “Once our reason has been turned exclusively into an instrument for satisfying individual interest...Enlightenment becomes fatalism” (Burger 88). But their critiques were mostly destructive, and an answer to the great wound arising from the new myth remained elusive. The creators of new

environments did so because they had nowhere to turn in the one they knew.

Tolkien, in his lecture "On Fairy-Stories," describes this feeling in terms of a prison:

Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison walls? (Tolkien 20)

The very things lacking in the constructed worlds of Morris and others equated to what they disliked about their surroundings: market economies, class divisions, smokestacks, guns, continental cynicism, and characteristic European hubris. In effect, all these things had become prison walls, sealing Morris and his compatriots away from the environment. Far from the oft-derided escapism, Morris's writings worked actively against these walls: his "poems and tales would have been anomalous indeed if they advocated simply the ignoring of problems" (Oberg 168). A person in a prison cell must reify the outside world every second. The prison will do nothing for them.

Constructed worlds also share the peculiar quality of at once being born from language and existing beyond it. In her remarkable statement of purpose, "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," Ursula Le Guin offers her thoughts on the necessity of constructing worlds when making political statements:

There is no comfortable matrix of the commonplace to substitute for the imagination, to provide ready-made emotional response, and to disguise flaws and failures of creation. There is only a construct built in a void, with every joint and seam and nail exposed. To create what Tolkien calls "a secondary universe" is to make a new world. A world where no voice has ever spoken before; where the act of speech is the act of creation (Le Guin 155).

In the world we inhabit, voices are speaking constantly. The fantasy world provides a way to silence them so that other perspectives can speak. Moreover, though the

author is the first voice in the world, the reader's own imagination—personal, plus any cultural memory of similar worlds—begins to fill the space beyond the borders of the text. This is critical to the revision, as the limit of language is a theme in the three texts discussed below; yet it works only when the primary world is silenced, hence why the setting needed to be removed even farther than Shakespeare's islands and fairy woods.

Chris Brawley, in a study of Coleridge that can be applied here, states that the poet “believed that through artistic constructions, one could realize that all matter in the world is symbolic of the numinous” (Brawley 38). In the mode of MacDonald, these constructions are reflections, wherein we can see the numinous in objects that we cannot recall from the primary world using words. The world had become convinced it could express anything through language, but since those words were generated according to post-Enlightenment myths, they took on more significance than the objects and environments they existed to describe: the ability to encapsulate nature was held to be greater than nature itself. Ways to approach nature outside of the sensory and rational methods were cast aside—hence, Hume's lament that “Thanks to the Greek philosophers, Christianity, and the Enlightenment, we have no vocabulary for analyzing literary departures from reality” (Hume 147). Accordingly, authors, beginning with the Romantics such as Coleridge and leading up to the twentieth century, had begun to realize that secondary worlds themselves could serve as symbols for things they could not express. Their constructions came to reflect the numinous, that intangible sense of higher meaning whose absence grants the 21<sup>st</sup> century its unique sense of malaise.

With Morris, George MacDonald, and Lord Dunsany writing high-fantasy, mythopoeic "Faerie Romances," the genre split further. Robert E. Howard and later Fritz Leiber wrote tales called "sword-and-sorcery," concerned with the actions of individuals in a hostile mythic world, while H.P. Lovecraft wrote what he called "weird fiction." Both of these settings responded to industrialization in a similar sense to Morris, who was disgusted by what he saw happening to his native England: Lovecraft feared "the ultimate meaninglessness of human history," the lack of a destination for modernization which he personified as a series of monstrous beings from space (Carlin and Allen 87). Howard and Lieber's characters resemble strivers like Walton and Frankenstein, never satisfied with their conquests.

Here is the stage onto which Tolkien came: speculative fiction was popular in the pulp sphere, but absent from the mainstream. Roger Schlobin describes how these stories in "yellowed magazines and paperbacks" were far more influential among the general public than among academics: "the twentieth century continues a sharp division within fantasy...in the early 1920s, another chasm appears between 'serious' and 'pulp' literatures" (Schlobin 142). While this distinction can seem arbitrary, it is indicative of the role pure fantasy plays in intellectual discourse. A work in a purely constructed world is not often allowed to speak for itself. Whether the text is deemed an allegory or a meaningless escape, it is not analyzed on its own terms. Though there will be others, J.R.R. Tolkien is the first author I will consider who cut through these definitions and used fantasy to say aloud to the world what it had been whispering all along. MacDonald and Lovecraft wrote from nameless

longings and fears: Tolkien, and Ursula Le Guin and Susanna Clarke after him, gives names to both their angels and demons.

Descended from Cervantes, respected literature was concerned with mirroring the world as it was, with all its longing for the absent myth consigned to subtext. Tolkien, like Lovecraft, responded to what he saw as a negative trend, though one celebrated by the rest of mankind as the glorious wages of Enlightenment.

## Chapter 2—The Marvel of the Trees: J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*

*That night they heard no noises. But either in his dreams or out of them, he could not tell which, Frodo heard a sweet singing running in his mind: a song that seemed to come like a pale light behind a grey rain-curtain, and growing stronger to turn the veil all to glass and silver, until at last it was rolled back, and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise.*

—J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, “Fog On The Barrow-Downs”

I am not only considering Tolkien in this thesis because it is impossible to discuss secondary-world literature without him, nor because he is the one who coined the term “secondary world.” Tolkien is, in his own right, a towering figure in my argument because *The Lord of the Rings* was a concerted and mainstream act against industrialization and the thought processes that spawned it, and functioned toward a specific goal of restoring to the world the mode of perception it had lost. It is nothing less than the first perfect symbol for the new form of perception, and its cultural resonance is not surprising in the least. Later works move far beyond this purpose using the basis established by Tolkien.

*The Lord of the Rings* is high fantasy, a subgenre whose name was coined by Lloyd Alexander, himself an author in the genre with his Prydain books. Works in this category “draw most directly from the fountainhead of mythology” to tell their stories (Alexander). The trilogy’s inheritance of the *Odyssey* and *Theogony* starts with this categorization by source of inspiration. Tolkien tells the story of a world called Middle-Earth that is threatened by Sauron, an ancient enemy from the chaotic time of creation. In order to defeat Sauron, two hobbits, Frodo and Samwise, must carry the Ring of Power to Mount Doom where it can be destroyed. Along the way, many supporting characters of many species help or hinder their quest. The quest narrative in *Lord of the Rings*, which follows the heroes becoming wiser the farther



they travel, is a product of the world of Middle-Earth in which it takes place. Since the secondary reality cannot be perceived all at once, the journey is paramount. This is what makes Tolkien's trilogy an environmental work, and simultaneously defines the text's project: the setting itself is the moral.

The text's strengths, however—the high fantasy setting, quest narrative, and mythopoeia—are also the same things that lead literary scholarship to disdain fantasies, secondary worlds, and fairy stories. It is not just the fact of being “genre fiction” that harms their respectability: Cormac McCarthy, after all, writes westerns, and is acclaimed as one of the greatest living writers. I propose instead that the visceral nature of the longings they evoke—the thought of a world outside the prison walls, when the prison has for so long been the world—is intense and primal enough to be considered only available to children. In considering these works beneath serious discussion due solely to their genre, academics miss out on the finest environmental texts of the modern era that are not expressly nature writing, or conservative works by Aldo Leopold. Tolkien seems to have been grandfathered into respectful study, but the writers that follow him are consistently turned away at the door for a perceived lack of maturity—a fact Tolkien himself weighed in on in “On Fairy-Stories”:

The association of children and fairy-stories is an accident of our domestic history. Fairy-stories have in the modern lettered world been relegated to the ‘nursery’...because the adults do not want (them), and do not mind if (they) are misused” (Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 11).

“Adult” works can only look sidelong at the dysphoria of our times, the worship of war and technology and the lack of purpose or rootedness. Secondary-world

literature thrusts it into our faces by showing us everything we lack, but in doing so, optimistically asserts that all these wounds might one day be healed. Thus, instead of unsettling us as they should do, the works of Tolkien, Le Guin, Clarke, and their colleagues are relegated to the nursery, their idealism—deeply-buried and beleaguered as it might be—deemed only fit for children.

In her preface to *Fantasy and Mimesis*, Kathryn Hume references George Orwell to bemoan the challenge of writing critically about high and other types of fantasy, saying it is “practically as difficult as wordless thoughtcrime. We do not have the analytic vocabulary to frame our inquiries” (Hume xii). She blames this on a “general distrust of fantasy” established in the classical era with Plato and handed down through the history of Western thought (xii). Tracing her argument back to the *Republic* yields this quote from Socrates on a critical attribute of the philosopher: “Truthfulness. Not willingly accepting falsehood in any form. A hatred of falsehood, and a love of truth” (Plato 485c). All fiction is falsehood, but myth, and mythopoeia, are uniquely vulnerable to the charge of being just so much lying—because, admittedly, of how much more surface material has been fabricated. Clearly the seeds for a distrust of the speculative have been present from near the beginning.

As an attempt to remedy the lack of analytical language, *Fantasy and Mimesis* introduces a four-part categorization of literature, with “fantasy” performing different functions in each. The literature of illusion cares only for providing a temporary vision to its reader. The literature of vision creates a new world which disturbs the reader because they do not receive the tools necessary to understand it.

The literature of revision grants these tools and teaches that they can be used on the reader's own world; frequently, though by no means always, this takes the form of a moral lesson. Finally, the literature of disillusion breaks down perception of the primary world, leaving nothing in its place (Hume 55-56). Each of these has its own purpose in reacting to modernity, but if we are to attack pervasive narratives at their roots, our focus must be on the coherent counternarrative: the literature of revision.

By its nature as a perpetuation of myth, secondary-world fiction falls into the category of revision, since myth was a method of forming understanding. However, a vision of cosmic truth need not be prescribed. A myth speaks a world into being, which, as with the Pueblo and Greek myths cited in chapter one, represents itself as conceived with perfect awareness. In this chapter I will argue that mythopoeic modern texts achieve the same result.

Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* is one of the strongest examples of a fantastical work that exists in conflict with a truth accepted in "reality" as universal. However, I disagree with Hume's argument that belonging in this category means Tolkien's trilogy must work with "assertions and absolutes" and that revising the existing state of perception "aims to annihilate critical thought" (103). This does not mean the text avoids staking out political and ethical positions; far from it, as the abdication of power, preservation of the past, and respect for the land are all upheld as good. But neither a secondary world nor a tale of the heroes and villains who inhabit it are required to teach these lessons. *The Lord of the Rings* is not a political pamphlet wrapped in a mythopoeia—such a hermeneutical approach is fallacious

with a text that owes far more to Homer than to Aquinas. Middle-Earth has a purpose to serve in its own right. It *is* the spirit of the text, without garment.

Fantasy literature in the modern era has evolved, by necessity, beyond simple didacticism. Rather than trying to substitute an easy solution for the problems he sees in modernity, as Hume might charge, Tolkien tries to evolve his reader's consciousness so they can see answers for themselves. This is the first step in a long process of revision, which spans multiple works but leads the secondary world to the role it occupies today.

In order to understand the purpose of Tolkien's efforts, we must first become familiar with what in particular he was reacting against. *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, Dickerson and Evans's book on Tolkien's "environmental vision," provides a useful primer in this regard (Dickerson and Evans 4). In a chapter describing Mordor, the blasted land where the events of Frodo's journey are fated to come to a head, they point out that descriptions of the domain of the enemy reverberate with the world inhabited by Tolkien's readers: "the form of agriculture practiced by the servants of Sauron...closely resembles mechanized, large-scale factory farming of the kind that has become prevalent in the modern world of agribusiness" (191). Though sprawling factory-farms were not recognizable as their present forms in Tolkien's day, the mindset that would create them was. In "The Scouring of the Shire," near the close of the trilogy, an industrial mill appears in the Shire as an avatar of the darkest evil: "Pimple's idea was to grind more and faster...They're always a-hammering and a-letting out a smoke and a stench, and there isn't no peace even at night in Hobbiton" (Tolkien *FOTR* 318). Grinding more and faster, without any more

grist to grind, is a characteristic all Tolkien's dark forces hold in common, the ones he reviled in the primary world and the ones his heroes fight in the secondary world.

Yet earlier, we meet a farmer in the Shire mystically attuned enough to receive notice from transcendent nature spirit Tom Bombadil: "There's earth under his old feet, and clay on his fingers; wisdom in his bones, and both his eyes are open" (*FOTR* 150). The gulf between them is as wide as they come: those who live in a cyclical way upon land they understand personally gain a special kind of magic from the eternal present. This is the numinous consciousness, available only to those who spend time looking, and the antidote to the modern ethos Tolkien lamented in his letters: "evil labours with vast power and perpetual success—in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in" (*Letters* 76). Those who desire only to expand, or to whom surroundings, settings, and people are expendable, set a course for their own destruction by making themselves the enemies of the rest of the world. This sentiment, expressed by the book's characters, allows the reader into the secondary world to consider it as well, but it is far from the deepest layer of the text. Nobody will achieve a clearer view of primary world just from being told to, so Tolkien must do more.

So, primarily, the trilogy is concerned not with striving for an ecotopia but with seeing where we already are. The nature of the threat itself must be explored with this in mind. Tolkien's own letters speak to a time when much of mankind saw its sanity outpaced by its technology, as he writes to his son Christopher during the Second World War: "We are attempting to conquer Sauron with the Ring. And we

shall (it seems) succeed. But the penalty is...to breed new Saurons, and slowly turn Men and Elves into Orcs" (78). A recurring theme throughout the trilogy is the corruption of characters by the power of the One Ring, which is able to whisper to the minds of everyone, regardless of how noble they were before they took it up.

Through many characters' interactions with the Ring, we can tell that people in Middle-Earth believe great power must be used. This is one of the courses of action put forth at the Council of Elrond, the pivotal scene in *Fellowship of the Ring*. Boromir, one of the story's foremost proponents of glorious war, suggests of the side of good that "valour needs first strength, and then a weapon. Let the ring be your weapon, if it has such power as you say" (Tolkien *FOTR* 300). We recognize in Boromir the type of hero we expect, a towering man with a sword; yet of the Fellowship he is the first to be corrupted, unable to understand the idea of willfully sacrificing power (448-449). Boromir and his counterpart Aragorn here present the two faces of Odysseus, who, we will recall, lost everything when he tried to match Scylla and Charybdis with his force of arms.

In the end, the events of the story vindicate Aragorn, who wins by tricking Sauron with a gambit that, though it would please Athena, knowingly makes Aragorn's warlike strength irrelevant. The final battle at the Black Gate is in the end only a diversion for the sake of Frodo's more important mission (*ROTK* 161). In a chivalric romance, Aragorn's victory would be the note of climactic triumph, but chivalry, as we saw with *Sir Gawain*, rejects nature. Thus we are spared the absurdity of wishing Aragorn's army had brought the Ring, or their own atomic

bomb. The alternative to force of arms is doubt, fear, and potential unnecessary loss, but in the end it could never have been strength that saved the world.

War in fantasy is a tricky analytical business, as many of Tolkien's less successful imitators treat victory in the last battle as the end of all things while forgetting what makes the Black Gate important. In "The Last Debate," Gandalf employs agrarian and wild language to remind us that this has all been for the sake of a place:

Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succor of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule (160).

For Gandalf, having more strength, or killing the right enemy, means nothing without a knowledge of why the battle is fought. The gospel of power rejects the environment, and so Gandalf's side must understand it—and its equality and superiority to us—in order to be good. This requires the most respect to be given to the ringbearers: it is their divine quest, not Aragorn's earthly one, around which the story turns.

From another letter from Tolkien to Christopher in 1944, he laments: "*Delenda est Carthago* (Carthage must be destroyed). We hear rather a lot of that nowadays. I was actually taught in school that that was a fine saying" (*Letters* 89). Having served in the First World War, and seen his son go to fight in the Second, Tolkien had firsthand authority to condemn war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In *Return of the King*, he actually has the orcs dig trenches to besiege Gondor (*ROTK* 91). Conflict was teaching him a simple lesson: that if one has power, one must use it to create

law. Accordingly, the ultra-potent Ring comes onto the scene as a hammer, and even to wise old Bilbo, everything looks like a nail. *The Lord of the Rings*, however, responds to this overwhelming ethos with the simple question of whether control over the human destiny *must* be distributed the way that it is. The text does not offer an answer, though this mentality of might is the central aspect of modernity it undertakes to revise—a mentality that gives rise to both military and industry.

Before going any further, I must acknowledge that the text's perception of the world is itself imperfect. Tolkien's delineation of characteristics shared by every member of a particular race—specifically, that all orcs must be the enemy—can be seen as simplistic, counterproductive, and even covertly racist. Though he states in *The Silmarillion* that the orcs loath the fact that their race has been co-opted for dark deeds by evil masters, he still robs them of sympathy in his best-known works (*Silmarillion* 47). Though a thorough analysis of racism in Tolkien's works is outside the scope of this paper, a couple of interpretations of race in *Lord of the Rings* relate directly to the issue of perception. The many races of Middle-Earth do not correspond to any primary-world ethnicities, and their histories do not consciously evoke existing systems of oppression: only the ideology at the root of it is troubling.

The racial aspect of the secondary world is present in part so that Tolkien can examine different ways of perceiving Middle-Earth, and introduce the reader to them. Hobbits, as with Farmer Maggot above, see everything in terms of the Shire, making the whole world relative to the place which is theirs. The dwarves, meanwhile, are building their industry across the world, at the expense of their fine metalwork: "Only in mining and building have we surpassed the old days" (*FOTR*



257). The dwarves are portrayed as aware of the problems with this, and they learn a strong lesson on greed in *The Hobbit*, but here again their focus on material extraction and production over craftsmanship brings them perilously close to the factory-farming orcs, and the orcs' alliance with Saruman—the chief industrialist of the trilogy. In addition to his crimes in the Shire, Saruman undertakes the following in his home of Isengard:

The shafts ran down by many slopes and spiral stairs to caverns far under; there Saruman had treasuries, store-houses, armories, smithies, and great furnaces. Iron wheels revolved there endlessly, and hammers thudded. At night plumes of vapour steamed from the vents, lit from beneath with red light, or blue, or venomous green (*TT* 174).

There is mining, and there is building. The function of races in the trilogy is not for one to be more human, but for each to be human in a different way, specifically the way they interact with their environment. This is deterministic: exploitation of the land to its limits makes one an orc, while living with perfect lightness makes an elf. Such a correspondence would push a work without an explicit mythopoeic project into the realm of allegory, but here, Tolkien's secondary world saves his text.

The above quote from *The Two Towers* demonstrates how. By this point, the reader has connected with Middle-Earth through the language used to describe it. Now that beauty is turned on its head, and Saruman has poisoned the world: “venomous” green is set against the “far green country” Frodo saw in Bombadil's house, there a scene of otherworldly beauty (*TT* 174, *FOTR* 153). Saruman, who in his embrace of industry is the lowest end of the racial/environmental axis, perverts environmental language to remind us why we fear for Middle-Earth: its greenery

has value in itself, not as a representation. The language is used multiple ways to remind us that different races are looking in different ways at something that exists beyond it—and that all this is endemic to the constructed world. There is no race, not even the heroic hobbits, that is “more human” than others in Middle-Earth, because correspondence is not their purpose; it is their viewpoints, not their traits, that define them. This still promulgates the condensing of races into blocks, however, something Tolkien himself implies regretting in another letter concerning a proposition to exterminate Germany following the war: “The Germans have just as much right to declare the Poles and Jews exterminable vermin, subhuman, as we have to select the Germans: in other words, no right” (*Letters* 93). However the book alters our perception, the reader must be sure to always use their own judgment as the final gatekeeper. Failure to do so would be a failure to fully realize the project of revision project, which must begin with the individual.

Previously I touched on the idea that Tolkien’s response to the modern ethos of power and conquest is to put forth a multitude of rebellious statements that have as their binding thread the constructed mythical place. David Sandner writes that “Tolkien describes fantasy as a wind blowing from beyond the world, something felt but unseen, which may move the reader to look for something that cannot be found in the text at all” (Sandner 135). He interprets that humanity has “disenchanted” itself from a “full experience of the world as we are (or were) meant to see it,” and that Tolkien saw the impulse to create “faerie” worlds as a solution to this (137). The act of worldbuilding, as it is popularly known, is one of the most essential exercises of imagination. Any child who imagines the crown of a backyard tree to be

the crow's nest of a pirate ship has done it. Moreover, the child and the author are doing the same thing—re-enchanting their worlds. The only difference is that of scale. The rest of this chapter will consider how Tolkien expresses this instinct, and the obstacles he must revise to overcome.

To consider first is a point that Curry puts forth: Frodo and Sam are not typical hobbits. Tolkien writes in his “Concerning Hobbits” prologue that people of this landlocked race tend toward such suspicion of the unknown that they “regard even rivers and small boats with deep misgivings...they liked to have books filled with things that they already knew, set out fair and square with no contradictions” (Tolkien *FOTR* 8-9). In this context, Frodo's habit of “wandering further afield...walking and talking with the strange wayfarers that began at this time to appear in the Shire” appears exceedingly singular (46). Yet not only is he the hero, but once the adventure itself begins, more and more hobbits begin to subvert the trend. Samwise is unusual because his loyalty to his master supersedes his desire to remain home—an outlook contrasted with that of aborted Fellowship companion Fatty Bolger, who, “fond as he was of Frodo...had no desire to leave the Shire, nor to see what lay outside it” (117, 121). Further, when the Fellowship arrives at the Great River, Merry efficiently destroys the perception that all halflings hate watercraft: “Not all of us look on boats as wild horses. My people live by the banks of the Brandywine” (413). Here he expresses a principal virtue of hobbitkind, that of adaptiveness, which beginning with the prologue of *Fellowship* counteracts a perception of the books as staid (6-7). The events of the last chapters, which relate the final battle against evil within the Shire, vindicate the heroes' decision to leave

home. The hobbits who remained are still tough, and capable of defending themselves, but it takes the wisdom of the returning travelers to organize them. The pastoral idyll is threatened from the outside, then saved by it.

Here, we encounter echoes of the *Odyssey*, wherein Odysseus won the true favor of the gods only by leaving the accustomed and familiar. Yet its purpose is not the same. Homer had more freedom to consider the role of humanity in a wild world because that world's indomitable presence was already assumed and assured. Middle-Earth has farther to go. Given the state of the primary world it entered, it must be concerned, first and foremost, with getting its characters to *notice* it. Odysseus's journey home was a personal quest, expendable crew members notwithstanding, and his slaughter of the suitors resonated outside his home and family only due to cultural symbolism. Sauron, on the other hand, threatens everything.

The part of *everything* that we first touch on, the Shire, is of note. Tolkien's work tends to romanticize the rural agrarian, but this romance is justified as a counterweight to the romance of progress—there is no shortage of people singing the praises of grinding more and better. Dickerson and Evans write that “a certain amount of idealism in an agrarian vision may be a good thing...if it inspires us to strive for it, such an imaginative portrayal of an ideal is exactly what we need,” (Dickerson and Evans 74). They are correct to state that *The Lord of the Rings* has an ecological ideal which expresses itself early on through the hobbits of the Shire. This ideal, though, is incompletely defined until it is threatened. Admirable as they may be, the Shire-folk have not adequately placed themselves within the world—in fact,

“maps made in the Shire showed mostly white spaces beyond its borders” (Tolkien *FOTR* 46). The fact that the hobbits’ way of life is at stake is the reason readers care what happens with the One Ring, but the threat better illuminates the Shire itself in turn. Frodo says:

I should like to save the Shire, if I could—though there have been times when I thought the inhabitants too stupid and dull for words, and have felt that an earthquake or an invasion of dragons might be good for them (68).

His opinion, a view of the Shire which is more worldly coming from a relative of the famous traveler Bilbo, is that the hobbits do not understand what they have, because they have never risked it. The mythopoeic world in the modern age must threaten itself so that its inhabitants, through defending it, gain a clear picture of it—essentially the process of defining humanity in the *Odyssey*, broadened to include the whole world. If the work is a successful mimesis, the reader will experience this along with the characters.

When Frodo and Samwise leave the Shire, and their crossing of the boundary opens the reader’s eyes to Middle-Earth, they find the conflict engendered by industrial expansion expressed in new ways: by the defensive mentality of Gandalf and Aragorn, both lovers of place, but also by Treebeard, who, as Verlyn Flieger writes, casts their rural paradise in a harsher light: “what is right for Fangorn is wrong for the Old Forest, or...what is bad for the Ents is good for the Shire” (Flieger 153). The hobbits maintained their agrarian communities by cutting back a line of trees at the edge of the Old Forest, an act condemned when the orcs do it—but the hobbits in the Shire know nothing of orcs. Flieger concludes that “Tolkien

recognized this reality” and ended “with the argument unresolved” (157-158). Part of widening one’s perception is the awareness of paradoxes, which, as the conflict over how to deal with Middle-Earth’s forests reveals, frequently arise when humans try to determine how to live in an environment without harming or at least altering it. The ordered pastoral of the Shire, and the vast wilds to the south and east, form two poles, with an answer lying someplace between them, never didactically stated. The hobbits progressed from something to get to where they are, and so progress must not be entirely evil; evil occurs when progress has no antipode. The constructed world, discovered gradually, becomes that antipode.

On the brink of losing Middle-Earth is when we perceive it for the numinous space it truly is. This also accounts for why it is so common for high fantasy stories to revolve around long quests: to effect the revision, as much of the vision as possible must appear. By Tolkien’s day, man had long since begun the work of breaking with the earth, as “pasture, farmland, and undisturbed wilderness retreat as before an advancing enemy” (Dickerson and Evans 187). It is no longer possible for the human race to define itself, as Odysseus eventually does, by the wilderness it can see. Noticing this trend even in his time, Tolkien built a new wilderness to explore, which was its own moral.

The text itself offers the strongest proof that Middle-Earth has inherent existence value, though the idea, as the rest of the chapter will cover, appears elsewhere. At certain points, such in one scene in *The Two Towers*, characters allude to it directly. Theoden, king of the militantly feudal nation of Rohan, has just been delivered from a siege by the intervention of Gandalf, and on his way to make a

counterattack, discovers that he has unexpected escorts in the tree-like Ents. Their leader, Treebeard, was first introduced in a meeting with Merry and Pippin, so the reader has more knowledge at this point than Theoden does. At that point, he explained that the problem of the Ents in the modern age is one of attention: many of his brethren “look just like trees now” though they are obviously not (Tolkien *TT* 70). We might not think of Theoden, who fights alongside elves and dwarves and was only days ago freed from an enchanter’s curse, as a disdainful rationalist or a man with wool over his eyes. After all, being a king, he carries on his shoulders the weight of a history that in Middle-Earth is inextricable from myth. Nevertheless, it takes the appearance of Ents for him to understand that he has been eliding critical characteristics of trees, robbing them of their significance in a world that exists entirely so we can see its trees and other components clearly. His speech upon realizing this is perhaps the central paragraph of all three books:

“Ents!” he said at length. “Out of the shadows of legend I begin a little to understand the marvel of the trees, I think. I have lived to see strange days. Long we have tended our beasts and our fields, built our houses, wrought our tools, or ridden away to help in the wars of Minas Tirith. And that we called the life of Men, the way of the world. We cared little for what lay beyond the borders of our land. Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom. And now the songs have come down among us out of strange places, and walk visible under the Sun.” (168)

To an extent, Theoden is speaking with Tolkien’s voice here, as his sentiments the comments from “On Fairy Stories.” But even without this unexpected intrusion of the author, it is difficult to overstate the importance of Theoden’s use of the word “understand,” or of his sun/shadow dyad. For Tolkien, few words are more

evocative than “shadow”: Gandalf uses it perennially to refer to Sauron and the general effects of his reign, and it is associated with other immortal characters such as Elrond, those who remember a time when the gods’ actions upon the world were more discernable (56, 309). It is used here to signify a change in Theoden’s ability to see. He has crossed the schism, and made the songs of legend once again an active part of his life. The shadow has relinquished him.

Gandalf himself deserves further attention, as he functions as a guarantor for the rest of the Fellowship as their eyes are opened by their tests. Though he cannot be said to have created the Balrog in the way the gods of Olympus birthed monsters in the Mediterranean, he is responsible for the heroes having to face it, having bequeathed them a quest (*FOTR* 68). Soon afterward, he employs praise of hobbits that sounds strikingly similar to Athena’s of Odysseus: “amazing creatures...you can learn all that there is to know about their ways in a month, and yet after a hundred years they can still surprise you in a pinch” (*FOTR* 69). Gandalf connects the subgenre to its legacy of myth, as his magical powers recreate awareness of the divine in the narrative. Its characters, and by extension its readers, need Gandalf’s presence, though not always his command, in order to complete the revision.

Gandalf is also the force that requires us to consider Sméagol, a character with great relevance to both the mythological idea of humanity and Tolkien’s project on the reader’s perception. Sam’s language describing Gollum—“miserable slinker”—along with the ex-hobbit’s walking partly on his hands establishes Gollum as a subhuman in the eyes of the race from which he aberrated (*TT* 233, 252). However, the gap between Gollum and Frodo narrows swiftly. When Frodo has an



opportunity to allow Gollum, who has guided him faithfully thus far, to be shot like game, he does not take it in part because he knows “somehow, quite clearly that Gandalf would not have wished it” (*TT* 333). In conferring the blessing of Gandalf on Gollum repeatedly, the books remind us that a complete mythology treats nothing as subhuman, and that the division of anything from the human world is a sign we are on the wrong path. Meanwhile, we begin to see how easily Frodo might be corrupted to Gollum’s state, as he struggles with the power of the One Ring.

By carrying out the mission Gandalf assigned him and destroying an object whose very purpose is to upset all natural balance, Frodo demonstrates that the abdication of power over nature in favor of survival within it is an unimpeachable characteristic of humans who live in a mythic system. This is the logical conclusion of the argument put forth when any character, Boromir especially, wants to use the Ring to win the war—the Ring itself being the extension of Saruman’s industry. It is the attempt to conquer the world as opposed to living in it. The fact that Frodo is ultimately pushed onto the right path by Gollum cautions us against imputing susceptibility to corruption only to subhuman groups of which we could never be members. Our humanity must have a stronger basis than the hatred of miserable sneaking things. Their place in a world of stories is no less than ours.

Further examples of Middle-Earth acting as a gateway for perception come through the characters’ interactions with history. Aragorn, an exemplar of the book’s human analogues, refers to the Balrog in terms of a shadowy genesis long past: “an evil of the Ancient World it seemed, such as I have never seen before” (*FOTR* 399). His recourse to a darker past before the existence of his kindred races

not only reminds us of the genealogy of the fearful figures of ancient and classical myth, but also casts Aragorn himself as an inheritor of the world from a previous wildness, for whose legacy he is entrusted to care. In her essay titled “Tolkien’s Mythopoesis,” Kirstin Johnson expands on the role Aragorn plays: “Aragorn is, of course, a crucial source of stories—and thus of wisdom—to the Fellowship, and it is through him that Tolkien explicitly impresses upon us that even fragments of tales may convey the mythopoeic” (Johnson 33). It can also be conveyed by the continuation of tradition, of which royal bloodline is merely one expression. In order to demonstrate this, Aragorn, at the moment of his crowning, pays more attention to the genealogy of a tree sapling than he does to his own (Tolkien *ROTK* 270-271). Returning to our context of the World Wars, recall that Tolkien’s son was fighting a war directly related to the legacy of the one Tolkien himself had fought in. Europe was being ravaged by people who had forgotten the past. I do not mean to suggest that the history of Middle-Earth was only developed because of the two great wars, but as a component of the secondary world it has a hand in what the text argues the primary world lacks. In Tolkien’s world, myth and history are inseparable. In a similar way, the things the primary world has forgotten are all bound up together as a single loss to be illuminated through revision.

Johnson goes on to quote again from “On Fairy-Stories” regarding the constructed fantasy world: “It is a place in which transformation can occur, a transformation that does not fade upon re-entry into the Primary World but, significantly, casts new light upon the Primary World” (Johnson 33). Johnson’s writing suggests that, to a significant degree, the characters in Middle-Earth are

aware of the power of stories to create meaning, and the danger of allowing them to fade. She cites the example of Faramir, a character who is able to resist a chance to seize the One Ring: “Faramir has been formed by ageless truths and meanings in the stories Gandalf has shown him...he has gained the wisdom of experience *within* story to discern that, regardless of intentions, the ring *will* corrupt” (36). Aside from Tolkien himself having lamented that the essential myths of mankind have been banished to the nursery, his characters know they wage their battles in “a Middle-Earth from which story is rapidly being lost” (36, 34). *The Lord of the Rings* is not a lesson to be taught for a discrete moment in time, but rather a constantly applicable reflection. While the present wonders of its quest re-engage our capacity to venerate nature on its own terms, its narrative acts directly and decisively to heal the wounds caused when the values of Mordor were reified. Recalling Harrison, and his depiction of a world founded on ironic detachment, we can see exactly what this act of creation is rebelling against. Aragorn derives his power from the legacy of Numenor, Gandalf from that of the Valar, Frodo from the adventures of his uncle Bilbo and his Took heritage—each without a trace of irony. Myth, for them, is entirely alive, in worshipful fashion. The quest in *The Lord of the Rings* represents not only the spatial axis of new perception, but the historical axis as well. The constructed world has dimensions: it is a wide range of places, each to be discovered by the heroes, and a panoply of past events that give those places weight. Physical presence is only part of Tolkien’s story. The presence of memories, something lacking in an ironic world, completes the picture.

To conclude, we can return to Hume and re-examine the question of whether *The Lord of the Rings* is didactic literature. Hume writes that the category known as literature of revision is most often didactic, and that its authors “wish to see personal morality revised in order to bring it into accord with their visions of cosmic truth” (103). This charge misses the mark with *Lord of the Rings*. Some of its earliest critics attacked different aspects of the work on charges of conservatism, pastoralism, and nationalism. In *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, Richard Mathews complains that “Tolkien affirms the conservative hierarchy of a king who should be returned to the throne,” while Patrick Curry in *Defending Middle-Earth* quotes Catherine Stimpson’s statement that the work “celebrates the English bourgeois pastoral idyll. Its characters, tranquil and well fed, live best in placid, philistine, provincial rural cosiness” (Mathews 126, Curry 40). These are all fair charges against portions of the story taken in isolation, but they variously misinterpret and mischaracterize the whole. As the discussion of race demonstrated, Tolkien’s creation of a secondary world and of a myth for that world lends strength to his revision in perception that goes beyond conservatism or didacticism. To accuse the text of either denies that the purpose of constructed-world fantasy is to express what is missing in the primary world, not to caulk the hole.

Hume describes “cosmological didacticism” as literature that “merely states what its author considers to be the truth about the structure of the world, including man’s place in the system” (Hume 114-115). *The Lord of the Rings* definitely has truths it wishes to share, but can never quite seem to decide which truth overcomes

the others. The hobbits are rural agrarians, who must leave their land in order to save it; the men define themselves by their history, which blinds them to other truths; Sméagol is the corruptest of the corrupt, and saves everything. By the time the Shire is scoured clean and Frodo has departed over the sea, the only certainty in the reader's mind is twofold: each character only received victory after they perceived the immediacy and divinity of Middle-Earth with unclouded eyes, and that the reader themselves has acquired this consciousness along with them.

With these thoughts as the book's legacy with its audience, Tolkien's work agrees less with Hume than with Chris Brawley's argument that "the mythopoeic author undertakes two tasks: to instill awareness of the transcendent, and to turn that awareness back to the mundane world" (Brawley 17). The creation and experience of Middle-Earth does more to break down modernity's epistemologies than it does to set us on any one right path. Tolkien takes issue not with how we behave but with how we perceive—with the "mind(s) of metal and wheels" among the human race, which "do not care for growing things" (Tolkien *TT* 76). He therefore sets Sauron and Saruman loose on the Shire so that we will leave it, and return with the sun of our perception shining out the clearer on the individual components of the universe we neglected in our rush for knowledge and power.

Though I touched on it only briefly, the intellectual climate in which Tolkien wrote this statement makes it, when viewed a certain way, politically subversive. Ursula Le Guin, a writer who produced great speculative work before discovering Tolkien, nevertheless took up this mantle and ran far with it. How she did this, and how this task relates to the theme of healing, will be examined in the next chapter.



### Chapter 3—Heal the Wound, Cure the Illness: Ursula Le Guin’s *Earthsea Cycle*

*Lebannen, this is. And thou art. There is no safety, and there is no end. The word must be heard in silence; there must be darkness to see the stars. The dance is always danced above the hollow place, above the terrible abyss.*

—Ursula Le Guin, *The Farthest Shore*, “The Children of the Open Sea”

No work of fantasy composed after *The Lord of the Rings* can avoid answering to J.R.R. Tolkien. “The readers wanted to revisit Middle-earth,” writes Brian Attebery in *Stories about Stories*, “or, better yet, travel to the mythic lands from which Tolkien derived his world” (Attebery 97). Subsequently, the presses pumped out scores of Tolkien imitators, even reprinting pre-Tolkien works with similar themes to *The Lord of the Rings*. Writers creating mythic worlds have either to perpetuate Middle-earth, actively deny it, or veto some aspects while retaining others. Frequently, however, as with Diana Wynne Jones’s and Terry Pratchett’s satirical fantasies, they are responding more to Tolkien’s imitators than to Tolkien himself. Because people might encounter these imitations first, *The Lord of the Rings* appears to deconstruct the mythopoeic genre Tolkien himself founded, in such instances as the hopeless final battle, the breaking of the band of heroes, and the technical failure of Frodo’s quest (107). Tolkien’s races, his elves and dwarves and orcs, were replicated ad nauseum, and his quest simplified into a perfectly dualistic good and evil, in works that—while still valuable for the perspectives offered by their escapism—had their mythic meanings buried under layers of marketing. For this reason, Ursula Le Guin’s *Earthsea Cycle* commits its first revolutionary act against the genre in which it is founded by focusing on little-known and under-exploited area of what, due to formulaic storytelling, had essentially become a shared constructed universe.

Immediately apparent is the race of the characters: the wizard named both Sparrowhawk and Ged, and his people, are described as brown-skinned. They contrast with the invading Kargs, a “white-skinned, yellow-haired, and fierce” race who resemble the heroes we would expect from a fantasy rooted in medieval Europe (Le Guin *AWOE* 9). This challenges our imaginations to expand, for without this, given our image of the fantasy world and the wizard—for which Gandalf is partly to blame—we might assume he was white. The choice to step outside the races of the medieval West exposes the strictures on our myths, and works to free them from preconceived imaginings.

Less immediate, but clear through implication, is the way that Le Guin broadens the fantasy world by showing us new ways to relate to it. The first book in the cycle, *A Wizard of Earthsea*, introduces Ged as a young, error-prone Gandalf, impudent and dreaming of great power: “surely a wizard, one who had gone past these childish tricks of illusion to the true arts of Summoning and Change, was powerful enough to do what he pleased, and balance the world as it seemed best to him” (60). The wizard or the prophet might never be seen as anything but old, but Le Guin sees value in showing readers what one would have to learn to reach the age of the white beard and wisdom. One of these lessons, a central theme of the cycle, is obtaining great power and not using it. Ged encounters many situations in which abstaining from striving is the right course—though Le Guin is evenhanded about this, as the books also revel in the thrill of discovering new horizons. Allowing the divine figures of the wizards to feel uncertainty reminds us that constructing worlds has its own consequences, but the truly subversive quality of *Earthsea* lies in



what precisely it allows Le Guin to say, outside of the “comfortable matrix of the commonplace” (Le Guin 155).

In the third book of Earthsea, *The Farthest Shore*, Ged, who has become Archmage (though with a strong memory of his youthful failures), sets out on a voyage to discover why Earthsea is losing its magic, an effect that starts at the edges of the world and moves inward toward its center at the isle of Roke. This island, home to a school for wizards, centers the geography of Earthsea and serves as a pinnacle for the successful parts of its human construction—greater than the capital of Havnor, for Roke is “where all crafts are taught,” and so where all things are given purpose (*AWOE* 32). It serves a similar purpose to Gondor in *Lord of the Rings*, with Ged’s homeland of Gont taking the role of the Shire. That Roke is the destination for those who want to learn magic, and the culmination of the loss of it, is the first clue that magic in this world is intimately connected to setting. When a mage is struck down on Roke in *The Farthest Shore*, another cries, “The enemy has reached among us, into Roke the well-defended, and has stricken our strength at its heart!” (*TFS* 144) But a heart alone does not make a body. Like Gondor’s trust in its genealogies, or the Shire’s agricultural roots, the story is not whole without the Reaches, nor complete until Roke’s wise mastery of magic is threatened by one who had his origins there.

Arren, a prince whose uncertainty makes him a conduit for the reader’s fears, accompanies Ged on his journey to counter the threat. The two follow the trail to corrupt Hort Town, where we meet a woman who used to be a famed illusionist but, after losing her magic, condemns it all as an irrational farce: “You can fool men...but

then in the end they know they've been fooled and fuddled and they get angry and lose their pleasure in such things" (Le Guin *TFS* 42). The Hort Town sequence also gives us a number of characters slowly poisoning themselves with a drug called hazia, because they feel trapped in a reality with no meaning beyond the physical, yet have forgotten how to escape any other way (41). These are our first indications that the author of a story packed with wizards and dragons—and described in the language Le Guin calls "the genuine Elfland accent"—wants us to come to terms with our own reality by scrutinizing the ideas that disconnect us from it. (Le Guin 148). We have seen this with *The Lord of the Rings*, but now it more incisively targets specific modes of thought: the ex-illusionist posits the common sentiment of Enlightenment revisionism that all wondrous events must be the result of desperate, gullible people fooled by easily explained phenomena, whereas the drug addicts are trapped within the framework she provides. Their escape through the use of substances instead traps them deeper in the world to which they can no longer relate.

These are symbols of modern discontent clear enough to approach the simplistic, but such charges are again unwarranted: as Le Guin herself states in "Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction," "symbol is not a sign of something known, but an indicator of something not known and not expressible otherwise than symbolically" (Le Guin 76). The figures on the page present a way to view things, a "living meaning" distinct from prevailing ideals of progress, but reminds us that they are also in flux. Since the entire secondary world acts as a symbol for what is missing in the primary, there will never be a perfectly equivalent meaning for magic

in Earthsea—with the illusionist, it stands in for a disappeared perception, and for the hazia addicts, a disappeared relationship. The idea that truly seeing something is equivalent to knowing it and taking it into oneself is the cornerstone of these texts' ability to affect the readers along with their characters.

I have mentioned modes of thought relating to rationalism, progress, and human perfectibility in the general sense, but the story goes on to single out the fear of death as the underpinning of all these. When Ged and Arren arrive on the isle of Lorbanery, a former haven for silk-weavers, they find its inhabitants bereft of purpose, too lethargic to carry on their tradition. For magic, or for “the luck” to which the narrative connects it, the mayor of the town has substituted economics and platitudes about “honest work” that persist even when no work is being done (*TFS* 81, 91). The loss of meaning in their lives stems from a shortage of raw materials since Soplì, a dyer, gave up magic in exchange for learning how to overcome death (89). Soplì is an incarnation of death-terror, so consumed with his mortality he lacks sufficient awareness to reckon directions by the setting sun, and his phobia begins to infect Arren with the same skepticism earlier given out by the ex-illusionist: “There was nothing in magery (he thinks) that gave a man true power over men; nor was it any use against death...It was from death he must escape, must find the way” (99-100). The language in this sequence awakens an almost evolutionary terror in the reader, particularly the Dyer's, as he regresses into a childlike diction in his desperation to hide from the sea that has come to represent his thanatophobia: “I want to *know* I can come back. I want to be there. On the side of life. I want to live, to be safe. I hate—I hate this water...” (101). He is destined to

lose his life in the water before he gets his succor, the irony drawing attention to the ambiguous nature of the ocean as a symbol within the greater symbol of Earthsea. Ged comes near his own death at the same time, but survives because the ocean does not represent doom for him. On the contrary, he is strongly attuned to the sea as a numinous presence, and in his struggle for life is able to trust it long enough for a flotilla of raft-dwellers to save him and Arren: “Yet we were rescued by that fancy, and our lives saved by a myth” (120). If the sea is a pervasive mortality, it is also one required for the Archmage to survive. Sopli, Ged, and Arren perceive the all-pervading sea differently, but Sopli’s view, as his death demonstrates, is in conflict with Le Guin’s vision.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, suggesting that civilization is moving along the wrong path tends to evoke a response based on the sacrality of life: many diseases have been stamped out, infant mortality is declining, average lifespans are increasing. However, leaving aside the statistical fact that these benefits are unequally distributed, the argument itself points to a disturbing founding tenet of modernity: anything is better than death. It is Epicurus and Lucretius turned on their heads. This is so axiomatic in the “real world” that Le Guin had to construct the secondary world of Earthsea in order to introduce a contrary viewpoint without being accused of diminishing the value of human life. T.A. Shippey connects this striving against death to Christianity, describing Cob, antagonist in *The Farthest Shore*, as “opener of gates, conqueror of death, promiser of life—one can hardly avoid thinking of Christ, the One who Harrowed Hell” (Shippey 114). Before we get carried away protesting organized religion, though, we must agree that the same point can be made about

Ged, who harrows a hell of his own in *The Tombs of Atuan*—though it is a personal hell, a land without light and color, too dark to perceive clearly (*TTOA* 86). And as Shippey goes on to point out, blaming religion for the trade of quality for quantity of life presents a paradox in the context of Earthsea:

She is implying, not that Christianity leads to morbidity, but rather that the present inability of many to believe in any supernatural power lays them open to fear and selfishness and a greedy clutching at hope which spoils even the present life that one can be sure of. Her striking presentation of the land of the dead...(has) a root in the great lapse of faith of the late nineteenth century (115).

The difference between Ged and Cob is that Ged's descent into darkness occurs because he is acting out of faith in a unified kingdom, whereas Cob is acting out of fear for himself. It is not faith Le Guin indicts, but the addiction to the next world—like addiction to *hazia*—and consequent failure to perceive this one outside of the “comfortable matrix of the commonplace” she decried in her essay. Trying to make her point within that matrix would get her nowhere.

Thus we can see what *The Farthest Shore* has to say, and along with it, one of Le Guin's most significant departures from Tolkien. With the hypnotic lure of the One Ring as his central plot device, Tolkien articulated fears about the triumph of brute strength. Le Guin, on the other hand, does not even get around to threatening the whole world until the third book of her trilogy, and when she does, with an imperceptible leaching of magic, the people of Earthsea hardly notice. She is less afraid of power than she is of indolent, isolated comfort. In the rest of this chapter, I plan to analyze how her use of magic as an intercessory metaphor directs readers toward a clear image of what is at stake if the “wound” and “illness” to which she alludes continue to grow (Le Guin *AWOE* 111).

Magic in Earthsea is intimately connected to two things: balance and language. Breaches of the former are expressed most vividly in terms of bodily injury, such as when a young Ged unleashes a shadow through an excessive display of magic. “The stuff of the world had been torn open,” the book tells us, and Ged will forever bear a scar to match (86). Later on, in *The Farthest Shore*, he takes another wound, “a little spider’s thread of crimson on the dark skin of his breast,” mirroring the hole in the world through which magic is leaking (*TFS* 111). A third instance comes soon after, when he and Arren behold a dragon, dying slowly: “So great a life is in dragons that only an equal power of wizardry can kill them swiftly” (149). Here imbalance has led to a denial of death; life itself has become unnatural. Since the islands of Earthsea were raised by magic, magic is inseparable from nature, and thus describing harm to the system of magery in terms of harm to the body begins to evoke the type of language Lawrence Buell describes as “toxic discourse.” Buell argues that witnessing such literary poisoning leads the reader to consider any holistic perception of reality absurd, because they realize the environment is not being equitably contaminated. However, he also writes that toxic discourse “recognizes both the strategic value and the benefit to human and planetary welfare of the ideal of a purified physical environment as a collective goal” (Buell 656). Thus the suffering that Ged and Arren witness and endure might be seen as a series of holes ripped in the fantasy world to prove it is a façade—Earthsea decays in the same way our Earth does, and is returned to the level of toothless allegory.

Yet Buell further characterizes toxic discourse with “shrill apocalypticism” (662). *The Farthest Shore* features apocalypticism in spades. Ged’s statement that

“The light is running out. We will be left in the dry land. There will be no more speaking and no more dying” is unambiguous (Le Guin *TFS* 154). But the story ends with the hole closed and Arren on a king’s throne, restoring the magical balance in a moment of utter eucatastrophic triumph. The presence at this moment of an intact dragon more ancient than any other in the tale, and the resuscitation of a wizard earlier rendered comatose by the magical drain, are not accidents in light of what has come before (195). Our discourse, then, is no longer wholly toxic, but has taken on an air of the redemptive. The Earthsea Cycle is not only subversive for the way that it challenges our perceptions, but because it dares to expand the way that we form those perceptions. The despair of the environmentalist is just as integral a feature of the modern world as the dogged optimism of the scientist, but Le Guin has shown us a worldview through which despair might become hope, where blind optimism might find its sight again.

The other component of Earthsea’s magic, the act of manipulating reality by “naming” it in the ancient language that first spoke the world, reinforces the potential of mythic awareness in a world that has stripped it away. In their final confrontation, Ged charges Cob with failing to understand the death that he struggles to avert. A person, Ged says, “is but a shadow and a name...all who ever died, live; they are reborn and have no end, nor will there ever be an end” (180). Here Le Guin has reversed the drive central to monotheism. It is not the persistence of the immortal soul with which Ged offers comfort, but the eternity of the body, with the “name” referring to the conscious sense of self. In Earthsea, humans and dragons are the only entities capable of knowing their own names and of naming

others, a state that condemns them to a knowledge of death. A further inversion occurs as the wisdom of humans is repeatedly demonstrated to be below that of their surroundings, and requiring to learn from them, specifically in the context of wizardry: “the wise man is the one who never sets himself apart from living things...he strove long to learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees” (*AWOE* 115). The “name,” then, stands in for the need of aware creatures to define and describe with language things that intrinsically exist on their own. The art of mages, who endlessly study these names, equates to coming into a slow awareness that “there is no end to that language” (64). Study, too, is confined to Roke, and so the names, not spoken in the presence of their objects, become doubly representational. Ged is the one who connects these names to places by taking to the ocean, defining the world by being of those paradoxical elements, Earth and Sea.

The mages’ ability to define the world with their speech is limited by itself, as a mage wishing to enchant a greater object like an ocean is unable to find sufficient words to capture everything that ocean means:

If some Mage-Seamaster were mad enough to try to lay a spell of storm or calm over all the ocean, his spell must say not only that word *inien*, but the name of every stretch and bit and part of the sea through all the Archipelago and all the Outer Reaches and beyond to where names cease (64-65).

The attempt to confine the earth to rational definition tries to remove from the environment agency that it cannot lose: it *casts* magic, rather than becoming *aware* of it. This balkanizes the language until only nonsense is spoken in the Old Speech,



yet the Archipelago persists. In the end, as with Middle-Earth, only Earthsea can speak for Earthsea.

With the concept of true-naming, Le Guin asks whether our environments have meaning outside of us, and if so, what this means for our perceptions and for the way we should live. The answer is not immediately clear. Throughout the trilogy, she spends a significant amount of time mapping the psychologies of her protagonists onto the geography of her world. George E. Slusser writes of *The Farthest Shore* that “the physical journey may be read as a projection of Arren’s fears, doubts and hopes” but cautions us to remember that “the devastation is not only in their minds; real people are ravaged, leaders turn aside from duty, their lands fall to waste” (Slusser 80-81). Similarly, in *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ged’s otak familiar dies “to remind us that the struggle is not entirely in his mind” (76). Ged’s physical battle is real because the world in which it occurs is real for him—we know this because we have been reading it, and because Le Guin has provided us with actual maps, reference points outside the text to help us make it real in our minds. This is its purpose for being constructed in the primary world. Yet we easily manage to sleepwalk through environments allegedly more real than Earthsea. Why do we so often fit our settings to the languages of our own minds?

One of the most striking images in *The Farthest Shore* is that of the constellation revealed at the edge of the known sea being traced by Arren in the shape of a linguistic symbol, the Rune of Ending (Le Guin *TFS* 127-128). The beauty of the scene evokes special lure of traveling into the uncharted, reminiscent of the fascination held by Tolkien’s shadowy East. Like Frodo and Sam, Ged and Arren

travel over the world in order to understand it on its own terms; their ideas of what the land is, of what is a distant “reach” and what is a center, disintegrate the more they sail. Once again, Le Guin uses the concept of magic to draw attention to the way her constructed universe comes into its own. We are told late in the first book of the trilogy that “rules change in the reaches,” and that spells in Earthsea are dependent not just on naming and keeping the balance but on the place where they are cast (*AWOE* 222-223). Through their ability to dictate the workings of magery, the islands are granted independent significance, and the idea of balance receives another layer of meaning: it is as real as the dying dragon and the scars on Ged’s face. “A calm in the East Reach may be storm and ruin in the West,” so the characters, wizards and sailors and marooned peasants alike, must constantly be reminded that their language is in service of the balance, rather than the other way around (73). After all, a sailor has his own list of magic spells in the true names of islands and channels, and it is all too easy for an isle’s name to become the isle, leaving the true rock behind. The ocean, part of Earthsea’s wildness, rebels against this particular method of control most compellingly by making certain islands disappear at high tide, daring their names to give them substance when the ocean has covered them (89). The weather, though subject to the same limitations of balance, appears to bend similarly to the sailor’s will when it is named. Though Ged initially employs magewind with impunity, when an older man in *The Farthest Shore* he avoids weather-working unless it is absolutely necessary (*AWOE* 119, *TFS* 33-34). He believes the balance to be more important, along with the crafts, such as sailing, that take place wholly within the world. This is appropriate in a world where

the name must die in order to make way for the land—like Faramir surrendering the Ring, Ged lets the magic drift out of his reach. His education taught him, in the end, that names fail.

In a scene in *The Farthest Shore* set at the school of magic on Roke, long after Ged's departure to seek Cob, the Master Changer, another wizard, sees a disturbing vision in a stone with a far sight. Standing "on Mount Onn in the center of the world," he discovers that his vision of the world has been obscured "past Roke": "There is a mist on Enlad, a greyness, like a spider's web. Each time I look, more islands are gone and the sea where they were is empty and unbroken, even as it was before the making" (141). The implication is that magic no longer reaches to these places. This passage resonates because it is not the first time the word "center" has come up in the book—the narration earlier stated that there was no center left to Hort Town, a state the text relates to its lack of a central government (50). The glorification of monarchy is a common criticism leveled at fantasy works, but Le Guin, as Charlotte Spivack points out, "reject(s) the principle of patriarchy," and is not interested in the king as a figure of masculine power, a charge that can be leveled at Tolkien (Spivack 131). Instead, she sees the monarch as a figure of unity and purpose. In the second book of the trilogy, *The Tombs of Atuan*, Ged goes in search of a ring bearing a lost rune, explaining that "no king could rule well if he did not rule beneath that sign" (Le Guin *TTOA* 110). The rune is placed in a superior position to the king so that its continuity takes precedence over his individuality—in his state as the symbol of a center, the king also symbolizes how the center is placed by humans, our requirement of it a natural consequence of our awareness of the names of things. At

the conclusion of *The Farthest Shore*, when Arren is crowned king under his true name, Lebannen, he refuses to compel Ged to attend the coronation, “saying, ‘He rules a greater kingdom than I do’” (*TFS* 197). Since there is no figure in Earthsea who appears as a king of forested mountains, and since Ged takes pains not to claim this role for himself, we have reached another point where human language sees its own Rune of Ending. The king is not for the land; he is for men and women, so that they might find their own way back.

In the previous chapter, the relationship of language to the fantastic environment became clear through the use of language to treat Middle-Earth’s various races. The text itself is what brings us to the fantasy world, but it does not create it, no more than it defines the primary world—something it is easy to forget in an age that treats anything not framed in human words as unverifiable and untrustworthy. When we see our own definitions as the end of truth, we lose sight of the places and purpose that grant us context to lift our malaise. Thus, the world existing beyond the boundaries of the novel or series of novels is critically important. The Earthsea Cycle exists in liminal space *between* the text and the constructed world; neither has purpose without the other. The critical revision of mankind’s relationship to the environment that takes place in a secondary world it that it encourages us to look beyond internal meanings to the things that define us.

Just what destination Le Guin has in mind is also apparent in the Earthsea trilogy. Magic running out, and the devastating effects of its absence on Hort Town and Lorbanery, demonstrate how the fear of death can steal all other purpose from a world; Arren voices the reader’s concerns—“If I love life, shall I not hate the end of

it?”—and Ged answers them in terms of the balance—“Life rises out of death, death rises out of life; in being opposite they yearn to each other” (136). Spivack connects these views to Le Guin’s Taoist philosophy, summarizing the works’ many paradoxes by stating that “the name Earthsea in itself suggests a reconciliation of opposites, a balance of conscious and unconscious...paradox is at the heart of its inherent Taoist view of life” (Spivack 42-43). In the end, however, though Taoism and the teachings of the School of Roke share many similarities, knowing that Le Guin has recourse to an existing belief system helps us only in determining the nature of her subversions. As we have seen above, any religion or system of mythology, from Taoism to Christianity, fights against modernity’s characteristic loss of faith. Since there is just as little place for either fantasy or religion in a rationalist world, the two—myth and the stories bred by myth—have converged again, and are shouldering some of each others’ tasks.

Is Ursula Le Guin, in *Earthsea* and *The Farthest Shore* in particular, attempting a revision? Many of the characteristics of the same task undertaken by *The Lord of the Rings* are present: the creation of a world far wider than the one which reaches the page, the quest to perceive that world truly, the use of the language to draw attention to its beauty that exists for no purpose but beauty. However, while Tolkien’s work sets out to teach us *that* we can imagine, Le Guin teaches *what* we can imagine. Neither of these is superior, both are necessary, and in being part of the same tradition, they build on one another. Her trilogy targets the axioms that progress means more life and that the whole world can be named by science, then admits its own method of telling falls short, leaving us to fill in the gaps

in perception and giving voice to the tenets of her world as we unknowingly make them more real. Though we glean a perception of the missing from Tolkien, we can see, through Le Guin, the results of that absence.

Attebery writes that “a cognitive minority,” such as those people skeptical of the modern age, “must continually negotiate between its sense of reality and that contrary system upheld by those around it” (Attebery 140). Le Guin’s act of revision entails granting that minority, with Earthsea, one more place it can safely rest. If Tolkien represents perception of the *higher*, and its absence from the latter centuries, Le Guin represents perception of the *alternate*. Divinity is less present in Earthsea. Ged is no kind of god. The dragons are closer, but their greatest power is to know the old speech; they are creators, authors, demonstrating the ability to imagine in parallel with the reader’s own. Having contributed the terms “wound” and “illness” to our discourse, she is quick to declare that the true wound is not between the English language and Earthsea, but in the minds of those who fail to look outward from the center.

In the next chapter, I will examine a work forty years newer than the Earthsea Cycle—which analyzes the reason that texts such as *The Farthest Shore* and *The Lord of the Rings* exist, and comments on them from a perspective embedded in, but aware of, modern society. In *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, the duality of the quest and the homeland, of progressive questing and conservative awareness, receives its fullest literalization, and the intrusion of the absence symbolized by the secondary world is literalized more strongly than it has been before.

#### **Chapter 4—Tree Speaks to Stone, Stone Speaks to Water: Susanna Clarke’s *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell***

*I came to them out of mists and rain;  
I came to them in dreams at midnight;  
I came to them in a flock of ravens that filled a northern sky at dawn;  
When they thought themselves safe I came to them in a cry that broke the silence of a  
winter wood...*

—Susanna Clarke, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, “The Magician of Threadneedle-Street”

Susanna Clarke’s novel *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* is, in many ways, a departure from what I have discussed before. The distinctions begin before even turning the first page: Tolkien and Le Guin worked in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a vastly different climate from the 21<sup>st</sup> in which Clarke writes. This perhaps relates to Clarke’s novel being more demonstrably rearward-looking across actual, primary-world history than either *Lord of the Rings* or *Earthsea*, though it is by no means backward. Another difference comes from the fact that one might find *Jonathan Strange* in the “literature” and not the “fantasy” section of a bookstore, on the “non-genre” bestseller lists, and on shortlists for “non-genre” awards such as the Booker and Whitbread prizes: “The novel garnered a vast readership among people who do not usually like fantasy” (Beckett 22). The inside cover of the paperback edition features numerous awards granted to Clarke’s work that have nothing to do with fantasy, including a number of “Best Fiction” lists and a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year award. While Le Guin and Tolkien may have enjoyed such a freedom from genre when they made their first impacts on college campuses, they are undoubtedly chained in categories now.

Then one begins the story, and an even more palpable difference makes itself known: *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* is set on *Earth*. This would seem to damage

its capability of altering its readers' perceptions, at the same time it may explain why Clarke seems to have escaped the fantasy ghetto. This ghetto is an equivalent to Tolkien's nursery of exile, as both refer to the tendency of work designated "genre" or "commercial" to escape serious notice. However, it is not only the presence of fantastical elements or a secondary world that turns away scholarly critics, but other characteristics of the works I have already discussed—a quest narrative, readily accessible magic, and even certain aspects of the language that Le Guin treats as so integral to the idea of fantasy; in "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," she cautions that "such language" as it used to tell a faerie story "is rare on Capitol Hill" (Le Guin 148). Constructed-world literature is considered to not be art in the same way that a painting of a landscape is not art: it cannot represent anything meaningful if the thing it represents already seems completely clear. I would argue that the works I discuss are ignored not because they are inferior portrayals of existence, but because they are *too* good at portraying things we might prefer not to consider.

By being set on Earth and avoiding a quest structure, *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* appears to be alluding only sidelong, especially in its first half, to the troubles Tolkien and Le Guin have their characters face. However, as foreshadowed by the ampersand on its cover, the novel is in fact a powerful meditation on how to live in two worlds. Hence, this chapter will concern itself with the questions that arise from Clarke's strife with her speculative predecessors: what defines a constructed world? To what degree must a world fit that definition to function as a mythopoeic effort to change the state of awareness, and why might it be better for a world to hew closer to reality in order to address the needs of a specific moment in



time? Finally, how does the relationship of *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* to its historical context express and alter the relationship of humans to their environment?

The first step toward answering these questions is to consider how Clarke's novel approaches what I have been referring to as the "wound," a term taken from my interpretation of Le Guin and defined in this paper as the hopelessness and directionlessness arising from the human attempt to live separate from nature. At the core of the text is the notion of other worlds existing in conjunction with our own, and what changes to the course of history an awareness of these would affect. *Jonathan Strange* takes place in a Napoleonic-era England where magic has existed for centuries, and where the English have denied acknowledging magic at its full power for almost as long. They have become practitioners of "Rational Thaumaturgy" who use science to shun the art's Romantic side—unpredictability and savage beauty (Clarke 9).

Clarke's magic derives from a communion with the world of Faerie, an unpredictable realm that resists explanation and domination while simultaneously being a perfectly accessible geographic overlay of England itself. Her alternate history initially takes the course of satire, reminding us of what will never change through the inclusion of documented historical figures as characters. The Duke of Wellington embodies this satirical perspective most strongly, lamenting about the politics of prosecuting his war while the magician Jonathan Strange violates the laws of physics in spectacular fashion around him: "Have you forgotten that we have only just signed a peace treaty with America? Nothing will excite the Americans'

displeasure so much as the appearance of a foreign city on their soil!" (559). He also proves himself to thoroughly lack a sense of place, as his response to the Spanish King charging that Strange has rearranged his landscape is to say "they are still complaining about that, are they?" (436) Both the comedy and the truth here point at the same incongruity: one's concerns tend to reside within one's own world. Characters with this viewpoint, of whom there are several, are the target for Clarke's act of revision. She intensifies the Duke's preoccupations to throw them into relief, the same thing she will do later when the Duke yields his place in the novel to Lord Byron.

Authors from the contemporaneous tradition appear as well, as a character is described as a man who "would have looked quite at home...in a novel by Mrs. Radcliffe" (17). Another revealing sequence has Mr. Norrell suggesting that the British government hire novelists, including the gothic pioneer Radcliffe, to create unsettling dreams with which to frighten Napoleon (311). These passages examine the role of literature, inviting the reader to consider why fiction that dances around the supernatural persists in a world populated by real, observable magic. The answer to this lies with the Duke of Wellington and his consummate realism—if the magic in the world existed in a different form, it would still be possible for it to disappear. It is not the shape of magic that matters, but the awareness of it. Thus, a general failure of human perception is at the heart of Clarke's satire, which on the whole is more sympathetic than other works to people seduced by logical modernity: the theoretical magicians of York may look like buffoons, but it is hard to imagine them attacking Gondor, or tearing a hole in the land of the dead. This

subtler characterization helps her later when she approaches the tendencies of individuals responding to their environment.

Elaine Bander points out that these earlier portions of the book owe a great debt to Jane Austen: “gentlemen magicians, imbued with Enlightenment values...speak with Austenian diction, wield Austenian wit, observe Austenian social conventions and manners” (Bander). Her article, however, is primarily focused upon the novel’s transformation, as “alarming, unforeseen consequences...shift the tone and narrative from that of polite, mannered Regency society to a darker, transgressive world of Romanticism” (Bander). The agent of this shift is the world of Faerie, which intersects with England. We know this from the start, as the book’s very first scene describes a group of “theoretical magicians” behaving as though actually engaging in magic is “the bosom companion of unshaven faces, gypsies, house-breakers” (Clarke 5). They employ recognizably English classism for the wider purpose of rejecting portions of the world they deem unworkable by enlightened means. On an initial reading, the events that follow seem to vindicate their opinion. Strange and Norrell revive practical magic, but their growing rivalry drives Strange mad and allows a fairy to nearly destroy them both. However, several devices complicate the apparently simple moral that the two magicians should never have touched the things that burned them. It is easy to consider the book as a conflict between Enlightenment and Romantic philosophies—the former warning against practical magic, the latter demanding we give up civilization and revel in wild magic—but the text is deeper than that. The following examples demonstrate that the interplay between the two viewpoints is more a dance than a struggle.

There is first, as mentioned above, the way that Clarke paints the theoretical magicians as ridiculous. In addition to their refusal to actually practice the magic they claim to be their art—due, as we can see with the Society of Manchester Magicians, to an inability to subject it to codified rules—they draw distinctions between “what shall be called White Magic and what Black” that turn out to be arbitrary the moment Strange engages in necromancy to help the English war effort (9, 528). If “a gentleman” would never kill with magic, is that more or less moral than fighting against invasion? (389) A minor character scoffing that magic “is chiefly used for killing Frenchmen” drives home the subjective nature of an ethics of magic (453). The realization of this subjectivity marks Strange’s break with Norrell and the beginning of his descent into wilder realms of magic. Late in Strange’s journey through the other world, a fairy states that “the laws of Great Britain are nothing but a flimsy testament to the idle wishes and dreams of mankind,” a proclamation that we are only too ready to believe now that miracles to determine the outcome of a war (942). Magic is an ethereal force, not to be restrained by man’s grasping hand, and will assert itself whether or not the learned men choose to engage with it. The effect of the narrative as a whole is to suggest that while Strange and Norrell suffer from their encounter with the realm of pure magic, they remain better off than those who pretend it does not exist. To understand why, let us look closer at the motivations of the characters and the way they initiate the shift in genre, a discussion which cannot avoid an examination of North England, South England, and Faerie as Earthsea-esque magically-determined places—that is, places

whose essences are brought into being by methods beyond the reach of logical language.

The presence of historical characters is useful for charting this shift, as the figure of prominence switches from the Duke of Wellington—a storied defender of English values—to Lord Byron, subverter of the ordered and pleasant, who shows up in the novel’s third act to befriend Strange. The first meeting of Byron and Strange ends in a quarrel. Strange’s opinion that Byron entertains “odd notions of magic” and disgust that he wanted him to “tell them about *vampyres*” both indicate that he has not yet moved beyond wanting his magic to be respectable, since he has until now been mostly employing it in the service of his country (714, 715). By the time Strange and Byron mend their quarrel, the magician has grown, as Bander terms it, “increasingly Promethean,” and Byron is certain that Strange has descended into a metaphysical agony: “The causes of his madness...lie in the vast chasm between that which one is, and that which one desires to become, between the soul and the flesh” (Bander, Clark 823). My main point of interest here is the evolution of Byron’s views on magic. In both the material history of the world and in Clarke’s rendition of it, Byron is a poet known for using the fantastical to approach the sublime, the state in which one is awed and humbled by a sense of the infinite (Potkay 204). Yet since, in the novel, he lives in a world of practical magic, his chief achievement is to view it differently from everyone else. People in this setting are still creating speculations, but we do not encounter any secondary worlds, because for Clarke, the longing that leads these worlds to be created instead is directed toward Faerie. In all places there is a great thing being ignored, a thing only certain

people can point out—as Byron guides Jonathan Strange to see it, so Clarke coaxes the reader.

A comic scene early on has the Ministers of parliament unable to determine what to do with Mr. Norrell’s magic, foreshadowing the Duke of Wellington’s distate for supernatural acts that are not helping him win battles (123). Byron appears in the text specifically to shoo out this viewpoint. For him, magic exists for its own sake, and Strange’s high emotion leads him toward this view after the apparent death of his wife. Byron suggests that the reason is that it is Strange’s nature to pursue realms outside of mortal ken:

“Before this peculiar obsession with his dead wife, he was full of quite another matter: John Uskglass...The magician who tamed the Otherlanders! The only magician to defeat Death! The magician whom Lucifer himself was forced to regard as an equal! Now, whenever Strange compares himself to this sublime being—as he must from time to time—he sees himself for what he truly is: a plodding, earth-bound mediocrity! All his achievements—so praised up in the desolate little isle—crumble to dust before him! That will bring on as fine a bout of despair as you could wish to see. *This is to be mortal, And seek the things beyond mortality.*” (823)

The character referenced is a constant fixture in the novel’s alternate history, known as John Uskglass or the Raven King. Though he makes only one confirmed appearance, many characters speak of him as a semi-divine figure who achieved a perfect unity between the realms of North England and Faerie, combining politics and magic into an unassailable entity. Strange venerates him, writing, “It is JOHN USKGLASS’S magic that we do” (532). For Strange to have become a magician, then, means that one of his goals must have been this sort of divinity, and furthermore that Byron is correct—his anguish stems in part from his inability to achieve the same closeness with great and powerful nature that the Raven King enjoyed.

Nonetheless, however, he does strive for it, a character trait which may be his most important.

John Uskglass is the central figure in the story, a perfect source for all of the alien nature with which Strange and Norrell come into contact and conflict. He is not directly opposed to the titular magicians, however, as they are already too set against each other for there to be room for a third point. Rather, he is set against King Edward III in a painting witnessed by Strange: “two kings seated upon two thrones,” one in sunlight and surrounded by knights and warlike gods, the other in darkness and accompanied by “mysterious persons” (441-442). In the center, uniting the pair by her hands, is an actress from the time of Charles II (443). This painting is the book in miniature. One side features the civilized history of England in light, ruled by a king in the south, while the other chronicles all the things that history has excluded, ruled from the north. Joining the two is the story itself, the acts of creativity and mythopoeia—a bit of symbolism made more believable by the way that *Jonathan Strange* contains so many other matched sets of opposed individuals. Along with the title characters, and Uskglass and his counterpart, there are Stephen Black and the “gentleman,” Arabella and Lady Pole, Honeyfoot and Segundus, Drawlight and Lascelles, Wellington and Byron, and in a memorable exchange, Norrell’s manservant Childermass and “walking prophecy” Vinculus: “Henceforth, Vinculus, you and I shall be each other’s shadow.” (995). These are all echoes of the larger web of equivalences that Clarke establishes for her own form of revision—the rural to the urban, England’s manicured south to its haunted north, and the sublime Romantic to the beautiful Enlightenment. One side of these dualities is wilder, more

magical, and closer to the Raven King and to Jonathan Strange; the other side, Norrell's, is controlled and urbane. Later in the book, Childermass claims to identify with both Norrell and Strange, a view likened to being "both Whig and Tory at the same time" (1000n5). He is expressing the destination of all of these dyads: the reader lives in an Enlightened age, but is reading a Romantic novel concerned with a secondary world. They are drawn to the Raven King's magic by their wish to see a work reflect a numinous physical environment. One who accepts Clarke's mythopoeic history must be both Whig and Tory, Strangeite and Norrellite.

*As Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* becomes more deeply and identifiably Romantic, the use of magic to stand in for wildness asserts itself. The way this happens is far different from what we saw in *Earthsea*. The Raven King is an enigmatic incarnation of the wizard, neither Gandalf nor Ged. Like those two, the divinity he brings into the world lacks a monotheistic focal point, and is instead pervasive—a numinous consciousness, where the divine is merely present, as opposed to a religion, where the divine is named. His spells have universal effects in his kingdom, where he not only rights wrongs but also controls the very form of the environment, along with the language that captures it: "When the weather is contrary and we have warm weather in winter or it rains in summer the country people say that John Uskglass is in love again and neglects his business" (914). A footnote earlier in the novel conflicts with this, however, as Clarke strongly implies that Uskglass was not interested in caring for nature or in communion with wilderness: "to revere nature and wild creatures...seems closer to the teachings of the twelfth-century magician, Thomas Godbless, than anything John Uskglass ever



proposed” (688n6). Though called a king, he did not see himself as a ruler of his environment—like Lebannen at the end of *The Farthest Shore*, he is for humans, and for fairies. His Fisher-King characterization relates not to the land itself but to the perception of it. It is humans, not the trees or rocks, that say Uskglass is in love and forgets the weather, as it is humans who separate the north of England from the South. It is also humans who do magic—for the trees, stones, and water do not *cast* spells, they *are* spells. An incantation causes the human Stephen Black to perceive the world in a new, perfectly numinous way:

The sun came out from behind a cloud; it shone through the winter trees; hundreds of small, bright patches of sunlight appeared. The world became a kind of puzzle or labyrinth...Suddenly everything had meaning (981).

Though he is certain that the land is speaking to him, Stephen is the only one given a distinct voice to repeatedly answer “Yes” (982). The landscape he perceives already has inherent meaning. Its questions are implicit, and they do not need to speak them, but a human needs a magical aid to access their meaning. Once Stephen successfully does, though, the results are eucatastrophically successful.

The human construct that is “England” and the magic of Uskglass are the pairing behind all the others: magic is *our* access to wildness, *our* longing to return. Strange voices his opinion that “English magic was shaped by England—just as England herself was shaped by magic. The two go together. You cannot separate them.” (784) By the end of the novel, Clarke has set up the above dichotomies—between regions, magicians, and philosophies—in a chain of equivalence that becomes apparent to the reader at the same rate the main characters learn to look

beyond the veil. England is magic, magic is the Raven King, and the Raven King is the utterly aware person, the union of Earth and Faerie. He went as far along the way of magic as it is possible to go, and ended up straddling worlds. The goal of all revision is to end up on this threshold. Outside of England, the landscapes will all be different, but the drive toward magic remains the same, as do the consequences for denying it—a life lived completely out of sync with the places in which it exists, the stunted perception Tolkien and Le Guin try to excise from modernity.

Strange and Norrell, who have not gone as far as Uskglass toward the threshold of worlds, are subservient to him, a point Clarke makes with an unusual use of the common fantasy trope of the opaque prophecy. A character named Vinculus, who has a prophecy written across his body, appears in Norrell's study to represent the first intrusion of Uskglass's wild magic in a book that to that point has remained squarely in Austen territory. His prediction is full of the language of the sublime: "*The second shall tread lonely roads, the storm above his head, seeking a dark tower upon a high hillside...*" (155). As each item of his prophecy comes true, Vinculus reappears—having returned from the dead—to explain how he knew what he knew. Norrell and Strange, he claims, "*are the spell that John Uskglass is doing. That is all they have ever been. And he is doing it now!*" (975). At this point, the novel could not be farther from where it began. We can now see that the two title characters were born with an urge that all their drawing-room propriety could never hope to slake. One of the book's final images, a pub full of quarrellers all clamoring to become magicians, universalizes the idea. It was never only the two men—every character we have seen, or could see, is a spell of the Raven King.

Considering the premise that the actions of the characters in *Jonathan Strange* are driven by a desire to reunite with their surroundings, we can ask our other question: why did the book need to be written the way it was? Clarke's world is obviously a construct, as the casual breaking of the laws of physics and the vast gulf between its history and our own demonstrate. But it is a construct that requires a pole outside of itself to be present within itself, for the reason that Clarke watches from her reader's position more than either Tolkien or Le Guin. While the latter two are concerned with their audience's interactions with the world, *Jonathan Strange* discusses its audience's interaction with itself. Its characters, within the text, are encountering a mythopoeic fantasy.

Tolkien's "On Fairy Stories" proves extremely relevant to Clarke's work. In this speech, later an essay, Tolkien says that "Faerie itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic—but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the furthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific, magician" (Tolkien "4). Having placed the word "magician" beside "scientific," Tolkien, the coiner of the term "secondary world," has placed *Strange* and Norrell in opposition to the world they intend to dominate, agreeing with what we have seen thus far about their antagonistic relationship to Faerie and to wildness. Science has no place on the Faerie roads, a fact established as far back as the Society of Manchester Magicians, whose dogma of rational inquiry shoves a square peg into the round hole of Clarke's numinous world. Even more importantly, this same quote has connected magic with the act of creating a fantasy, agreeing with the Windsor Castle mural and its representation of the creator occupying the liminal space. Of the network of roads

itself, Strange says, “I have not the words to describe it...I wish I could give you an idea of its grandeur! Of its size and complexity,” simultaneously aligning language with rationality and demonstrating the insufficiency of both to encapsulate a whole world (Clarke 505). Not only does *Jonathan Strange* comprise a clear instance of mythopoeia, it revolves around the influence of a world that, like Earthsea, is awesome because it is great beyond words. This makes the Faerie realm an effective symbol for the missing numinous—and Strange literally accesses it through a mirror, alluding to the constructed world reflecting the beauty in the primary toward those who cannot immediately see it.

Tolkien’s speech states that “There is one proviso: if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself” (Tolkien 4). Clarke is careful not to make fun of the magic, and consummates this by mocking those who do. The Secondary World framework, the mythopoeia of nature she has built between the known and unknown, is expressed through her world’s history having no recourse to ours: its characters and events are present, but from the beginning, this has been a different place. The outside perspective—a secondary world which itself parallels another—permits her both to interpret Faerie and to justify the existence of her interpretation. Like a primary world environment, or a complete construct like Middle-Earth, the *Jonathan Strange* history has existence value. The things that happen there gain meaning, allowing us to begin constructing an interpretive myth of how we interact with our present, modern state.

The theoretical magicians have shunned entering worlds that are coterminous with their own, despite the fact that “very plain” roads exist in the

countryside for this purpose, and the further truth that any mirror in any society drawing-room can, in this universe, be used to travel Elsewhere (Clarke 468). It is Strange who feels the temptation to use these mirrors to walk on alien roads; Strange who begins his magical career searching in vain for books to learn from—Norrell teaches that “there is a great deal of magic in books nowadays”—and ends the novel by renouncing language (109). In the climactic scene when Strange and Norrell, at wits’ end due to a fairy’s curse, call upon the Raven King in order to throw themselves on his mercy, the King responds by transforming all of the books in Norrell’s library into ravens and back again (961). The books have given them knowledge of the “wound” from this chapter’s opening, but are an insufficient means to heal it. As in *Earthsea*, the name is merely a bridge to the magic. Language exists to point at the world beyond language, and to effect whatever shifts in perception are necessary to comprehend the meaning of an object or a place. Strange’s interaction with magic takes him to this threshold, and grants him this realization: “Perhaps I am too tame, too domestic a magician...how *does* one work up a little madness?” (707) Madness, the state of things unacceptable to society and lacking explanation, becomes a thing for him to seek out. The word itself carries strong connotations of subversion, and is not used accidentally. Clarke’s alternate history of England includes the golden-age magicians who “considered madness in quite a different light. They held madmen in a sort of reverence and thought they knew things sane men did not” (466). Yet in 1814, madness has become a disgrace to respectable families (438). Depending on the time period in which it is invoked, the same word stands on opposite ends of yet another dichotomy; it is a conflict in

one idea. Effects of perception such as this point to the presence of concepts such as “madness” that appear to exist on the fringes of society but which this text has relocated to the center.

The world of 1814, apathetic about its surroundings, seems an impenetrable system from within, and this appearance has only grown more so in our present time. But Clarke’s secondary history is an edifice to counter an edifice, through her act of literalizing metaphor as magic and Faerie, and has given her characters access to it in hopes that her readers might follow. To exist, Strange and Norrell have to transform. This is the meaning of mythopoeia: literature that grants new things in which to have faith.

For it is clear that the need for these new myths will appear whether or not we have the myths themselves. In *Jonathan Strange*, this takes the form of the secondary world making literal, physical incursions into the primary. The forest, that age-old harbinger of the unknowable and indomitable that “haunt(s) the mind like some mystical dream or nightmare,” is at the vanguard of these attacks (Harrison 183). Stephen Black encounters a footman who insists that “he (can) hear an invisible wood growing up around the house...ghostly branches scraping on the walls and tapping upon the windows” (182-183). This is a forest with agency, not a mere tree farm—it is a place where one “would have as much to fear from the trees as from another person hiding there” (183). This cannot be conclusively interpreted as evidence of longing until much later, when Strange makes a call for a restoration of magic grounded in the landscape: “Tree speaks to stone; stone speaks to water. It is not so hard as we have supposed” (858). The employment of trees as a symbol

both feared and desired creates a paradoxical Romantic space. Strange feels drawn to this space, which his society has passed over, and wishes to enter it in the same way that the writers of Romanticism sought out the sublime: to be overawed and even made afraid by the sheer presence and size of the world. He has already encountered this feeling on the mirror road, a similar wilderness to the forest, and now seeks it again—though his efforts remain focused on England, the environment whose magic he knows best (863). Drawlight, caught in Strange’s orbit, sees “a thicket in a dark wood in winter...dark pillars separated by thin, white slices of winter light” (861). While some parts of the numinous have been forgotten in the primary world, other more primal parts have been buried intentionally, only to re-emerge through constructed spaces in texts like *Jonathan Strange*. In separate ways, through coming into a slow consciousness of place, Strange, Norrell, Stephen, and other characters all make their way into these dark corners.

To Rosemary Jackson, fantastical literature exists in order to unearth the “unsaid and unseen of a culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’” (Jackson). Baker, who quotes her, further reinforces that the untrue, the irrational, and the speculative appear in fiction to “to undercut, diffuse and dissolve oppressive cultural orders” (Baker 4) In *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*, all of this takes the form of physical place (with the kingdom in the North) and physical substance (with the forests). This relates to Clarke’s satire of England and the English literary tradition, in that the North—the coal country, land of impenetrable dialect, where Austen’s green and pleasant country gives way to Emily Bronte’s wild moors—is the site of magic’s domain and the

opening of the new fairy roads (Clarke 891). But the psychological geography of her book continues onto a scale both broader and deeper.

As the Raven King makes his way to the center of the novel, the forests become even more active. Strange and the mad King George III find themselves drawn toward a spontaneously appearing grove of trees that serenades them with music that convinces them they are martyrs being constantly betrayed by the world (461). We have come to know trees as symbols of the interposition of magic, through Vinculus's prophecy—"I came to them in a cry that broke the silence of a winter wood"—and later through Strange's message of tree speaking to stone (151). Recalling Harrison in the context of Jackson, Baker, and Clarke, we can imagine the trees and the forest not just as symbols of the mystical or unknowable, but of the hidden or the discounted. As Strange and King George are pulled toward the ethereal wood, as Strange calls for a magical resurrection by revealing—in the throes of "madness"—that he sees all England as a *genius loci*, it becomes at last clear that the book is about the irrepressible desire to shine light into dark places (858). The irony is that those dark corners were created by a modern logical positivism that claimed to want to shine light everywhere, but *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* neither sets out nor concludes as an ironic novel; it is merely a means to unveil an irony. Its own mission is sincere: to show us Faerie.

I must now address a contradiction between *Jonathan Strange* and its predecessors in this paper: why, when *Earthsea* and *Lord of the Rings* venerated characters who possessed great power without using it, does Clarke portray magicians who do not cast spells as worthy of mockery? The answer is that it is not



the casting of magic that satisfies Strange's and Norrell's desires, because at the same time they treat magic as an end in itself or a method to gain influence, they deny John Uskglass (643). It is instead the *acknowledgement* of magic—and through it, of divinity, embodied once again as a wizard with the Raven King. Remember that Tolkien's most conservative hobbits, though expressing a laudable agrarian devotion, did not achieve triumph in Middle Earth. It was those who went on the journey, who sought a greater understanding of their environments while simultaneously set against the distortively overpowering strength of the Ring, that prevailed to steer the new age. In *Jonathan Strange*, a theoretical magician is a hobbit who will not leave the Shire.

Positing that certain human ideas were superior in the past can run the risk of espousing, among other things, slavery and the marginalization of women. Clarke is prepared for this charge, and converses with it by having her novel's fairies no more admirable than its humans. The villainous fairy called "the gentleman with thistle-down hair" becomes, to Daniel Baker, "the personification of total and unmediated gratification of desire" (106, Baker 15). When Stephen Black takes over the gentleman's kingdom at the end of the book, he says, "This house...is disordered and dirty. Its inhabitants have idled away their days in pointless pleasures and in celebrations of past cruelties...All these faults, I shall in time set right" (Clarke 989). Black, a former slave, is well aware that the readoption of an elder, Uskglass-era consciousness is something that must be implemented carefully, lest healing the wound bring unwanted infections along with it. His taking a throne in Faerie

concludes the novel in order to remind us that revision need not entail regression, if we are as vigilant as we are when navigating in these constructed secondary worlds.

Here, then, we can see at last why *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* requires the presence of fantasy. Following on Brawley's interpretation of Hume, it is literature of revision, but in a different position from either Tolkien or Le Guin. Where Tolkien teaches his readers to open their perceptions, and Le Guin prompts them to use these opened perceptions to challenge the "real-world" ideals they hold, Clarke is interested in the desire to open these perceptions that already, painfully and longingly, lies within us. With its opening chapters full of distinguished gentlemen dithering about "respectable" magic, the novel proves remarkable self-aware about the manner in which it is likely to be received; in the genre where it has been placed, it might receive serious praise for its craft, but not for its mythopoeia. The progression of Strange and Norrell's careers calls this a fallacy. If magic, gained through communion with Faerie, stands in for awareness of the coterminous reality of wildness, literature is all magic, albeit with ambitions to point out different parts of the spectrum of modern idea that led to the "wound." A "literary" work would examine some of the problems—existential angst, directionlessness, anxiety about mortality—that have resulted from trying to cheat death, while a "speculative" work is simply one that is more interested in showing us a way back. Each, and all art, have a critical role to play if society is to be rescued from the siren song of constant, heedless progress. *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell* is an illuminating stop in the history of myth because, through its deft metamorphosis into the Romantic, it in fact plays all ends of this spectrum, thus revealing it to its reader.

I have suggested before that speculative works are often ignored by those who do not wish to hear what they have to say. The themes of *Jonathan Strange* which concern the motivations behind Romanticism, the resurrection of place, and the appeal to divine powers unfathomable by scripture all sail against the winds of modernity. In the conclusion, I will discuss what we can learn from the works many would prefer to ignore, and the ways in which the exile of constructed-world fantasy protects us—and must be allowed to do so no longer.

## Conclusion—To Find the Colors Again

*We read fantasy to find the colors again, I think. To taste strong spices and hear the songs the sirens sang. There is something old and true in fantasy that speaks to something deep within us, to the child who dreamt that one day he would hunt the forests of the night, and feast beneath the hollow hills, and find a love to last forever somewhere south of Oz and north of Shangri-La.*

*They can keep their heaven. When I die, I'd sooner go to middle Earth.*

—George R.R. Martin, *The Faces of Fantasy*

The above quote from George R.R. Martin, the veritable pontiff of modern fantasy thanks to his *A Song of Ice and Fire* series, was written 138 years after the quote by George MacDonald which opened this study. However, the two Georges that bookend my thoughts are speaking about the same thing. The reflections we create of our primary world are not perfect mirror images: they are naturally lovelier, and their colors brighter, because we see them for the first time. Living in this world since coming into awareness inures us to it. We mature out of the natural wonderment of childhood to a jaded age in which we laugh off the ancient Norse sightings of dragons, and subject *Peter Pan* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* to constricting psychosexual analysis. Society teaches us this is praiseworthy. We are, after all, now contributing. And so science marches on with no purpose to its curiosity, philosophy is left in the lurch, and critics praise works that wonder why we feel like we are falling when we should be flying.

The construction of fantastic worlds is a crack in that social armor. The fact that works imprinted as “fantasy” form one of the largest publishing markets of 2015 proves how hungry people are for alternatives to the dominant narrative; after all, just because a book plays a part in a capitalist system by retailing for money, does not mean the text itself, or its reader, are in favor of that system. People look at

reflections of the primary world to recall what a world of color is like so that they can see color here. They know what was taken from them, and they want it back.

None of this is to say that the modern world is an enemy of our well-being—just certain narratives within it that have supplanted other narratives. A world is never wholly evil; these fantasies I have discussed need both conflict and resolution. Childermass, after all, was both Strangeite and Norrellite. But duality does not begin and end with *Jonathan Strange*. With *Earthsea*, after all, the boundary is right in the title, and remains in the front of our minds through such devices as the Ninety Isles, sometimes land and sometimes sea. Furthermore, Ged must always have a companion in his travels, whether Vetch, Tenar, Arren, or his own shadow; he does not function without a conflicting viewpoint. In *The Lord of the Rings*, as remarked on in chapter two, the clearest duality is between the Shire and everywhere else. This appears to be a Campbellian two-worlds dynamic, but resonates more closely with the awe of the sublime: there is both progress and terror in the wide world. Neither has claim.

In the end, the problem with the modern world is the dominance of myths few of us chose, without the chance to make new ones. Secondary worlds give us this chance. As symbols of what is lost in the transition between the mirror image and reality, they revise our perception so that we can discover the numinous—the “color”—in the primary world. They provide us with access points, such as Roke, the Shire, or our own history, then expand to reveal entire realized worlds, resplendent with beauty and threat enough to make us look deeply at them. The critical duty of the reader of the literature of revision is the act of *seeing with new eyes*.

The thing to see beyond is the attempt to dominate wildness by reducing it to logical precepts. In each book, this shares a connection to magic. In *The Lord of the Rings*, the dominating instinct expresses itself in the One Ring, and is fought back by the collective will of people who love Middle-Earth. Interestingly, in both the *Earthsea Cycle* and *Jonathan Strange*, the controlling principle takes the form of language. For Le Guin it is the true names of things, and for Clarke it is books of magic, and systems to codify it. Each of these, too, is overcome by the intervention of an environment which simply has more existence than the words do. The Raven King is a wildness pointed at humanity, who scorns books as he scorns the names that men place on the land. In *Earthsea*, magic itself bows to geography, with even true names having less resonance than the world itself does.

Why would this kind of creativity fail to earn respect? Why might its message be scorned and even feared as social decline? Perhaps for suggesting that the primary world is not providing everything it promises. Perhaps for its idealism: claiming that we can still get off of the wrong train can seem childish, ignorant of the way things work. Perhaps for that very childishness, since believing that the fairy tales we loved growing up are the key to saving us as adults appears inconsistent with maturity. Mythopoeia, worldbuilding, and storytelling, however, are the hallmarks of a mature mind, since it is now able to construct meaning for itself.

Whatever the reason, constructed worlds cannot be overlooked by intellectual discourse any longer. The primary world has lost its color, bowled over by a thundering economy that treats its wondrous environments as grazing grounds. We need the fantasies, the colors in the mirror, to remind us what the way

out is. We must apply continuous awareness of a world in which meaning will rarely be obvious. Dreaming of the forests of the night, and of feasts beneath the hollow hills, is the polar opposite of modern malaise. And so, like Ged the Sparrowhawk, we must go hunting.

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